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## Kant and Peirce on Pragmatic Maxims

Rydenfelt, Karl Henrik Olavi

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# PRAGMATIST KANT

Pragmatism, Kant, and Kantianism  
in the Twenty-first Century

Edited by  
Krzysztof Piotr Skowroński &  
Sami Pihlström



Nordic  
Studies in  
Pragmatism

4

PRAGMATIST KANT

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PRAGMATISM, KANT, AND KANTIANISM IN  
THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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Edited by  
Krzysztof Piotr Skowroński and Sami Pihlström



Nordic Pragmatism Network,  
Helsinki 2019

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Most of the speakers from the conference responded positively to our invitation to submit the extended and scholarly edited versions of their papers to this volume. We are also grateful to the referees and to the editors of the online series, *Nordic Studies in Pragmatism*, for a smooth process leading up to the publication of this volume. Our warmest thanks, of course, go to the contributors themselves.

The Editors



# Introduction

Krzysztof Piotr Skowroński  
Sami Pihlström

Among the obvious characteristics of the philosophical (and interdisciplinary) tradition known as pragmatism is its commitment to empiricism and naturalism. The world is a rich array of multifarious natural formations, with human culture growing out of pre-linguistic and pre-cultural structures. The human mind and its cultural achievements are not beyond nature but are, rather, emergent products of natural complexes. This natural and cultural world we live in can be investigated and, to a large degree, known by human beings through experimental science following the basic philosophical guidelines of dynamic empiricism.

It might seem that a pragmatist philosophy of this kind must firmly reject any commitment to Immanuel Kant's transcendental philosophy. After all, Kant is a prime example of philosophical rationalism and apriorism, insisting on a fixed, universal structure of the human cognitive capacity and a corresponding fixed set of conceptual categories in terms of which we experience any possible objects and events to be encountered in the world. Similarly, in ethics, Kant is a rigoristic rationalist postulating a universal moral law, the categorical imperative, to be found by means of pure practical reason. His views seem to be very far from the pragmatists' dynamic conception of experimental scientific inquiry and the equally experimental account of ethics most of the pragmatists have subscribed to.

On the other hand, several pragmatist thinkers, early and late—from Charles S. Peirce to Hilary Putnam and beyond—have taken very seriously the deeply “Kantian” features of their pragmatism. While Kantian transcendental philosophy or its specific views, such as transcendental idealism or the strict system of deontological ethics, may be unavailable to

pragmatists, it does not follow that the pragmatist tradition would have to reject Kantian ideas altogether. On the contrary, pragmatism can be seen as a tradition crucially indebted to Kant in various ways.

When speaking about “Kantian” philosophy in this volume, we mean something that is based on Kant’s ideas but not necessarily strictly confined within Kant’s own philosophical system. Pragmatists, like many others, can be “Kantian” thinkers in a relaxed and reinterpreted sense while rejecting many or most of Kant’s original philosophical ideas and arguments. They may, for instance, offer a pragmatically reinterpreted version of transcendental idealism as a kind of practice-embedded constructivism. The papers collected here indicate various ways in which such reinterpreted pragmatic Kantianisms can be formulated. However, many of the contributors to this volume are also highly critical of such suggestions and argue that pragmatism ought to remain fundamentally non- or even anti-Kantian.

Continuing such a critical discussion is, we should observe, congenial to both Kantian critical philosophy and the critical, fallibilist spirit of pragmatism. Thus, pragmatism and Kantianism can join forces exactly by engaging in a genuine inquiry into the ways in which, and the degree to which, they may or may not be able to philosophically join forces.



The book has been organized into five main parts. We will here very briefly introduce the contents of the volume, but the individual essays will mostly speak for themselves; the rich array of scholarly interpretations of the relation between Kant and pragmatism is impossible to summarize here. In some cases, the individual papers can be read as entering into implicit critical dialogues with each other regarding the usefulness of viewing Kantian philosophy and pragmatism as relevantly similar or analogous approaches.

The first part focuses on philosophical issues regarding cognition and science, that is, Kant’s (and the pragmatists’) “theoretical philosophy”. Joseph Margolis’s essay, “Between Pragmatism and Rationalism”, based on his keynote talk at the conference, opens the discussion by insightfully criticizing various attempts to view pragmatism as a species of Kantian transcendental philosophy. In the next paper, “Kant and Peirce on Pragmatic Maxims”, Henrik Rydenfelt examines whether, and how exactly, Peirce’s pragmatic maxim could be claimed to be indebted to Kant. Gio-

vanni Maddalena in his “Anti-Kantianism as a Necessary Characteristic of Pragmatism” draws heavily on Peirce in maintaining that pragmatism is (or at least ought to be) inevitably anti-Kantian. Hemmo Laiho’s “Kant’s Universalism versus Pragmatism” finds universalism the key issue dividing Kant and the pragmatists: as pragmatists emphasize contingent, evolving, and changing human practices, they cannot really, Laiho maintains, endorse universalizability in the sense in which Kant subscribes to it.

Opening the second part of the volume exploring methodological issues and the philosophy of communication, Guido Baggio seeks a quasi-transcendental account of Peircean sem(e)iotics in his “Sense, Sign’s Sense, and Gesture: For a Quasi-Transcendental Semiotics”. In her essay, “Kant and Pragmatists: On the Supremacy of Practice over Theory”, Agnieszka Hensoldt investigates the thesis about the primacy of practice by comparing Kant to three major pragmatists: Peirce, Dewey, and Rorty. Tom Rockmore joins the conversation with his paper, “Kant, Pragmatism and Epistemic Constructivism”, which interprets both Kant’s and (some) pragmatists’ views as species of constructivism in epistemology.

The third part discusses various topics in anthropology, psychology, and religion. Phillip McReynolds’s “Does Pragmatism Need a Concept of Autonomy?” explores the key Kantian notion of human autonomy, fundamental to Kant’s practical philosophy, in relation to pragmatism, while Matthew Crippen’s “Pragmatic Evolutions of the Kantian *a priori*: From the Mental to the Bodily” suggests that Kant’s transcendental conception of the *a priori* evolves in pragmatism into not just a mental or psychological but even a bodily way of categorizing experiential reality. Michela Bella offers a more detailed comparative study of Kant’s and William James’s psychological views in her paper, “James and Kant on Empirical Psychology”. Concluding the third part, Sami Pihlström suggests in his “Jamesian Pragmatism, Rortyan Ironism, and Kantian Antitheodicy” that pragmatism—from James to Rorty—needs Kantian critical resources in order to deal with the problem of evil and suffering central not only to the philosophy of religion but to any ethically adequate understanding of human reality.

Ethics and aesthetics are more explicitly the main themes of the fourth part of the book. Sarin Marchetti’s “Kant, James, and the Practice of Ethics” focuses on the comparison between Kant and James, especially regarding the practical question concerning the nature of ethical life, while Alexander Krémer analyzes Richard Rorty’s critical stance toward Kant’s ethics in his paper, “Rorty on Kant’s Ethics”, drawing attention to Rorty’s

refusal to accept the kinds of foundationalism, universalism, and rationalism that seem to be indispensable to Kant's moral philosophy. The dialogue on the reconcilability of Kantian and pragmatist ethical approaches is continued by Chris Skowroński in his essay, "Does the Pragmatist Reflection on the Ethical and Aesthetic Values Need the Kantian Axiology for its (Pragmatist) Future Developments?", which seeks to show that pragmatists may very well utilize Kantian resources in inquiring into values and valuation.

In the fifth and final part of the book, the contributors tackle various social and political issues from their Kantian and pragmatist perspectives. Jacquelyn Kegley asks, in her "Kant as Public Intellectual and Political Theorist", whether there is a sense in which Kant could be seen as a "public intellectual", arguing that Kant's public essays and political letters do bring him closer to the pragmatists than has sometimes been understood, especially regarding philosophy as a politically relevant activity promoting enlightenment. One political issue busily commented on by several pragmatists is feminism; perhaps somewhat surprisingly, Shannon Sullivan shows in her "Kant and Pragmatist Feminism" that pragmatist feminists may find some aspects of Kant's moral philosophy useful for their purposes, especially when read through Josiah Royce's philosophy of loyalty. The final paper of the volume, "Peace, Bread and Ideas for a Cosmopolitan World: Addams' Unknown Pragmatist Legacy Today", by Núria Sara Miras Boronat, focuses on Kantian cosmopolitanism and (social, this-worldly) eschatological hope in comparison to Jane Addams' pragmatist political philosophy.



As can be seen by anyone reading these essays, the authors have studied the relations between Kant and various thinkers in the pragmatist tradition extensively and in great historical detail. However, it must also be noted that the contributions are by no means guided by a merely historical interest. In their different ways, they seek to further develop pragmatist—as well as Kantian—philosophy by re-examining these comparative issues in their historical and systematic complexity.

Therefore, we sincerely hope that this volume will be of interest to scholars of Kant and pragmatism not only because of the new historical light it sheds on the questions concerning the actual relations between the two philosophical orientations, but also because it suggests various

new ways of moving on in our pragmatist and Kantian philosophizing. The future of pragmatism (and of Kantianism) crucially depends on the ways in which we are able to come to terms with the history of our philosophical approaches, and, conversely, the ways in which we interpret that history may partly depend on how exactly we—pragmatically—see those approaches in terms of their potential future results. In this sense, for pragmatists—as well as for Kantians—historical and systematic philosophy ought to be developed hand in hand. Above all, both ought to be developed in the spirit of critical philosophy, a spirit that crucially joins the two approaches examined in this collection. While John Dewey was in many ways a non- or even anti-Kantian thinker, his characterization of philosophy as a “critical method for developing methods of criticism” could very well have been penned by Kant himself.

Believing in the future of both pragmatism and Kantianism, we wish our readers interesting moments of critical philosophical understanding and insight.





PART I

COGNITION AND  
SCIENCE

# Between Pragmatism and Rationalism

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Joseph Margolis  
*Temple University*

I

Kant, I say, is too grand a figure to capture whole and too much of a singular unity to be captured in pieces.<sup>1</sup> There's an endlessness in Kant's *vision* that cannot be mended and a gap in his *argument* I expect he would deny, and nothing, it seems, could possibly alter Kant's magic standing in the philosophical lists.

According to my intuitions, Kant captures and is captured by a distinctly regressive rationalism—that's to say, the would-be modernity Kant champions in the first *Critique*, no more than moments (it seems) before the onset of a more immoderate, but also more potent modernity already sweeping Europe in Kant's time, committed to obliging obdurate rationalisms like Kant's to capitulate to the dawning theme of historicity—effectively allied with the forces of evolving experience and practical life. These forces could never have been thwarted by Kant's regression, and yet Kant has still to be answered in our day (extraordinary tribute!). I'm speaking, of course, of the principal philosophical lesson of the long approach to the French Revolution—mingled, for all that, with my own secret pleasure in savoring Kant's unrivaled invention. For Kant's purpose in his Critical system lies, I believe, with matters well beyond the evolution of modernity itself (which *we* know all too well) and beyond the retrieval of the would-be timeless truths of rationalism, carefully decoded to reveal the essential key to a truly modern epistemology or metaphysics; although, even that, I concede, may already be an incipient part of the actual plan of the Critical venture: the higher politics of philosophy per-

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<sup>1</sup> This is a shortened version of a paper originally presented at the Berlin 2017 Pragmatist Kant meetings.

haps, if that won't seem too impudent a verdict—the final meaning of Kant's transcendental instruction. Where, otherwise, could the rationalist intuitions come from, if not from our ordinary experience of effective thought—with all their deceptions? Kant is the most advanced regressive figure that we know: superannuated almost from the start of the Critical undertaking, but never obsolete.

The natural sciences have changed immensely over the centuries, but not, I think, in a way that could entrench transcendental speculations of the Kantian sort. The characterization of arithmetic and geometry as necessary synthetic truths has been overwhelmingly rejected. The theory of space and time has been radically altered. Causal determinism and the principle of causality have been profoundly challenged. The unity of the sciences is essentially gone. The nature of a law of nature has become exceedingly problematic. The natural and formal sciences are now viewed disjunctively. There is no assured scientific methodology. Nomological and metaphysical necessities are on the retreat. The natural sciences tend to be empirically grounded, but in ways utterly unlike the fledgling efforts of the early empiricists (and early rationalists, for that matter), whom Kant engages.

I would say flux has replaced fixity; foundationalism and cognitive privilege are no longer required or favored, and the newer sciences concerned with animate, mental, cultural, informational, purposive, behavioral, social, and historical factors are likely to tolerate increasingly substantive departures from the kind of invariances Kant favors. The Kantian transcendental looks more and more like an extremely early form of heuristic guesswork marked by prejudices that are no longer well-regarded or needed. Kant's increasingly triadic unification of the whole of thought and reality, polarized in terms of "God" and "world" and unified, subjectively, in terms of human thought and experience and belief and action (so-called soul) is simply no longer regarded as useful in current scientific practice, in the way they once were in Kant's own memory. But then, new modes of philosophy seem to lose their followings at a faster and faster pace, with regard to the issues that attracted Kant originally. Philosophy is now thoroughly historied.

The fact is, our preoccupation with the familiar Kant leads us away from the deeper mysteries of Kant's transcendental philosophy. Just ask yourself: Why is it that, despite our continually reading Kant's texts, we remain so unsure as to whether *any* of Kant's would-be transcendental claims and judgements actually deliver necessary synthetic *a priori* truths?

On a standard reading of Kant's *Analytic*, in the first *Critique*, but against Kant's apparent intention, I'd say straight out that there are no assuredly transcendental specimen truths at all—in which case, Kant's system must utterly collapse, *as* a canonical version of Kantian argument. However, on a reading in accord with other items of the prefatory and introductory themes of the first *Critique*, joined with cognate posits drawn from the *Transcendental Dialectic*, together with the bafflingly supportive claims of the *Opus postumum*, transcendental truths seem to be a dime a dozen. They're abundantly produced all the time by Kant, they are actually easy to invent, and they would be completely pointless to refuse. But why? The reason, I believe, rests with our entrenched misunderstanding of Kant's ultimate purpose in the whole of his Critical labor, particularly as he approaches the end of his career. Nothing that I say in this regard is meant to demean Kant in any way. But surely, we must move on.

I expect you'll demur, and you'd be both right and wrong to do so. But how would you explain the puzzle of Kant's transcendentalism? I believe the answer may be found encoded (without guile) in the promise of a seemingly endless run of responses prophetically addressed (by Kant himself) to a straightforward question contrived by Eckart Förster to mark the final section (or chapter) of Förster's translation and careful mapping of the fragmented manuscript of the *Opus postumum*, under the plain title, "[What is transcendental philosophy?]" Kant answers Förster's question—well, he answers his own question, that's to say, his first and his final Critical question (which are of course one and the same)—with a stunning array of carefully differentiated sentences (about a dozen or so) that begin (nearly all) with the common phrasing, "Transcendental philosophy is. . .", where, rightly arrayed, the completed sentences (of an obviously endless, problematically compatible sequence) enable us to retrace the mounting complexity and completeness of what Kant terms his "doctrine" and his "system", reworked as a "critique" (for instructional purposes chiefly), but also as what he calls his "propadeutic" to the system itself (Kant 1998, All/B 24–25; cf. also A 850/B 878): that is, an integral part of the system, but not the entire system and not a separate commentary either, a canonical part expressly suited to the instruction of all those drawn to Kant initially or primarily or easily or at least in good part by the sheer salience of his apriorist critique of the defective "argumentative" strategies of the classic forms of rationalism and empiricism.

I put the matter in this somewhat labored way, for several reasons, partly at least to signal that the method of "critique" is not (or is not

longer, in the last phase of Kant's career), primarily an "argumentative" device. It's really (perhaps it always was) an instrument of privileged instruction of a very wide-ranging sort ("visional", as I shall say): meaning that its internal "argument" becomes increasingly informal—increasingly imperative—however committed to a unique principle of systematized totality. We are aware, of course, that neither an all-inclusive articulated totality (the universe, say) nor a grasp of an absolutely totalized systematicity (say, a detailed knowledge of the universe) is humanly accessible, though its assumption (its presumption) is essential to Kant's "vision". The idea is almost too ambitious for modern tastes.

Kant's "argument", if there be one, has already been completed—is already taken for granted, I should say; it remains (we may suppose) assuredly secure, *behind* whatever Kant presents in the first *Critique*—well, its effective force in the *Critique* is already meant to be entirely self-evident *in its application* to the failed arguments of Kant's named precursors. There's the gap—or at least one insuperable gap—in Kant's "argument": there *is* no explicit argument that actually defines the final form of Kant's transcendental apriorism; there's no proof at all that, read in any standard logical or semantic way (or otherwise), one could actually discern, by criterial means, any specimen avowals that were necessarily true, as synthetic *a priori* claims or propositions. The very idiom has become distinctly alien in our world.

Nevertheless, we would be profoundly mistaken if we supposed that the mere presence of the "gap" would have defeated Kant hands down. It would not! It would merely mean we had misunderstood what Kant meant—must finally have meant—by his transcendental critique. We would have been looking in the wrong place. We must not forget that Kant nowhere displays the actual grounds on which we may suppose the entire unity of science and practical life depends. I shall argue, finally, that Kant shifts to the primacy of the "visional" over the "argumentative", in the *Opus postumum*. Kant extends the range of the transcendental to include the practical use of reason's own creative "ideas". It's that enlargement that may explain Kant's distinctive perseverance on Förster's question. He's aware that he's put the entire venture at mortal risk, but, if he had turned "Platonist" here, he would have been no more than another dogmatist.

The so-called "gap" that haunts Kant more and more profoundly in his last years, hopeful and fearful at the same time—the gap is itself the interminable unraveling of Kant's distinctly positive efforts to close every

prior, seemingly more shallow gap; possibly, then, in a strange way, Kant becomes the indefatigable companion of all those confronted by the more worldly trials of the day, the practical discovery (witnessed, say, in the approach and onset of the French Revolution) of the lesson that public order and disorder can never be effectively separated at the level of human intervention (whether conceptual or political)—Kant’s gap is nothing less than the effect of the ineluctable circularity of transcendental philosophy itself, which Kant claims to practice but cannot confirm from any neutral turf. Kant is unwilling to claim his transcendental method is self-evidently valid when applied to either theoretical or practical questions—he seems to hold only that it “approximates” best to the articulation of a transcendental vision of the entire universe, all of whose parts are related to every other part (necessarily) and to the totality of one unique system, under one supreme principle (in a rationally necessary way). Fantastic idea.<sup>2</sup>

The vision need not be true, as far as Kant is concerned, in order to be rationally effective. *Qua* transcendental illusion (however benign), it cannot be true, and, trivially, of course, it cannot be known to be true, since that would entail a knowledge of the entire universe. But it can be rationally believed, Kant believes; although even that may be indemonstrable or hopelessly problematic.

I’m persuaded Kant believes his transcendental practice allows for rational revision and correction (of a sort) but not for actual defeat, as long as it remains coherent and consistent, avoids humanly inaccessible truth-claims, and manifests a competitive capacity for fine detail and the boldest sort of inclusiveness relative to the known world. I take Kant’s grandest claims to be generally infeasible but also impossible to confirm—“stipulative”, as I say. In Kant’s view (emphatically in the *Opus postumum*), practical reason demands that we search out its ultimate reflexive “commands” (divine, if you wish, though that is itself a figurative expression of the highest reach of man’s reflective freedom). Hence, practical reason (the voice of human freedom) claims primacy over the limitations of theoretical reason, though its propositional mate remains indemonstrable as before. That is indeed my considered interpretation of the first *Critique* and the gathering argument of the *Opus postumum*. It’s in that sense that Kant assigns Reason a quasi-Platonic autonomy. But, of course, he’s also “discovered” (he claims, in the third *Critique*), by way of a review of “aesthetic judgment”—which, please note, *is not* itself a cognitive

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<sup>2</sup> See, for a telling reminder, Kant 1998, A 795/B 823.

judgment—the transcendental principle of the formal “purposiveness of nature”, which then justifies, in terms of rational preference, his enlargement of the powers of reason in the *Opus postumum*.<sup>3</sup>

The claims in question are not hypotheses, though they possess conjectured virtues. Kant finds his chief principles more than rationally adequate for his own life in both theoretical and practical terms; he’s committed to perfecting them (according to his insights) as a free gift to others who may wish to organize their lives in a manner that befits creatures like ourselves, who may be drawn to the ideal of living according to the highest possible conception of rational life—that’s to say, at least in accord with what Kant is able to assure us conforms with transcendentalism’s reach.

## II

I don’t think it makes sense to suppose that Kant’s actual doctrine could possibly be argumentatively convincing, except perhaps conditionally, in special circumstances, as by the addition of prior premises that are simply not contested; although I can also see that Kant’s vision may be compelling to some, in practical terms, in some sense rationally, because of its commitment to would-be necessity, universality, totality, unity, and some appreciable congruity with the work of the sciences and the normative and practical consensus of humanity. But concessions of these latter sorts also raise systematic doubts about the autonomy (and confirmability) of Kant’s venture—which he nowhere relieves. His labor, here, begins to resemble familiar partisan doctrines. Kant’s mature conviction holds that pure reason can indeed function autonomously as an effectively pertinent faculty, with respect to practical life, beyond cognition—hence, with respect to satisfactory belief (as distinct from actual truth or knowledge of the world): because persons can, rationally, consider acting on the strength of beliefs they know they cannot demonstrate are true.

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<sup>3</sup> I confess my sympathies here are closer to Michael Friedman’s interpretation of the link between the work of “reflecting [or reflective] judgment” (in the third *Critique*) and the adjustments inserted in the “Appendix to the transcendental dialectic” (in the first) than to Eckart Förster’s (Förster 2000, Ch. 1, especially 7–11). Nevertheless, I think Förster has the better of the textual argument, particularly in terms of the *Opus postumum*. In any case, Kant seems precipitous in drawing his transcendental argument from whatever he believes he’s discovered by way of the absurd muddle of his account of “aesthetic judgment”. It’s in accord with such considerations that I venture the opinion that the “visional” thesis acquires primacy, finally, over the “argumentative” in the *Opus postumum*. Regarding Friedman’s view, see Friedman (1992), 251–3 (cited by Förster).

If all this strikes you as the barest sketch of a fair challenge to Kant, then I trust you will allow me a more problematic maneuver—intended as a grand economy at very little cost. I find it irresistible (initially improbable but finally advantageous) to paraphrase the thought of Kant's transcendental project (as "vision" rather than "argument") in the same spare—now somewhat neglected—idiom C. I. Lewis uses (for an entirely different purpose) in introducing what he famously names the "pragmatic *a priori*", which, of course, is, explicitly, an "analytic [a merely formal, stipulated] *a priori*" (Lewis 1970, 231–9). Lewis does not mention Kant or Kant's synthetic *a priori* in his paper, but no one would seriously suppose that Lewis's essay was not intended to demonstrate, by a single stroke, that Kant's transcendental extravagance does no essential work at all. I wish to reclaim a favorable sense of Kant's labor, but at a price that, as a pragmatist, Lewis would probably be willing to pay, though rationalist aficionados of Kant probably would not.

The truth is I'm taking an extreme liberty with Lewis's "pragmatic *a priori*" for a purpose Lewis would never sanction. In part, my maneuver's tongue in cheek, but it's also plausible. In treating Lewis's proposal as analytically necessary—*because* it's stipulated ("stipulated" is Lewis's term)—settled, that is, by initial definitions, I deliberately disjoin the *a priori* from Lewis's own *a posteriori* account of knowledge, which, in the context of his book, *Mind and the World Order* (1929), would be unthinkable. But I have no wish, here, to attempt a close reading (or defense) of Lewis's account of realism or scientific knowledge or of the "given"—or, for that matter, of a comparison of the relative merits of Lewis's treatment of Kant's Critical method and (say) Wilfrid Sellars's alternative account of much the same matter. I'm simply pirating a part of Lewis's strategy quite opportunistically: partly for the comic effect of yielding an elementary ploy that *might* easily have generated Kant's own free-wheeling use of the would-be Critical method and partly to drive home the reminder that Kant nowhere explicates (operationally) how to arrive at his own transcendental "conditions of possibility".

I take Kant, ultimately, to be methodologically arbitrary, but philosophically plausible, indeed distinctly responsible and very nearly convincing. In short, I recommend we reject outright the premise that there are necessary synthetic truths, though I do see how easily one could conspire with Kant (or with Sellars, or with those whom Sellars may have or could have persuaded—well, in very different ways, for instance, both John McDowell and Robert Brandom—who are prepared to speak of a "naturalistic tran-



scendental” turn that collects, “inferentially”, in some lax way associated with Sellars’s notion of “material inference”), the diminished transcendental each chooses to support. What’s needed here is a sense of philosophical danger: for once we yield in this direction, “contingently necessary” synthetic *a priori* truths are bound to appear everywhere—though only passingly. There will be no escape.<sup>4</sup> What makes the maneuver philosophically intolerable is, precisely, that it risks construing an indefinitely large and continually changing *subset* of otherwise empirically contingent propositions regarding meanings, inferences, and causal regularities (and the like) as transcendental—that is, necessary synthetic truths. Kant, I remind you, wishes to draw an unbridgeable divide between the transcendental and the empirical—and so, insists on transcendentalism’s yielding a unique solution. In this sense, Sellars’s admittedly important (thoroughly worthwhile) speculation is, essentially, *not* Kantian at all—not Critical, not transcendental in the Kantian way. I see no advantage in muddying the waters here. I find it entirely reasonable, therefore, to abandon Kant’s transcendentalism and to take up the *completely* different inquiry that Sellars and Lewis (and an army of others) share—which, I foresee, is bound to favor pragmatism over rationalism. We need only abandon necessary synthetic truths and hew to the transcendental/empirical disjunction.

Allow me, then, in this aside, to provide the briefest clues about the genuine puzzle that affords a new inning for the contest between pragmatism and rationalism (or, perhaps better, for a successor contest), at the same time they mark the ground on which “Kantian naturalism” (O’Shea’s term), which appears already, implicitly, in the title of Sami Pihlström’s *Naturalizing the Transcendental* (cf. Pihlström 2003; Introduction, Ch. 1), leads us into conceptual thickets that it would be wiser to free ourselves from, if for no other reason than that any overlap between the “empirically

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<sup>4</sup> I’ve touched here on a huge problem that deserves a fuller analysis than I can attempt in this essay. The single most important locus of the idea appears (somewhat obliquely) in Wilfrid Sellars (2005 [1980], 117–34). I find its principal influence—or allies—in Brandom and McDowell. But the most direct analysis of the emerging transcendental “compromise”—compromise, because it’s cast in naturalistic terms—I find in James R. O’Shea’s recent paper (2017, 194–215). O’Shea is very clear about the attractions and pitfalls of what has sometimes been called “transcendental naturalism” (which I would rather call “quasi-” or “pseudo-transcendental”). I’ll venture just enough along these lines to signify some overlap (and divergence) with regard to O’Shea, since O’Shea favors Sellars’s intuition over Lewis’s. Sellars and Lewis actually agree about the nerve of the puzzle they address, but not, of course, about its resolution. See, further, James R. O’Shea (2007, Ch. 7), and (2016, 130–48). I must thank my assistant, Shaun Poust, for bringing O’Shea’s recent paper to my attention.

contingent” and the “necessary synthetic *a priori*” will, surely, spell conceptual and logical confusion. Alternatively put: the only way to read any such overlap as conceptually benign would be by way of something akin to a double application of Lewis’s “stipulative” treatment of the pragmatic *a priori*: one application, as I’ve suggested, to arrive at Lewis’s analytic *a priori* among mixed elements that must surely include antecedent empirical contingencies, the second, to convert some subset of the first into transcendental (synthetic *a priori*) truths, wherever wanted. In that way, a comic extension of Lewis’s strategy would secure the issue on which O’Shea pits Sellars and Lewis against one another. I argue that we have no need for any such regression *and* that Sellars’s speculation obliges us to read the issue in broadly Critical terms, once Lewis’s proposal is in place.

Here, then, are some clues that define the unwanted complication and the way to exit from it. I draw them from O’Shea (citing Lewis) and from Sellars (tempted by Kant). First, O’Shea:

Concepts for Lewis [O’Shea says] are basically principles by which the mind interprets the sensuous given [n. b.] according to criteria which [on Lewis’s view], analytically determine, *a priori*, the sorts of experiential sequences to which *that* specific kind of reality must conform. “All concepts”, writes Lewis, “exercise this function of prescribing fundamental law to whatever they denote, because everything which has a name is to be identified with certainty only over some stretch of time”.<sup>5</sup>

I conclude that Lewis successfully applies his “stipulative” strategy here, which clearly depends on empirical or experiential regularities (that are of course contingent): the would-be *a priori* can be collected only if the stipulation is taken to be autonomous (or free), without any formal (as opposed to any motivational) relationship to actual experience. (This marks Lewis’s rationalism unmistakably, though we may not favor Lewis’s epistemology.)

Now, Sellars:

My purpose in writing this essay [Sellars begins] is to explore from the standpoint of what might be called a philosophically oriented behavioristic psychology the procedures by which we evaluate actions as right or wrong, arguments as valid and invalid and cognitive claims as well or ill grounded. More specifically, our frame of reference will be the psychology of rule-regulated behavior.

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<sup>5</sup> O’Shea, “The Analytic Pragmatist Conception of the *A Priori*...” 205; the citation appears in C. I. Lewis (1929, 257).

This is meant to provide a *via media* between outright Kantianism and empirical psychology, in accord with the rationalists' "minor premise": "Concepts and problems relating to validity, truth and obligation are significant, but do not belong to the empirical sciences" (Sellars 2005 [1980], 117). (I take this to be a version of the ultimate rationalist howler—Kant's, paradigmatically, if I dare say so.)

You cannot fail to grasp the sense in which Kant, Lewis, Sellars, and O'Shea are rationalists of an increasingly marginalized kind: in diverse ways, they acknowledge an *a priori* rule-like or law-like constraint on intelligible experience, which they (also) feel obliged to bring to bear on some reading of Kant's own Critical transcendentalism. For instance, Sellars's application depends on the distinction between "action which merely conforms to a rule and action which occurs *because* of a rule":

Above the foundation of man's learned responses to environmental stimuli [Sellars affirms] there towers a superstructure of more or less developed systems of rule-regulated symbolic activity which constitutes man's intellectual vision [as in] an Einstein's grasp of alternative structures of natural law, a Leibniz's vision of the totality of all possible worlds, a logician's exploration of the most diversified postulate systems, a Cantor's march into the transfinite;

and then adds:

[I]nsofar as actions merely conform to it, a rule is not a rule but a mere generalization. Sellars 2005 [1980]; 122, 123

As far as I can see, the so-called regulist "necessities" that Sellars features must be acknowledged and examined, but they are, as such, no more than habituated, anticipatory, guessed at, falsifiable, diverse, plural, applied to an empirically interpreted world—not transcendental at all: which is to say, not transcendental in the Kantian way. Clearly, they are originally empirical conjectures. Concede this much, and the Kantian construction dissolves before our eyes. Sellars and Lewis prove to be remarkably close, but pragmatism and rationalism remain irreconcilably opposed.

I want to say that Kant's transcendental *a priori* is as "stipulative" as Lewis's analytic *a priori*, but the "visional" sense I reserve for Kant, as opposed to the "argumentative" sense Lewis would allow, in advancing his own pragmatic *a priori*. To say that Lewis's usage is "formal" or "argumentative" is to say only that *his a priori* is defined non-rationally (logically or analytically), not in terms of substantive linkages of meaning or the like, not as substantive Kantian-like discoveries of any kind ("regulist", say);

whereas, when I say that Kant's *a priori* is also "stipulative", I mean at least that, as with Lewis's usage, it signifies a free or autonomous act or decision on Kant's part. But, then, it must be an act that *is* relationally encumbered in conceptual or semantic ways, *in* the "visional" (transcendental) sense—where Lewis's is not (of course). That is, in terms of Kant's view of the supposed systematicity of the uniquely integrated unity of the entire universe (which Kant identifies as its "architectonic" structure)—or, more modestly, the singular, internally articulated unity of the supposed whole of all possible experience.

There's the decisive clue to the meaning of Kant's final notion of licit transcendental reasoning (Kant 1998, A 832/B 860-AA 51-B 879). Ultimately, for Kant, transcendental discourse entails the rational assurance of the uniquely totalized systematicity of the entire universe: "in some sense", human reason is governed by its own apodictic belief—grasped inwardly, unconditionally, as its own autonomous Categorical Command. Here, Kant's speculation exceeds canonical metaphysics, in the interest of rational faith.<sup>6</sup>

If you read Kant aright, you see at once that Kant treats "rational" and "historical" order—disjunctively—relative to closed systems. Hence, he offers, as his minimal conception of a "system", the notion "of the unity of the manifold cognitions under one idea" (Kant 1998, A 832/B 860). Kant means that there must be one and only one such necessary order under one uniquely adequate principle (or idea of reason); also, that architectonic claims hold true under the condition that all the parts of the universe are duly "posited" within that totality—abstractly conceived but impossible to articulate (humanly). No "approximative" cognitions could possibly serve. To regard the principle (the rational "idea") as transcendently regulative (for human inquiries) is, in my opinion, to exceed any would-be (benign) cognitional function altogether: there are no pertinent regulatory "approximations" to the totality of the universe that human inquiries could possibly consider, and Kant's "necessary" constraints on rational freedom are plainly paradoxical if they are not antecedently "stipulated" (in the sense already given).

Notice that if, as Kant believes, chemistry is *not* a true science as it stands (in his own day), then perhaps neither is Newtonian physics, since Newton's physics was also unable to provide a viable and accept-

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<sup>6</sup> See Cassirer (1981, Ch. 2, § 2); also, for specimen formulations of the idea of a supreme God, 200–201. I find the following lines especially instructive: "There is a God in the soul of man. The question is whether he is also in nature" (203).

able model of chemistry adequate to bringing chemistry into accord with other bona fide sciences. It must be clear that, on Kant's account of architectonic totality, there may be no sciences at all, if we are not permitted to defend a compromise between rational and historicized considerations. Kant draws his account of totality much too tightly, well beyond the cognitive capabilities of mortal inquirers. He's put the entire transcendental venture at insuperable risk, if he requires an "argument". There's the obvious advantage of his transcendental "vision", which allows, in practical matters, for rational faith. My surmise is, precisely, that Kant came to see the futility of attempting to escape the "argumentative" *petitio* of transcendental reasoning beyond the resources of *Verstand*: he turns, therefore, from the "conditions of possibility" of truth and knowledge to the "conditions" of the highest reach of rational freedom (and belief). But, of course, the validity of the latter objective cannot be demonstrated.

The philosophical rhetoric of recent forms of rationalism—spanning our own few new decades and the entire last century: Kantian but decidedly post-Kant—adheres to what has been called a pragmatized rationalism or a rationalist pragmatism (both oxymorons), shared mainly by enthusiasts of Kant and Frege; it speaks of preserving an authoritative, foundational "platform" or "framework" of a relatively formal (logico-semantic, inferential), distinctly nondescriptive nature. It's said to be "mathematical", as by Kant, in the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, and, more recently, to be "metalinguistic", perhaps to capture the force of the prevailing compromise between classic rationalism and upstart history—impossible to gainsay, in any event—as one sees in Robert Brandom's (Brandom, 2015) cautious inferentialism (or "analytic pragmatism").

Brandom does in fact collect, as "near"-Kantians, figures as diverse as Wilfrid Sellars, Rudolf Carnap, Donald Davidson, even part of one side of Richard Rorty, Wittgenstein (rather improbably), and himself, all bent (as he suggests) on displacing empiricism but no longer wedded to any explicit transcendentalism. Inferentialism is, in fact, a carefully crafted replacement for transcendentalism, that deliberately—quite cannily—blurs the line between what I'm calling the broad sense of "empirical" and "metalinguistic" approximations, as a new sort of pragmatist canon of a decidedly Fregean cast.

Philosophy, at the moment, is noticeably attentive to what is being said in the rationalist part of the philosophical world. But I believe the conceptual weather has turned against the rationalists. It's not clear that

they have much of a purpose any longer if (as is true) the formal and natural sciences are treated disjunctively and if (as is also true) the circularity of epistemology is openly acknowledged. The rejection of cognitive privilege and the tacit acceptance of historicity are, of course, instinctively opposed to Kant's (and Frege's) game but are central to pragmatism's venture. Kant himself, it seems, tends to favor what I call "vision" over "argument", increasingly, as he approaches the end of his career: opposed to "forms of life", if you wish, as distinct from prior doctrines. That may indeed prove a better clue to mark the vague contest I'm attempting to retrieve. I'd say it has more to do with retiring Kant politely than with any new *geistlich* motivation.

Let me, then, be as candid as I can. I wish to dismantle Kant's transcendentalism. As "argument", it's the most brilliant self-deception philosophy can offer; as "vision", it's a completely outmoded, no doubt noble, but then also extravagantly idiosyncratic command of the sublime masquerading as methodological rigor. Allow me some slack, therefore, to run some small thoughts by you that rightly bear on our appreciation of Kant, without too much heavy labor.

I must begin with a marvelously deft correction of Kant, provided by Ernst Cassirer, that I daresay cannot be bettered or defeated, a fine-grained, thoroughly accurate farewell that ends by citing Kant's own severe correction of himself, drawn from the important passage (in the first *Critique*) titled "Appendix to the transcendental dialectic", which explicates in the clearest way just what (with regard to the natural sciences) remains of the regulatory "idea of limit" applied to what an "object" or a "physical body" must be. Cassirer says, in defense of his own Hegelianized departure from Kantian transcendentalism:

It is not a matter of disclosing the ultimate, absolute, elements of reality, in the contemplation of which thought may rest as it were, but of the neverending process through which the relatively necessary takes the place of the relatively accidental and the relatively invariable that of the relatively variable... [W]e can never claim to grasp these invariants with our hands so to speak. Cassirer 1957, 475-6

You realize, of course, as Kant and Cassirer must as well, that, once we give up transcendently "constitutive" principles of objecthood, we cannot expect the "regulatory" function of reason to be more than merely verbal: obviously, there can be no "approximation" to the absolute or total or apodictic or strictly necessary or complete or anything of the kind, if we

don't already possess a working knowledge of what would-be "approximative" terms actually designate—knowing *that* would require empirical data, of course. And we cannot speak meaningfully (non-vacuously) of the internal details of the totality of the universe. Cassirer's own "approximative" qualifications are more a reckoning with regard to historied innovations in the sciences and ordinary empirical contingencies (that we cannot rightly anticipate) than variants of *a priori* necessities. That's to say: Cassirer abandons Kant's transcendentalism and makes his peace with history and historied evidence!

Nevertheless, Kant's conception of transcendental thinking may well require an *a priori* grasp of totality that we cannot possibly validate: for instance, regarding what we may deem to be the true merit of current physics relative to its development *in any unknown future*.

If you concede this small reminder, then much else in Kant's system must collapse without being specifically acknowledged: for instance, the would-be demonstration of the "completeness" of Kant's categories or the "unity of apperception"—possibly, the ultimate problematic premise of Kant's entire venture. As Peter Strawson (Strawson 1966, 55) tellingly reminds us: according to Kant's view (Kant 1998, A 482/B 510–A 483/B 511),

The whole, in an empirical signification, is always only comparative. The absolute whole of magnitude (the world-whole), of division, of descent, of the conditions of existence in general, together with all the questions about whether these are to come about through a finite or an endlessly continuing synthesis, has nothing to do with any possible experience—

and *cannot* be grasped in any would-be articulated totality of transcendental ideas. But if the "completeness" of the table of our most fundamental categories (putatively "deduced" in accord with the resources of the "science of logic", though transcendently) is a determinate—and essential—"condition of possibility" of the entire Critical venture, then must we conclude that Kant has made his task impossible to fulfil?<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Effectively, the whole of the argument of the "Transcendental analytic", read as articulating the "essential premise"—Strawson's phrasing (Strawson 1966, 26), that is, the affirmation of "the necessary unity of consciousness"—may have effectively no meaning at all, and, on the empirical evidence regarding consciousness itself, it's probably false or insuperably problematic. I take these considerations to suggest that Kant's model of the "unity of apperception" and the entire machinery of empirical cognition is probably inadequate to its task. I am not endorsing Strawson's attack on Kant's transcendental deduction, but the dilemma of Kant's explanation (*ibid.*, 112–3) cannot possibly be ignored. Compare Horstmann (1989).

I see the distinct threat—in fact, more than the threat—of a distorting tautology here. Consider the possibility of separating the conditions of operation of *concepts* in perceptual episodes from the conditions of an operative *Ich denke* (an “idea” of Reason, say, not a categorical concept) said (by Kant) to be inseparable from the other: for instance, on an occasion on which someone *sees* a particular determinate object while driving on a familiar stretch of road, without being *aware* of all that he’s actually seen—in particular, his seeing a dog of an unusual breed (but not otherwise distinguished), without being aware that he is seeing it. But then, responding to a solicitation from the police for possibly pertinent clues regarding some foul play, our driver, by an effort at recovering his perceptual memory and deriving inferences from what he thus uncovers, does actually guess correctly (otherwise inexplicably) some of the distinguishing features of a dog known (by the police) to have belonged to a man found assaulted in the vicinity of the apparently loyal dog, our driver now realizes he’d seen what he reconstructs—accurately enough to begin to fix the approximate time of the supposed assault. The point I wish to press is that, however innocently, Kant has surely drawn on empirically contingent conjectures in affirming the transcendental necessity of the “spontaneity” of the *Ich denke*, said to govern the “application” of concepts to the supposed “receptivity” of the sensuous content of sensory experience itself.

If that begins to sketch a reasonable objection to Kant’s theory, then I’m prepared to believe that Kant’s general account of perception must be fatally defective (however irresistible) and that the search for the would-be transcendental conditions of empirical perception may be utterly futile, very possibly an illusion produced by what may be regarded as a “stipulated” truth.

I see no way to confirm Kant’s would-be *transcendental* necessity regarding the unity of any perceptual manifold or the completeness of Kant’s categories or the unity of apperception or any synthetic necessities of the sort Kant seems to favor (in accord with whatever criterial rules Kant might offer to validate). You cannot fail to see that Kant never quite distinguishes between arguments confined to the *internal* constraints of his theory (which are clearly stipulative—and, thus far, analytic) and demonstrations of the further (stipulated) synthetic standing of any of his transcendental claims.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See, for instance, Kant (1998), the whole of Bk.I, Ch. 2 of the “Transcendental analytic”, “On the deduction of the pure concepts of the understanding”, A 84–A 130. Of course, the validity of the whole of transcendental reasoning is at stake. The trouble is: without the



Kant does not succeed here, nor does he succeed in securing the function of the “*Ich denke*” in the “unity of apperception” doctrine, which is said to usher in the categories themselves and monitor their necessary ubiquity, though the *Ich denke* is treated in the vaguest and most perfunctory way and has no categorical features of its own. Contrary to Kant’s argumentative strategy (and, in any case, problematically), the transcendental account must make provision for the fluencies of ordinary discourse, thought, self-consciousness, and whatever Kant ascribes to the unity of apperception. These may be minor, but they are not negligible responses to the compromise required by cognition’s confrontation with rationalism. The Kantian account is unusually lax at this juncture. But then, consider two other transcendental claims advanced by Kant, in the *Prolegomena*: one, to the effect that

the *a priori* conditions of the possibility of experience are at the same time the sources out of which all universal laws of nature must be derived.

Kant 2002, 4:297

Here, Kant acknowledges the domino effect of his own apriorist claim. Is the table of Kantian categories complete, or systematically adequate and explicit, or confirmed apodictically? I doubt there’s anyone left who would not agree with the general dissatisfaction regarding the treatment of the matter. Recall, also, that contemporary philosophers of science, John Worrall (1989, 92–124) and Steven French (2014), for instance, are entirely prepared, in the light of recent discussions bearing on the metaphysics of quantum physics, to consider abandoning the very notion of physical bodies and substantive entities and to speak only of bundled predicables. Is it possible to demonstrate that Kant’s table of categories is transcendently secure? I’m inclined to doubt it. What would be its objective principle? How should we proceed? There seems to be no ready answer. (Nevertheless, I must advise, French is much more headlong than Worrall. I don’t believe the options are sufficiently determinate.)

Pertinently, with regard to the sciences, Kant offers (in the *Prolegomena*) a version of the causal principle:

Everything of which experience shows that it happens [Kant observes] must have a cause.

Kant 2002, 4:296

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pertinence of empirical considerations, the entire venture seems entirely arbitrary, and, if we allow empirical tests, we necessarily preclude the transcendental thesis itself. Here, I suggest, empirical reflection regarding the intelligence of the most advanced animals and the extraordinary abilities of prelinguistic infants cannot fail to lead us to consider whether Kant’s explanatory model is not, finally, impossible to reclaim.

But leading quantum physicists, Niels Bohr and David Bohm, for instance—with a word from Erwin Schrödinger to the effect that the matter cannot be decided (appears to be undecidable) on the basis of empirical evidence and can (it seems) only be settled by fiat—have actually adopted, respectively and without apparent conceptual disadvantage on either side, an indeterminate and a deterministic view of quantum phenomena (cf. Cushing 1994, Ch. 11). Is such a maneuver compatible with Kant's treatment of transcendental concepts and predicables? It seems impossible to deny the pertinence of what we would now admit to being contingent evidence ("empirical" in a very loose sense, if you wish) that confronts us even in the quantum context in which we are to construct our account of the physical world along lines very different from Kant's treatment of Newton's theory and practice. We surely must agree with Cassirer, for instance, that Kant's disjunction between the concepts of the understanding and the concepts (or ideas) of reason is not at all in accord with advanced forms of inquiry in the physical sciences. So that what Kant would have thought impossible to deny transcendently—the fixed order of time and space, for instance, the canonical concept of a physical body, the exceptionless causal principle itself—appear now to be open (more than open) to fundamental revision in our own day. But if such changes are possible, then is not transcendental reasoning hopelessly uncertain as a ground for reliable metaphysical arguments?

There may also be different scenarios to consider: conceptual constraints affecting the coherent attribution of predicables at different levels of discourse, sheer stalemate involving conceptual imagination, considerations regarding what to admit as real "things" at different levels of inquiry, but, then, there's also reason to suppose that the adequacy of Kant's table of categories may be already adversely affected. How should we know whether we had decided the question correctly or consistently?

Here, we may as well say, Kant "corrects" Newton's empirical treatment of "the laws of nature"—without addressing Newton by name:

Categories [he says] are concepts that prescribe laws *a priori* to appearances, thus to nature as the sum total of all appearances (*natura materialiter spectata*). . . without deriving ["the manifold of nature"] from the latter. B 162

Empirical (or "local") laws of nature are themselves formally ("relationally") determined (or "derived") from *a priori* "laws of appearances in nature", not themselves conditioned in any way by actual sensory appearances. But the argument is completely "stipulative", in the pejorative sense

I've proffered (borrowing from C. I. Lewis). We touch here on the ultimate unresolved gap of Kant's entire system, which Kant skillfully converts into an "adequate" transcendental justification (in the "visional" sense) of the primacy of practical reason over theoretical reason—which seems to be the final lesson (if I may say so) of the *Opus postumum*, recovering its anticipation in the first *Critique* (Kant 1998, A 794/B 822).

Notice, too, that Kant, in a well-known remark meant to accord with the would-be transcendental principle, "to cognize something *a priori* means to cognize it from its mere possibility"—which, on the "evidence" at Kant's disposal (plainly skewed in favor of a Newtonian model of what it is to be a true science)—affirms that "chemistry can be nothing more than a systematic art or experimental doctrine, but never a proper science" (Kant 2002, 4:470–1). But if conceptual gaffes of this kind can be obtained so easily, how could we ever know that we had got our transcendental arguments right? How could we possibly justify Kant's insistence that the transcendental, as such, is entirely free of empirical or historied constraint, or, indeed, that it should be? For instance, as I've already remarked, the failure of chemistry might then signify, transcendently, the failure of physics itself, since, on Kant's architectonic treatment of a "system" of sciences, chemistry's failure is also physics' failure—a definite hazard of speaking of the total unification of all parts of the universe.

Of course, the import of such options should have been already effectively sorted by providing a criterially adequate account of the scope and power of transcendental reasoning. It's entirely possible that Kant had already begun to worry about the adequacy of one version of the "argumentative" strategy of transcendental reasoning (or of other ways of sorting rational arguments), in the process of writing the first *Critique* and the *Inaugural Dissertation* (1770) before it. The very idea of a rationally demonstrable, uniquely valid, architectonically necessary system of theoretical knowledge or practical belief, comprising the entire universe, seems clearly beyond the competence of any merely human investigator. I see, here, a possible motivation for preferring a practical rather than a theoretical system (such as the *Opus postumum* proposes), but I cannot see how, if the force of the concession be allowed, Kant could possibly insist on a uniquely valid solution. But then, to admit the validity of an endless diversity of such solutions would be to abandon altogether the ultimate daring of Kant's original intuition. I would have to count it as a (glorious) failure.

I find myself obliged to think that these and similar reminders leave the entire matter of transcendental reason in a shambles. Why should

we continue to support the idea that would-be transcendental conditions of possibility must be strictly necessary and must therefore preclude any appeal to empirical factors? How should we ever know whether we had discovered the necessary (transcendental) model for appraising the true validity of any and all would-be standard ways of modeling the sciences? To speak of “totality” here seems meaningless—in a manner not altogether unlike that in which the very idea of the autonomy of human freedom is said to entail the absence of any (heteronomous) causal relation (possibly, then, the absence of any relation) to the “things” of the experienced (deterministic) world, a difficulty vigorously raised against the argument of the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, and which must, therefore, give us pause.

I cannot see how the completeness and accuracy of the table of categories can be assessed without considering empirical factors and the history of science itself. (The matter cannot be settled in merely formal terms.) The coherence of Kant’s entire Critical venture seems threatened. Kant claims that psychology (regarded as a science) is at an even greater disadvantage than chemistry, since psychology does not proceed by the usual empirical means (bearing on outer sense) and because it fails to make provision for mathematized causal laws.

Cassirer, of course, more consistently than Kant, though in a way all but impossible to reconcile with Kant’s approach, openly treats the cultural sciences as essentially interpretive (and, of course, as committed to a suitable form of freedom). Furthermore, if we concede the relevance of the actual practices of inquiry among the natural sciences—for instance, those notably examined by Thomas Kuhn (Kuhn 1970 [1962]) and Nancy Cartwright (Cartwright 1983)—then strict nomologicality and the necessary continuity of scientific method cannot fail to be placed at mortal risk. Certainly, Kant’s transcendental practice points to difficulties (possibly another “gap”) that belong more clearly to the “visional” topics of the *Opus postumum* than to the “argumentative” topics of the *Metaphysical Foundations*. This bears, of course, quite pointedly, on the plausibility of my own guess at Kant’s entire transcendental “vision” and the supposed necessity of Kant’s would-be *a priori* discoveries.

### III

Ultimately, Kant’s Critical venture is not an argument. It’s a vision to be shared (in the form of rational faith), and it is that, in such a way that

Kant's would-be synthetic *a priori* claims are necessary truths only in a "stipulative" sense made congruent with his visional intention. Kant's argument (if there be one) is embedded in the encompassing vision, but that's to say no more than that Kant's "argument" is itself no more than the unspecified source of Kant's "valid" exposé of the defects (primarily epistemological and metaphysical) of the explicit arguments of his principal rivals and predecessors. *Whatever* his critique reveals in this regard is meant to count as capable of yielding transcendental apriorist truths (if Kant merely christens or stipulates them suitably for his own vision). Hence, synthetic *a priori* truths may pop up anywhere and everywhere in the work of the Critical Decade and the *Opus postumum*, and are bound to appear in many guises.

They may indeed need to satisfy preliminary demands of plausibility (they must be synthetic rather than analytic and they must be characterized as "conditions of possibility" rather than as "objects" or "properties" of any familiarly experienced sort); otherwise, they have, and need have, no further determinate criterial features, beyond merely being open to being freely proposed *as* synthetic, *as a priori*, *as* necessarily true, wherever it suits Kant's "visional" purpose. That's to say, they're free-hand constructions, not actual discoveries. They serve another purpose altogether: they proceed by way of a double "stipulation": first, as definitionally *a priori*, and, then, as synthetically necessary. There's the whole of the final transcendental maneuver, unceremoniously simulated—hardly reproduced.

Let me remind you of a compelling admission from one of Dieter Henrich's papers regarding the would-be conditions of what Kant identifies as a transcendental deduction. Henrich first explains how Kant draws a deliberate analogy between his philosophical "program" and the model of "deduction" in medieval and post-medieval practices of law, and then he adds, "we must still explore [Kant's] views about the methodological foundations on which one might justify acquired rights in philosophy": the validation of transcendental deduction. Of course. But then Henrich says, very quietly indeed: "In this regard, the first *Critique* remains completely silent" (Henrich 1989, 40). Full stop!

You may suppose Kant has failed us here. I don't entirely agree. I believe *this "gap"* confirms my intuition: namely, that the transcendental *a priori* featured in the first *Critique* was never unconditionally intended to be defined in any criterially explicit, theoretically applicable formal terms. The entire *Critique* is exhibit A of what transcendental thinking actually *is*: the initial fulfilment of Kant's architectonic "vision", rendered

as an ultimate practical commitment wherever theoretical (“argumentative”) confirmation proves to be transcendently illusory. You cannot fail to see that Kant confirms the point by characterizing the “synthetic” (as in synthetic *a priori* judgments) solely in terms of the contrasted definition of “analytic” judgments (Kant 1998, A 293/B 249–A 309/B 366; cf. also A 9/B 13–A 10/B 14). That may have misled Kant’s standard readers: they may have misinterpreted the prominence of the analytic/synthetic distinction in both Introductions (to the first *Critique*): the trick is to see just how this much commits Kant to the deeper instruction of the Transcendental Dialectic—and, further, in the spirit of the Critical Decade and the instruction of the *Opus postumum*.

I find the clearest and most instructive anticipation of Kant’s entire transcendental program—in the pages of the Transcendental Dialectic closest to the “vision” of the *Opus postumum*—where Kant distinguishes his view of rational “ideas” and “ideals” from Plato’s Forms, in accord with the surprising example of Kant’s rationalist conception of God, “the inner vital spirit of man in the world” (Kant 1993, 240). Note Kant’s formulation, please. One line from the Dialectic may be enough to capture the constant theme of nearly the whole of Kant’s account and, if I may say so, the reading I favor in explicating what Kant finally means by the “transcendental”, which requires accepting what amounts to the “transcendent” standing of “ideas” relative to the concepts and categories of the understanding. They are indeed said to be “unconditioned”, as opposed to the “conditioned” standing of experience, judgment, objects of knowledge, and the like, and they apparently (if obscurely) account for the practical belief (or inclination to believe in, but not to know) the total, ramified, necessary architectonic structure of the whole of the universe.

The sentence I have in mind—Kant’s sentence—is this:

human reason contains not only ideas but also ideals, which do not, to be sure, have a creative power like the **Platonic** idea, but still have **practical** power (as regulative principles) grounding the possibility of the perfection of certain **actions**.<sup>9</sup> Kant 1998, A 569/B 597

Here, in context, we find the briefest summary of the entire space that systematizes the following master themes that concern Kant—which, when completed, satisfy the objective of “transcendental philosophy” (cf. Kant 1998, A 11/B 25–A 12/B 26). That is, the unity of, and difference between, theoretical and practical reason, the primacy of the practical over the the-

<sup>9</sup> See the whole of Kant (1998), A 569/B 597–A 572/B 600.

oretical, the ultimate hierarchy of ideas, concepts and manifolds of sensibility, the difference between rational thought or belief and confirmable knowledge, and the ideal of rational life itself, expressed, supremely, in terms of God's thoughts, viewed as the posit of the highest rational power within and beyond man's specifically cognitive capacity, but still apparently transcendently licit. All that it assembles belongs to the unique, singular, stipulatively necessary architectonic of the whole of the intelligible world. But, of course, if that's conceded, there will be very few defensible liens on transcendental necessity.

The reading I offer is moderately supported by the Dialectic of the first *Critique* and the unfinished text of the *Opus postumum*, which confirms Kant's unflagging vision at both the start of his Critical venture and at the end of his life. On this reading, Kant's supreme transcendental principle is itself a categorical imperative, as Kant himself says (cf. Kant 1998; 198, 202, 207, 214, 237), broadly akin to the following imperative: "Think and act in accord with the unique and ultimate rational architectonic of the universe", which is itself an ideal generated by the highest power of reason within man—beyond confirmable knowledge. Imagine!

Let me close, then, with one of the sentences I had intended for closer examination, from the *Opus postumum*, which may confirm how unfamiliar our familiar Kant becomes near the end of his life:

Transcendental philosophy [Kant says] is not an aggregate but a system, not of objective concepts but of subjective ideas, which reason creates itself—not hypothetically (*problematically* or *assertorically*) indeed, but *apodictically*, insofar as it creates itself. Kant 1993, 253–4

But, of course, in making sense of this paradox, we must bear in mind that *a priori* necessity may have "risen in rank" (as Kant believes reason can), from what appears to have been favored, earlier in Kant's career, in alethic terms, but is now distinctly and primarily practical—and, for that reason, cast in imperative terms. So the seeming laxity of the logic is neither a mistake nor a piece of carelessness. It's the mark, rather, of an evolving conviction about the rational meaning of a life lived according to the rule of such a life, judged in terms of the transcendental vision that informs it.

It claims to capture the unique and total meaning of any rational human life, though it cannot demonstrate that that's possible: first, because the articulated totality that it requires cannot be grasped by any human mind, and, second, because the teleologized command that might fulfil the supposed condition of articulated totality cannot be practically engaged by that same human mind. If so, then Kant's imperative may ac-

tually be irrational—or sublime; it certainly cannot demonstrate that, as Kant also claims, “everything that thinks has a God”: that is, believes in a supreme being who knows the articulated system of the all-inclusive universe (Kant 1993, 248)—or believes “because it is absurd”, a new unity of faith and reason.

Strictly speaking—except for expressions of enthusiasm—science never actually engages the sum total of all the articulated parts and relations of what comprises the universe, and human freedom has never found a convincing way of ordering, within any comprehensive system, all the possible readings of man’s would-be unconditional duties as a rational agent. Kant has sanctioned—how is never made entirely clear—two impossibilities (as if by divine fiat) as the supreme regulative “ideas” or imperatives of his transcendental vision. They function beyond truth and falsity and mundane interests as a sort of insuperable paradigm of a would-be rational life at its noblest, so that every human effort to live rationally may be construed as “approximations” of the ideal conception of the vision itself. Truth is out of the question here. It’s more a matter of coming home to the practices of the world. But, then, that must mean that Kant is mistaken as to there being any one rational answer to the ultimate question. Or is it that pluralism also confirms the ingenuity of Kant’s final philosophical paradox? In either case, Kant’s answer is an answer for a time whose time has passed.

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# Kant and Peirce on Pragmatic Maxims<sup>1</sup>

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## 1. Introduction

Charles S. Peirce stated that the word *pragmatism* is derived from Kant's use of the term *pragmatisch*. But while Peirce famously claimed that he learned philosophy from Kant, especially in the 1870s—the decade where Peirce's first expressions of his logical doctrine of pragmatism reached print, although without that name—Peirce is adamant in his criticism and opposition of transcendental philosophy and the *a priori* method. For this reason, despite both earlier and more recent attempts at explaining Peirce's choice, it is somewhat unclear why Peirce insisted on naming his logical doctrine after a Kantian term.

I will argue that Kant clearly prefigured Peirce's pragmatism in his claim that there is a connection between *theoretical judgments* and *practical imperatives* (or principles of conduct). Kant held that all theoretical judgments are expressible as—indeed identical in content with—practical imperatives. He may be the first to have made this claim. Peirce's maxim of pragmatism turns this theoretical judgment into a practical maxim of its own right, exhorting us to trace the “meaning” of words and thoughts by considering their impact on self-controlled conduct. Accordingly, it turns out that the name *pragmatic maxim*—often used interchangeably with the *maxim of pragmatism* in the literature on Peirce and pragmatism—is something of a misnomer: any maxim of conduct which is based on a theoretical judgment is, following this terminology, a pragmatic maxim. However,

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as I will then show in some detail, using Kant's own terminology, such maxims should rather be called *technical*.

I will next turn to the question of whether the reverse is the case, in Kant's or Peirce's opinion: whether there are practical imperatives that are not *pragmatic* in this sense. Are there practical imperatives which are not "translatable" into a theoretical judgment? Kant's view on this score appears as clear as day: he argues that *moral laws* are just such judgments. However, I will go on to propose—from an admittedly unorthodox perspective—that things may not be quite as simple. Namely, Kant argues that belief in the three postulates of practical reason is prerequisite for true moral conduct, or conduct in accordance with the moral law. This contention has often puzzled Kant scholars: can't we follow the moral law without, say, belief in God and the afterlife? Kant's view, however, would be readily explained if the three postulates combined would be the expression of the moral law in *theoretical* key.

Peirce does not maintain that there are imperatives which are not equivalent to some theoretical judgment. However, I will suggest—albeit briefly—that there is a further type of judgment which falls outside of the scope of the "pragmatic": *aesthetic judgments*. Unlike theoretical and pragmatic judgments, aesthetic judgments do not recommend means to be taken to (actual or assumed) ends. Rather, these judgments can be taken to suggest new purposes without reference to any already existing purposes. While the details of this view are beyond the scope of this paper, Peirce's debts to Kant here are deeper than it initially appears and merit further study.

## 2. Peirce's pragmatism

As is familiar, Peirce never referred to his logical doctrine by the name of pragmatism in print until James used that term in his 1898 address which initiated the pragmatist tradition. However, according to both Peirce and James, the term itself is from Peirce. In its early 1878 formulation, Peirce's pragmatism is presented as a method and a maxim for the clarification of the meaning of terms and sentences, and further as a device to detect claims devoid of meaning. Any meaningful sentence, if believed by a speaker, would result in action under some conceivable circumstances. If the conceivable conduct resulting from the acceptance of two sentences in no way differs, their meaning is the same. In order to clarify the mean-

ings of words and sentences, we are to consider their conceivable effects in conduct.

The maxim of pragmatism was later incorporated in Peirce's broader semiotic account of the operation and interpretation of signs. A sign is not necessarily an idea or thought, but anything that could elicit an interpretant—another thought, an action, or a feeling—that interprets the sign as a sign of its object. Pragmatism pertains to *logical* interpretants, which are mostly *thoughts* (as opposed to feelings and actions) interpreting a sign. However, as long as further interpretants of logical interpretants are themselves thoughts (or words, such as in a translation), there is no obvious way of telling whether two thoughts indeed mean the same. For this reason, Peirce suggested that we must ultimately step outside of thinking and language, and anchor meaning in conduct. In Peirce's view, the *ultimate* logical interpretants are (not thoughts but) habits of action, and the "meaning" of signs which admit to logical interpretants can be clarified by considering the habits their acceptance would entail. Accordingly, pragmatism can be formulated—as Peirce sometimes does—as an account of the connection of theoretical and practical judgments, the principle that the meaning of a *theoretical* judgment is a *practical maxim*:

Pragmatism is the principle that every theoretical judgment expressible in a sentence in the indicative mood is a confused form of thought whose only meaning, if it has any, lies in its tendency to enforce a corresponding practical maxim expressible as a conditional sentence having its apodosis in the imperative mood. CP 5.18, 1903

This passage deserves a couple of qualifications. Firstly, by "meaning" Peirce is here referring to the ultimate logical interpretant, not to everything that could be counted as the meaning or content of a theoretical judgment. (His intention is not to deny that, say, the *meaning* of the German sentence "Schnee ist weiss" is "snow is white" in English.) Secondly, Peirce's wording should not be understood to imply that the meaning of a theoretical judgment is a practical maxim which is expressible in a *single* sentence. A single theoretical judgment may enforce innumerable practical imperatives depending on the circumstances and aims at hand. The meaning of a theoretical judgment is, rather, a set of such practical imperatives. As we will soon see, Peirce considered the relevant imperatives to be those of purposeful conduct, such conduct that (by definition) has an aim.

A consequential shift in Peirce's pragmatism concerns the connection between conduct and sensation. In his early 1878 view, pragmatism en-

tailed the “proto-positivist” idea that all differences in conduct are (or are grounded in) differing expectations of future sensations. Habits, Peirce argued in “How to Make Our Ideas Clear”, make us act based on stimuli which are “derived from perception”, and conversely the purpose of that action is to “produce some sensible result” (Peirce 1992, 131). Thus “our action has exclusive reference to what affects the senses, our habit has the same bearing as our action, our belief the same as our habit, our conception the same as our belief; [...]” (ibid.). Here, habits and ensuing action are understood as both occasioned by sensations and as directed at sensible results. However, in many of Peirce’s later formulations of pragmatism, this connection between conduct and sensation is far less rigid. In many—but not all—of his later writings, Peirce emphasises that the practical consequences that the maxim of pragmatism exhorts us to trace are the effects on deliberate *conduct* and do not concern “sensible effects”. Indeed, Peirce at points attempts to exclude such effects from among the practical consequences under consideration:

The method prescribed in the maxim is to trace out in the imagination the conceivable practical consequences,—that is, the consequences for deliberate, self-controlled conduct,—of the affirmation or denial of the concept; and the assertion of the maxim is that herein lies the whole of the purport of the word, the *entire* concept. The sedulous exclusion from this statement of all reference to sensation is specially to be remarked.

CP 8.191 , c. 1904

Admittedly, Peirce’s “sedulousness” is not quite consistent. For example, in a passage written around the same time, he describes pragmatism as the logical doctrine which maintains that the meaning of any thought or word “consists in what it can contribute to an expectation about future experience, and nothing more” (MS 462:42, 1903). Although the reference here is to experience and not (more narrowly) to sensation, it seems Peirce was wavering somewhat on the nature of the connection of habits and expectations concerning experience. In any case, the *primary* “practical consequences” which Peirce’s maxim urges us to trace—at least in its mature version—are consequences in deliberate conduct.

### 3. Kant's pragmatism

Peirce states that the word *pragmatism* is derived from Kant’s use of the term *pragmatisch*. Commenting on William James’s proposal to call his

view “practicalism”, Peirce explicates the grounds for his preference for “pragmatism”:

[...] for one who had learned philosophy out of Kant [...], *praktisch* and *pragmatisch* were as far apart as the two poles, the former belonging in a region of thought where no mind of the experimentalist type can ever make sure of solid ground under his feet, the latter expressing relation to some definite human purpose. CP 5.412

Peirce’s claim is that the “pragmatic”, in Kant, remains within the scope of experimental inquiry, whereas the “practical” exceeds that sphere. Commenting on this passage, Marcus Willaschek (2015) suggests that Peirce overstates his case. Willaschek proposes that Kant’s pragmatic and practical laws are to be understood as two kinds of practical imperatives, and are not quite as far apart as Peirce’s language suggests. However, here Peirce appears to be alluding to a passage in the Canon of the *Critique of Pure Reason* which is, to be fair, a good bit more complicated. It is worth quoting in full:

Everything is practical that is possible through freedom. But if the conditions for the exercise of our free choice are empirical, then in that case reason can have none but a regulative use, and can only serve to produce the unity of empirical laws, as, e. g., in the doctrine of prudence the unification of all ends that are given to us by our inclinations into the single end of **happiness** and the harmony of the means for attaining that end constitute the entire business of reason, which can therefore provide none but **pragmatic** laws of free conduct for reaching the ends recommended to us by the senses, and therefore can provide no pure laws that are determined completely *a priori*. Pure practical laws, on the contrary, whose end is given by reason completely *a priori*, and which do not command under empirical conditions but absolutely, would be products of pure reason. Of this sort, however, are the moral laws; thus these alone belong to the practical use of reason and permit a canon. Kant 1998, A 800/B 828<sup>2</sup>

Referring to this passage, Willaschek argues that both *pure* practical laws and pragmatic imperatives appear to belong under the genus of “practical” imperatives: as Kant maintains, they are both laws of free choice (*Willkühr*). However, it should be noted that Kant seems to be wavering between two notions of the practical. At the beginning of the passage, “practical” appears to refer to any imperative (maxim or law of conduct); by its end, Kant is limiting the issue of *practical reason* to its pure, *a priori*

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<sup>2</sup> Citations of Kant’s works refer to the Akademie edition page numbers.

products. In addition, the “unity of empirical laws”—which must be an example of the regulative use of *theoretical* reason—is listed as the very basis of reason’s pragmatic issue. If pragmatic imperatives include the products of *theoretical* reason, the idea suggests itself that, for Kant, practical *reason* is strictly speaking limited to the issuing of moral laws.

Indeed, this turns out to be Kant’s intent. In the passage just quoted, Kant distinguishes between pragmatic and pure practical laws (of conduct). However, in the second *Critique*, Kant explicates what appears to be the same distinction as that between *maxims* and *laws* (Kant 2002a, 21–2). Kant’s usage of the term *law* is here limited to the issue of practical reason, the moral law which operates with “objective necessity” due to its *a priori* ground. Other practical principles or imperatives are called *maxims*, and they are based on *empirical* cognition. The issue is not merely terminological. Kant’s distinction between theoretical judgements and practical imperatives does not fall neatly in line with his distinction of the two aspects of reason as their respective products. That is, there are practical imperatives which are not the products of practical reason. They belong, rather, to the theoretical use of reason (or to the domain of understanding). This fact is perhaps most explicit in the First Introduction to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, where Kant writes:

[...] while practical propositions certainly differ from theoretical ones, which contain the possibility of things and their determination, in the way in which they are presented, they do not on that account differ in their content, except only those which consider freedom under laws. All the rest are nothing more than the theory of that which belongs to the nature of things, only applied to the way in which they can be generated by us in accordance with a principle, i. e., their possibility is represented through a voluntary action [...].

Kant 2000, 196

Many things could be said about this passage; however, at least this much is clear: an exhaustive connection between theoretical and practical propositions is precisely Kant’s intent. With the exception of moral propositions (or practical *laws*), Kant maintains that the difference between practical and theoretical propositions is not one of content but of presentation. The properly *practical* maxims are moral laws, and *practical* philosophy pertains to the *a priori* moral law. In turn, *pragmatic* use of reason is *theoretical* reason under a different guise.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> It is unclear if Peirce ever studied Kant’s third *Critique*. In addition, the First Introduction—Kant’s lengthy draft introduction to the third *Critique*—was printed in edi-



This is where pragmatism's debt to Kant is at its most evident. Kant's notion of the connection between theoretical judgments and practical imperatives is precisely the contention which drives pragmatism, further developed by Peirce into a principled test of the meaning (and meaningfulness) of theoretical judgments. Here pragmatism is perfectly Kantian in its central claim. To wit, Peirce took Kant's contention concerning the connection between theoretical and practical judgments and turned *that* theoretical judgment into a *pragmatic* maxim of logic. It follows that the label "the pragmatic maxim" often used of Peirce's maxim of pragmatism is somewhat misleading. Peirce's maxim is a pragmatic one—but one among many. Or this is how it would be, were it not for one more terminological twist.

#### 4. Practical and technical

In the Canon of the first *Critique*, Kant had distinguished—in a rather complicated fashion—between pure practical imperatives (later called moral laws), which are based on practical reason, and pragmatic maxims, which were described as founded on the empirical "doctrine of prudence". But it turns out that these are not the only two main types of imperatives. In the *Groundwork*, Kant further distinguishes between *technical* and *pragmatic* imperatives (Kant 2002 b, 414–7). While technical imperatives concern the attainment of this or that possible end, pragmatic imperatives assume the end of happiness. The "doctrine of prudence" referred to in the first *Critique* is here given a more precise statement as the doctrine of the attainment of happiness. Again, the relevant passage deserves quoting at some length:

[imperatives] are either *rules* of skill, or *counsels* of prudence or *commands* (laws) of morality. For only law carries with it the concept of an *unconditional* and objective, hence universally valid *necessity*, and

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tions of that volume only in the early 1900s; however, almost the same is said in Kant's briefer introduction, which was included in the set of Kant's collected works which Peirce purchased in the 1860s. For example: "All technically practical rules (i. e., those of art and skill in general, as well as those of prudence, as a skill in influencing human beings and their will), so far as their principles rest on concepts, must be counted only as corollaries of theoretical philosophy" (2000, 172). In case Peirce wasn't familiar with these passages, he appears to have picked up this theme in Kant from the first *Critique* which, as we know, he studied extensively. In addition to the first *Critique*, we know that Peirce had studied Kant's *Prolegomena*. However, in 1865, he had purchased a major edition of Kant's works, the *Sämmtliche Werke*, edited by Rosenkranz and Schubert (Leipzig, Leopold Voss 1838–42), 12 vols. in 13. I'm indebted to Cornelis de Waal for this information.

commands are laws that must be obeyed, i. e., followed even against inclination. The *giving of counsel* contains necessity, to be sure, but can be valid merely under a subjective, pleasing condition, whether this or that human being counts this or that toward his happiness; the categorical imperative, by contrast, is not limited by any condition, and as absolutely, though practically necessary, can be called quite authentically a command. One could also call the first imperative *technical* (belonging to art), the second *pragmatic* (to welfare), the third *moral* (belonging to free conduct in general, i. e., to morals).

Kant 2002 b, 416–7

The distinction between technical and pragmatic imperatives is founded on Kant's contention that happiness is a subjectively necessary end, which can thus be presumed to be an actual goal of any agent. Technical imperatives, in turn, concern the attainment of some contingent end, presumed by or explicated in the imperative.

Kant further argues that technical imperatives are analytic by invoking his doctrine which is often called the principle of hypothetical imperatives: "whoever wills the end, also wills (necessarily in accord with reason) the sole means to it in his control" (Kant 2002 b, 417–8). Pragmatic imperatives or rules of prudence would also be analytic, "and entirely coincide with" technical imperatives, "if only it were so easy to provide a determinate concept of happiness" (ibid., 417). Happiness, however, remains hopelessly indeterminable: one "can never say, determinately and in a way that is harmonious with himself, what he really wishes and wills" (ibid., 418). As is evident, Kant here connects happiness with the satisfaction of one's wishes and desires. Indeed, happiness, in his view, admits of a simple definition: it is "the state of a rational being in the world for whom in the whole of his existence *everything proceeds according to his wish and will*; [...]" (Kant 2002 a, 124).

These distinctions point towards a crucial difference between Kant's pragmatic imperatives and the kind of practical maxims which Peirce proposes we use to elucidate the meaning of theoretical judgments. Kant's pragmatic imperatives do not express a relation to a *definite* human purpose, as the purpose of happiness is deemed hopelessly indeterminable. By contrast, as we saw, the practical maxims Peirce has in mind must have a "relation to some definite human purpose". Peirce's pragmatism is concerned with *technical* (rather than pragmatic) imperatives, in Kant's sense.

Of course, one might well doubt whether Kant's notion of pragmatic imperative, as opposed to a technical one, merits its own label. For one

thing, it is a nice question to ask whether we have any examples of pragmatic imperatives: if happiness cannot be determined, are there any general rules of “prudence” to be given? Kant’s answer could be sought from lectures on *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*. While even these lectures contain little by way of simple precepts for happiness, they supply considerations of various aspects of human nature and their implications within that pursuit. Indeed, Kant appears to devote these lectures to broad lessons in life to his young students; perhaps this merits the “pragmatic” label.

But, even more pressingly, Kant’s contention that the pursuit of happiness is a “natural necessity” is dubious. It apparently rests on a fallacy which Peirce often sets out to refute. Namely, even if our desires supply us with our various ends of action, it does not follow that we further desire the satisfaction of all our desires.<sup>4</sup> Such a “natural necessity” would require a *further* desire to gratify all one’s desires—something that we cannot quite impute on all agents. Indeed, Peirce argues that happiness, understood as some form of (maximal) gratification of one’s desires, cannot be consistently adopted as one’s ultimate purpose at all (cf. Peirce 1998, 200–2). Happiness (understood as an optimal satisfaction of desires) is not only not a (subjectively) necessary end of deliberate action—in Peirce’s view, it is not even a possible end. From Peirce’s perspective, then, there is no meaningful category of *pragmatic* imperatives, in Kant’s sense. Perhaps this helps to explain why Peirce was nevertheless content with Kant’s term, although—to be consistent with Kant’s distinctions—pragmatism could have been labelled “technicalism”.

## 5. The purely practical

Kant’s contention, taken up by Peirce, is that every theoretical judgment is, by way of content, equivalent to a practical maxim, given a purpose of conduct. But does the opposite hold? Can any practical imperative be viewed as an expression of some theoretical judgment? In Kant’s case, the answer seems clear, at least at first blush. There is at least one practical imperative, namely the moral law, which does not entail any theoretical statement. This, we might think, is what makes the moral law a *purely* practical imperative: it is not “translatable” into theoretical judgments. Perhaps in-

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<sup>4</sup> For example: “[I]t is so far from being true that every desire necessarily desires its own gratification, that, on the contrary, it is impossible that a desire should desire its own gratification” (1998, 245).

stances of the moral law are expressible as practical propositions which are not imperatives in the sense that they are not in imperative form. For example, “it’s wrong to lie” is in indicative form. However, this expression will inevitably include normative vocabulary which cannot further be translated (or reduced) into non-normative terms. This is, of course, the usual distinction between the descriptive and the normative, or “is” and “ought”.

There is, however, an interesting possibility in the offing. Kant famously maintained that following the categorical imperative necessarily presupposes belief in the three theoretical-seeming claims which Kant calls the postulates of practical reason, the existence of God, afterlife, and the greatest good, or *summum bonum* (e.g., Kant A 810–1/B 838–9). This contention has puzzled Kant’s commentators. Is it really so that one cannot act morally without believing in God, for example? But from the pragmatist point of view, this necessity would be readily explained if we were to interpret the three postulates as the *theoretical* expressions of the moral law. Conversely, taken together, the three postulates of practical reason would find a practical expression in the moral law. Even in this reconstruction, we would be able to account for the reasons why, in Kant’s view, the moral law remains *purely* practical. Kant emphatically denies that the postulates of practical reason could receive empirical support: they belong to the realm which transcends the limits of understanding. In this manner, the moral law would remain pure in that its theoretical expressions cannot be defended—either empirically or *a priori*—while the law itself is *a priori*.<sup>5</sup>

Obviously, this is an unorthodox suggestion, and wasn’t Kant’s own position. Instead, even in the First Introduction, which otherwise includes his perhaps most explicit pragmatist views, Kant attempts to show how the connection between the moral law and the postulates of practical reason is not akin to the connection exhibited by a pragmatic (or technical) maxim and a theoretical judgment. He maintains that there are practical judgments “which directly exhibit the determination of an action as necessary merely through the representation of its form” (Kant 2000, 199). These are judgments of *moral law*. Kant immediately continues, however,

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<sup>5</sup> A further complication is brought about by the fact that the moral law is not the only binding law of reason, for Kant. At least the so-called principle of hypothetical imperatives, already quoted above, seems to belong to the same level of generality. This principle is, moreover, stated by Kant by way of a theoretical judgment. Indeed, it would sound strange to put this principle by way of an imperative.

that while these judgments “ground the concept of an object of the will (the highest good) on these very principles, still this belongs only indirectly, as a consequence, to the practical precept (which is henceforth called moral)” (ibid.). Kant’s view appears to be that moral conduct is conduct in accordance with the moral law, and the purpose of conduct in accordance with the moral law has the *summum bonum* as its purpose. Unlike with the other imperatives, this purpose is due to the determination of the will in accordance with the law; it is not due to an antecedently accepted end. However, this quite obviously returns us back to the initial puzzlement. If willing or action in accordance with the moral law does not require a purpose—but, perhaps, implicates the highest good *as if* it were its purpose—why would belief in the highest good, and the other moral postulates, be prerequisite to action in accordance with that law? It may be that Kant’s account would benefit from the pragmatist reinterpretation just provided.

What of Peirce? Are there any practical imperatives which are *not* equivalent in content with some theoretical judgment? Peirce’s critical stance towards Kant’s (purely) practical imperatives suggests that he would not be willing to admit imperatives other than the “pragmatic” (in Peirce’s sense). As we saw, however, his most explicit criticism of the purely practical was explicitly motivated by “experimentalism”, that is, the notion that every imperative should be subjected to an empirical inquiry and revision, and, as already pointed out, Peirce’s later expressions of the maxim of pragmatism, the connection between practical consequences in conduct and anticipation of future sensations, is loosened, even severed. This might be taken to imply that there might be meaningful judgments which cannot be subjected to empirical revision. But this, I think, would be a mistake. Peirce seems to allow for meaningful judgments which do not anticipate certain sensations, even with various other assumptions in place; at the very least, he does not deny this possibility. But this does not imply that any meaningful claim need not be subjected to revision in light of experience, broadly understood. At the very least, there are no “pure practical” judgments in Kant’s sense of an *a priori* moral law. However, as I will now turn to argue, there is a type of judgment that stands apart from the pragmatic and the theoretical: aesthetic judgment.

## 6. Pragmatism and aesthetic judgments

In the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant introduces a third type of judgment in addition to theoretical judgments and practical imperatives: aesthetic judgments (Kant 2000, 205–10).<sup>6</sup> Aesthetic judgments are distinguished from theoretical judgments in that they do not involve the subsumption of the object under a concept which would pertain to its empirical features. In this sense, for example, beauty is not a theoretical concept. While Kant does not stop to argue for this view at length, one way of understanding his position is to see his pragmatism at work. Kant argues that aesthetic judgments are *disinterested*: they are not based on the object appearing agreeable or good, in the sense that it would be suited to serve the agent's desires or purposes. An aesthetic judgment, then, does not suggest a practical imperative, and thus cannot be equivalent to a theoretical judgment. On the contrary, the objects of aesthetic judgments appear purposive without serving some purpose on part of the judging agent.

But aesthetic judgments are not (pure) practical judgments either. As opposed to moral judgments, such judgments do not involve or suggest practical precepts. In judging a flower to be beautiful, we do not judge it to be good in the moral sense. Moreover, in Kant's view, aesthetic judgments are not objectively necessary. Rather, these judgments are funded by a feeling that is elicited in the judging agent. Nevertheless, Kant argues that aesthetic judgments are subjectively universal: they aspire to be valid for all judging agents (Kant 2000, 213–8). In making an aesthetic judgment, we assume that others ought to make the same judgment. Kant grounds this demand for universal agreement, and how it can be met, in the purposiveness exhibited by the object of the aesthetic judgment. This purposiveness Kant attributes to the interplay between imagination and understanding, an interplay that we can expect to occur in any agent capable of judging in the first place. Thus an aesthetic judgment is neither theoretical (equivalent to technical/pragmatic) nor purely practical (or moral).

While it is not clear whether Kant's views here may have influenced Peirce, it is aesthetics and aesthetic judgment that, in Peirce's late philosophy, begins to occupy an increasingly central role. Indeed, as I will now argue, it appears that precisely aesthetic judgments are the only "non-pragmatic" judgments, from Peirce's point of view. Moreover, it seems

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<sup>6</sup> Here I will be concerned with aesthetic judgments in a narrow sense, excluding what Kant calls judgments of the agreeable.

clear that Peirce's view has at least some debts to Kant: the role that aesthetic judgments play is, as we will see, intimately connected with the notion of purpose.

During the first years of the 1900s, Peirce took an interest in issues of normativity, suggesting a set of normative sciences—esthetics, ethics and logic—as the part of philosophy occupied by inquiry into questions of right and wrong. Logic, Peirce's central interest, was rendered as the science of the rules of inference which are revised against a purpose: it “not only lays down rules which ought to be, but need not be followed; but it is the analysis of the conditions of attainment of something of which purpose is an essential ingredient” (CP 1.575). Pragmatism, as a maxim of logic, was framed as a device within this pursuit. As inference is just a form of deliberate action, logic needs backing from a broader account of the rules we may adopt in conduct. This is the main question of the normative science of ethics. And as that inquiry, in turn, requires a view of the ultimate ideals or purposes of conduct, normative science rests on (what Peirce calls) *esthetics*: the study of what is admirable in itself.

It is within these discussions of normative science that Peirce ultimately appropriates some features of Kant's account of aesthetic judgments into his view of the role of esthetics in normative inquiry. Two such features are especially salient. Firstly, as in Kant's view, Peirce takes aesthetic judgments to be grounded in feelings. Peirce enlists feelings (as opposed to observations) as the basis for the development of purposes of deliberate conduct (Peirce 1998, 412; cf. Rydenfelt 2017). Secondly, Peirce's view of aesthetic judgments involves a version of Kant's “purposiveness without a purpose”. Aesthetic judgments do not recommend courses of action based on more or less definite ends deliberately adopted. Such judgments do not depend on a pre-existing purpose, actual, assumed or imaginary. Rather, aesthetic judgments, in Peirce's view, suggest novel purposes, whatever the initial interests of the judging agent: they pertain to what is admirable without hindsight to any aims or ends we might have (e. g., Peirce 1998, 200–2). It is aesthetic judgments, then, that turn out to play the role of “non-pragmatic” judgments.

This fact helps us explain one of the most curious features of Peirce's view of the three normative sciences. In a famous passage from 1906, Peirce suggested that ethics “should be the theory of the conformity of action to an ideal” (Peirce 1998, 377). That is, ethics was not to be understood as the science of the ideal(s) of conduct—the role which Peirce went on to reserve to *esthetics*. Instead, Peirce suggested renaming ethics “an-

tethics” or “practics”, as “ethics” would suggest that the science “involves more than the theory of such conformity; namely, it involves the theory of the ideal itself” (ibid.). Practics, to be clear, should not be understood as the inquiry of how to best attain our ideals. Rather, ethics (as practics) is the science of the consideration and *review* of conduct, both its means and its ends, against our ideals. Ethical judgments, then, are already *pragmatic*: they suggest revisions of our patterns of conduct in light of pre-existing purposes.<sup>7</sup> Here they diverge from aesthetic judgments, which do not presuppose pre-existing purposes.<sup>8</sup>

Peirce’s view on aesthetic judgment, then, retains at least important traces of Kant’s position. There are, of course, sundry differences. Most centrally, unlike Kant, Peirce does not argue that aesthetic judgments and the (apparent) purposiveness of objects aesthetically judged depend on the interplay of our faculties of cognition—faculties which Kant thinks we may assume any agent to possess. However, in arguing that esthetics is a normative *science*, Peirce clearly maintains that aesthetic judgments can have a claim to universal (or intersubjective) validity. The grounds of such validity, then, must be (broadly speaking) *empirical*. Esthetics, for Peirce, is an empirical science of the revision and criticism of our habits of feeling (cf. Peirce 1998, 377–8). Feelings—understood as emotional interpretants—can be more or less appropriate responses to various signs with respect to different goals, including cognitive purposes (cf. Rydenfelt 2015).<sup>9</sup>

## 7. Conclusion

Peirce acknowledges that he learned philosophy from Kant; however, pragmatism’s debts to Kant may run somewhat deeper than commonly understood. In Kant’s view, with the exception of the moral law, practical precepts and theoretical judgments do not differ in content but in expression. This very contention motivates Peirce’s pragmatism. Indeed, I have

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<sup>7</sup> Even here, however, the boundary between the two sciences is not rigid. Ethical inquiry may lead to aesthetic judgments, suggesting new purposes to be adopted.

<sup>8</sup> There’s a nice question which cannot be addressed here. Namely, aesthetic judgments—I am arguing—do not presuppose purposes in the sense that they do not offer practical precepts as means to some pre-existing, actual or imaginary ends. But the *formation* of such judgments—spontaneous as it may be—does imply some purpose; in Peirce’s semiotic view, any formation of interpretants (including judgments) does. What is this purpose? The answer, I suppose, will be complicated.

<sup>9</sup> I have argued for this point at some length, drawing from Peirce’s account of emotional interpretants, especially as developed by T. L. Short (2015) (Rydenfelt 2015).



argued that Peirce turns this theoretical judgment (concerning the connection between theoretical judgments and practical precepts) into a practical precept by way of his maxim of pragmatism. The differences between Kant's and Peirce's views are, however, notable. Kant distinguishes between *pragmatic* and *technical* imperatives, with the former pertaining to the indeterminate but subjectively necessary end of happiness, the latter to some antecedently presupposed, contingent purpose. Peirce's *pragmatic* maxims thus coincide with Kant's *technical* imperatives; in general, Peirce would be highly critical of Kant's view that happiness is a subjectively necessary end.

In addition to technical and pragmatic imperatives, Kant distinguishes the *a priori* moral law, which he appears to think has no equivalent theoretical judgment. But while this is by no means an orthodox Kantian view, I've argued that the *postulates of practical reason* could be viewed as the *theoretical* expressions of that law. Although Peirce does not propose that there are such "purely practical" judgments, a third type of judgment, aesthetic judgment, appears to play the role of a non-pragmatic judgment in his late philosophy. Aesthetic judgments are neither theoretical nor pragmatic: they do not suggest a course of action to be taken, given an antecedent purpose. Rather, if anything, aesthetic judgments suggest new purposes to be adopted. Although the extent of Peirce's study of Kant's third *Critique* is unclear, here especially Peirce appears to retain the key Kantian idea of aesthetic judgments indicating a "purposiveness without a purpose". Both maintain that aesthetic judgments can aspire to intersubjective validity. However, while in Kant's view such validity crucially depends on an interplay of our shared faculties, Peirce ascribes such intersubjectivity to our shared experience, ultimately due to the nature of the aesthetically judged objects themselves. These differences and commonalities would merit further investigation which would shed light especially on Peirce's account of aesthetic judgments and their role in (normative) inquiry.

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# Anti-Kantianism as a Necessary Characteristic of Pragmatism

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## 1. Introduction

Pragmatists declared their anti-Cartesianism at the first appearance of the movement, in Peirce's series on cognition written for the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* (1867–8). As is well known, the brilliant young scientist characterized Cartesian doubt as a “paper doubt”, by opposing it to scientists' true “living doubt” (Peirce 1998 [1868], 115).<sup>1</sup> Some readers have not understood the powerful novelty that his opposition to Cartesianism implies. According to Peirce, research does not proceed from skeptical, “paper” doubt. For Peirce, doubt is possible because of a previous certainty, a position which is similar to the one held by Augustine (Augustine 1970). Research moves from one certainty to another; the abandonment of an initial certainty is only reasonable in the presence of a real and surprising phenomenon that alters one of the pillars on which it stands. Peirce never abandoned this position, even as he corrected the psychologism of his first approach—which paired certainty with satisfaction—in a more realistic direction; he placed this process of correction into a logical pattern by inserting the “surprising phenomenon” as an internal step within the logic of abduction (hypothesis). In these foundational writings of pragmatism, Peirce assigned both intuitionism and introspectivism to the enemies list, together with “paper doubt”. In opposition to Descar-

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<sup>1</sup> For quotations to Peirce in this paper, I include the year of the quotation in brackets. This is necessary in order to stress the chronology of Peirce's statements, which will reveal his progressive abandonment of Kant's philosophy.

tes, Peirce refused any form of intellectualism, and the entire pragmatist movement has followed his lead in this regard.

However, this argument against Descartes is still insufficient to define pragmatism as a movement. Empiricists, existentialists, and hermeneuticians were also anti-Cartesians. Pragmatism clarifies the attack on Descartes by means of a second attack on Kant. This second attack has always been overlooked, primarily because of Peirce's initial reverence for the German thinker. In fact, the founder of pragmatism referred to the *Critique of Pure Reason* as the "tables brought down from Sinai" (CP 4.2 [1898]). He gave his doctrine a name borrowed from Kant (CP 5.412 [1905]), insisting that the Kantian problem of the unity of the manifold was the central issue of epistemology (Peirce 1992 [1867], 1).

However, Peirce's unconditional appreciation of Kant faded away over time. This change brought out some critical remarks about issues that had always nagged Peirce. As early as 1868, he said that the real philosophical question was not, "How are synthetical judgments a priori possible?" but suggested that "before asking that question he [Kant] ought to have asked the more general one, 'How are any synthetical judgments at all possible?'" (CP 2.690 [1869]). Jean-Marie Chevalier (2013) showed that, from the start, Peirce understood Kant in a peculiar way that Chevalier calls "Leibnizian". In this paper, I attempt to generally summarize the relationship between the ideas of Peirce and Kant as clearly and faithfully as possible. I will set aside all the harsh statements Peirce made in the second part of his life charging Kant with superficial or hasty logic. These statements should be avoided because most of them are contained in unpublished manuscripts, raising questions about whether it was Peirce's intention to express himself in that way. They are useful as background, however, for pointing us in a conceptual direction, a direction followed by European and American classical pragmatists. I describe this anti-Kantian track herein by recapitulating Peirce's remarks on Kant (in section 2) and casting a quick glance at the views of the philosopher expressed by other classical pragmatists (section 3) so that we can understand why anti-Kantianism is a necessary characteristic of pragmatism.

## 2. Peirce's march toward anti-Kantianism

We mentioned Peirce's early allegiance to the Kantian flock. Even if his philosophy was characterized by an original twist on Kant's categories and an idealist turn of the phenomenon-noumenon distinction, Peirce did

not criticize Kant explicitly in his series of articles in the 1860s. A hidden critique is implicit in his mention of the a priori method for fixing beliefs in *Illustrations of the Logic of Science* published during the years 1878–9. In this work, Peirce describes the a priori method as one of three ineffective methods of inquiry, together with tenacity and authority. A fourth, effective method is the realist method of science and the connected social view of logic.

### 2.1 Against the “Thing in Itself”

Starting from 1884, Peirce emphasized his criticisms of Kant more and more, particularly in light of the deepening of his idea of “continuity”, the true keystone of his philosophy. His mind evolved with respect to this topic, gradually passing from his original Kantian version of the idea into a Cantorian one. Thanks to Peirce’s discovery of Georg Cantor’s theorem and paradox (arrived at independently of the German mathematician), he came to prefer a unique view that places real continuity beyond any logical or metrical calculation.<sup>2</sup>

Peirce’s concept of continuity, and Kant’s alleged misconception of it, allowed Peirce to understand why in Kant’s thought there is always a “gap” between knowledge and the reality to be known, between the “phenomenon” and the “thing-in-itself”. This gap had troubled him since his early philosophical studies (Peirce 1981, 37–44). During the last twenty years of his life, Peirce considered the permanence of this schism to be the epiphenomenon of an entire intellectual attitude, that is, nominalism, understood here in a very different way from a mere rejection of the existence of universals. One can believe that universals are real, yet still be a nominalist if he/she thinks that universals are hopelessly beyond the inferential capacities of humankind. Nominalism affirms an unbridgeable gap or discontinuity between reality and reason. In this view, realism maintains that reason belongs to reality and in the long run, after inquiry, it would be able to know reality. This is a decisive break with Kant’s transcendentalism. Peirce synthetizes it using the terms “pragmaticism” and “critical common-sensism” in the following way:

The present writer was a pure Kantist until he was forced by successive steps into Pragmaticism. The Kantist has only to abjure from the bottom of his heart the proposition that a thing-in-itself can, however indirectly, be conceived; and then correct the details of Kant’s

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<sup>2</sup> See Zalamea 2012, Moore 2007a and 2007b, Havenel 2008, and Maddalena 2009, 193–224.

doctrine, and he will find himself to have become a critical common sensist. Peirce 1998 [1905], 353–4

The irony of the quote lies in the “only”. To abjure from the bottom of one’s heart the “thing-in-itself” is to abjure the entire distinction between phenomenon and noumenon, which is the kernel of Kant’s Copernican revolution. When we abandon the “thing-in-itself”, we are left with either a profound idealism or a profound realism. In fact, Peirce thought that there was no difference at all between those two possibilities (Lane 2018)—he called his doctrine “real-idealism” and he boasted: “My philosophy resuscitates Hegel, though in a strange costume” (CP 1.42 [1892]).

This first theoretical point underlines another characteristic of Peirce’s thought and the treatment of it in the scholarship. It is possible to read the first part of Peirce’s production as reflecting an idealist view that would be corrected in the second half of his life by a sort of transcendental realism.<sup>3</sup> However, the manuscripts seem to indicate a different path. If this reading reflected the actual situation, it is difficult to conceive of Peirce’s philosophy as a unity. In fact, Tom Short (2007) split Peirce’s work into two halves: the idealist and the (transcendental?) realist. There is, however, no hint of this split in Peirce’s texts, even though they sometimes describe corrections to previously held views. Of course, one can say that Peirce’s ideas changed without his noticing it; however, setting aside the issue of Peirce’s self-knowledge, his texts show something else. As far as Kant is concerned, the texts go from an explicit appreciation to increasingly stronger critiques. Moreover, Peirce considered his early papers to be suffused with a kind of realism, even the texts prepared for the Metaphysical Club in the early 1870s. Besides, he considered his later production to accord more with Hegel’s monism than with Kant’s transcendentalism. About the latter, he thought that its logical bases were weak (CP 2.31 [1902]) and that the crucial distinction between synthetic and analytic judgments was “so utterly confused that is difficult or impossible to do anything with it” (Peirce 1998 [1903], 218). In the last part of his life, Peirce appreciated only Kant’s schematism (CP 5.531 [ca. 1905]) because, in his view, it is a tool for creating a real synthesis that is respectful of common sense. However, he also noticed that “[Kant’s] doctrine of the schemata can only have been an afterthought, an addition to his system after it was substantially complete. For if schemata had been considered early enough, they would have overgrown his whole work” (CP 1.35 [ca. 1890]).

<sup>3</sup> On this line of thought, with different nuances, see for example Brandom 2011, Gava & Stern 2016, Gava 2014, Misak 2016, and Pihlström 2010.

This interpretative option accepts that there is a profound unity among the different parts of Peirce's production. His initial take on Kant had a "subjective idealist" leaning, but it already contained a phenomenological basis for semiotics. In the following years, on the one hand, he deepened both his fascination with idealism and a realist basis for semiotics, bestowing the precision with which he conducted his studies on continuity to the somehow vague idea of the dialectical development of the Spirit present in Hegel's writings. On the other, by precisely delineating the "outward clash" between secondness and the role of the dynamic object, the object that is not yet a sign, he strengthened the importance of the first two phenomenological categories. Peirce did not consider the two characteristics of continuity and the plurality of phenomenological and semiotic categories as being opposed to one another, as De Tienne's studies on Peirce's phenomenology in both his early and late writings confirmed (De Tienne 2004).<sup>4</sup>

Summarizing, we can say that the reading of Peirce that has him passing from an early, special kind of subjective idealism to a late, special kind of objective idealism corresponds most closely to the texts. As evidence, one can read MS 642 written in November 1909, in which Peirce distinguishes reality from subjective perception, genuineness, and exteriority. He takes the example of a Jacqueminot rose, possibly something that he could find in his garden in Milford, Pennsylvania. Peirce considers the attribute of the rose's redness. First, he introduces the idea that the color would not be less real if we made a mistake in identifying it. If we maintained that it was yellow, the red color would not be less real. Second, if we then say that the color is only relative to our retina, we would not admit anything but that there is a real object, which is the red rose. These two points amount to saying that there is a "hard kernel" (Eco 1997, 36) of reality that is independent from any skepticism arising from our weakness in perceiving. So far, Peirce accepts what someone has recently called a "minimal realism" that corresponds very well to recent philosophical moods and to the idea of a transcendental realism (Ferraris 2014). However, according to Peirce, this is not the kind of reality that is useful for our cognition and science. We need to investigate the content of this hard kernel. That is why Peirce makes another distinction: reality is

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<sup>4</sup> De Tienne 2004 contains an important summary of Peirce's late approach to phaneroscopy. Another important text is André De Tienne's doctoral dissertation. The first part was published in French (De Tienne 1996), while the second part, unpublished, is available at the Peirce Edition Project at Indiana University—Purdue University, Indianapolis.

not only “genuineness”. Something is genuine when it has a description corresponding to its purported definition:

We must not confound Reality with Genuineness. A thing is Genuine or not according as it is or is not of the description it professes or is supposed to have: a false diamond may be genuine paste. Thus Genuineness belongs to an object as the Subject of Attributes. But Reality is not relative to any professions or suppositions. Nor [...] is it relative to any Respect. MS 642, 8 [1909]

Peirce presents two arguments against a view that would confuse reality and genuineness: first, this view reduces reality to dependence on the mind, falling again into intuitionism and infallibilism; and second, it reduces reality to actual happening, depriving it of an infinity of possibilities. Therefore, the hard kernel of reality is not relative to any form of linguistic or mental description. If the former dilemma between reality and subjective perception singled out reality as something independent from errors and perceptions, now Peirce claims that reality is independent from the single mind. This is the same topic that he also stated clearly in the 1860s: reality is independent from an individual mind or any sum of individual minds.

At this point, one might say that reality amounts to exteriority, but Peirce makes immediately the distinction between them. It is true that exteriority is independent from the individual and the social mind’s definitions and perceptions, but it is not independent from its relationship to the mind itself, or as Peirce says, to “any mind” (MS 642, 10). Exteriority is something that we can predicate insofar as we are thinking of something. The red color of the rose is neither itself because our retina perceives it, nor because our description agrees with the definition of red, nor because our mind can think it. The red color is “interior in respect to its Formal Essence”, the place of other realities like poetical power and beauty. “Its color, too, is External in Respect to what it (the color) inheres in, but it is Internal (i. e. not External) in Respect to its Formal Essence; while the Jacqueminot’s poetic power (if it has any) and some part of its beauty are still more unquestionably Internal” (MS 642, 9).

Is Peirce going back here to the ancient idea of eternal essence? No, he is not. He makes this clear by immediately quoting the idealist position and maintaining that idealism was very advanced in explaining the dependence of exteriority on mind and in distinguishing it from reality. For idealists, as for Peirce, reality is a rich continuity of developing essences.



I will not, however, go so far as to say that an External Fact would remain unchanged no matter what conceivable change should take place in what it should be possible for any human mind to Feel, Think, Do or Suffer; because that would make most of the well-known forms of Idealism deny the Externality of these ordinary External Facts which, as it seems to me, those forms of Metaphysical opinions just as sharply distinguish from Internal Facts as Common Sense does, and in the very same way, too. If any disciple of mine were not clearly to apprehend this, I should say to him: "My dear friend, you do not understand Idealism. Read Berkeley again, putting yourself in his intellectual shoes as you read, and as you reflect. Think as much further deep as you can, but do not fail, this time, to apprehend his Thought".

MS 642, 10–11 [1909]

There are essences, but they are not eternal. They coincide with the dynamic object that we can only indefinitely communicate. If we think about it attentively, we can see that Peirce is not far from the idealist tone of his 1860s conclusions, even though he broadened immensely the range of what constitutes reality. As in the 1860s, reality coincides with the general mind, with the Spirit, but this coincidence is not limited to actual facts that could easily be read as either genuine or exterior. Peirce's idealism has become aware of its objectivity, or, stated in another way, Peirce is here stating his peculiar form of metaphysical realism in which there is room for possibilities and necessities along with actualities. Reality is a transition among real modalities.

In order to clarify his position, in the same series of manuscripts Peirce explains the logical-ontological difference between Occurrence and Fact. An occurrence is a "slice" of our experience: it implies an infinite number of details and relationships. A fact is that small portion of an occurrence that can be represented in a proposition (MS 647, 9–10 [1910]). When we think of reality, we have to consider occurrences, and we should admit that they are utterly inexhaustible. They correspond to what in semiotics Peirce calls the "dynamic object". Moreover, according to different logical modalities, we also have to consider the distinction between possible occurrences and necessary occurrences. Necessary occurrences can be thought of as developments of the infinite relations inhering in the actual occurrence, but potential occurrences involve such a proliferation of infinity that they fade away into a deep vagueness (MS 648, 5–6 [1909]).

Now, how general must the general mind be in order to conceive all of this rich continuity?

Now, when you think that so starting you never would get to the number of the details of the simplest occurrence, and that such Occurrence Actually does swarm throughout the Infinite Universe of our Experience, and that to the eye of Logic it is equally evident that there is a Being to whom the thought of such a Universe in all its details [implies] no effort at all, one's head swims at the contemplation of such a Being. MS 648, 4-5 [1910]

Peirce's late writings confirm and deepen the first insights from which pragmatism was born. His rejection of nominalism brings him to a view of reality as continuity in transition among logical modalities and present to one Being's mind, which is neither classical realism nor classical idealism. Peirce was probably right to name it real-idealism. We find a confirmation of what we said in the following passage in MS 636 where Peirce comes back to nominalism from another point of view.

There is a celebrated passage in the second edition of the *Critick der Reinen Vernunft* and a very notable one, in which Kant says that the "I think"—Das Ich Denke—must be able to accompany all his ideas, "since otherwise they would not thoroughly belong to me". A man less given to discoursing might remark on reading this: "For my part, I don't hold my ideas as my own-ty-down-ty; I had rather they were Nature's and belonged to Nature's author". However, that would be to misinterpret Kant. In his first edition, he does not call the act "the I think" but "the object= $x$ ". That which that act has to effect is the consecution of ideas; now, the need of consecution of ideas is a logical need and is due not, as Kant thinks, to their taking the form of the Urtheil, the assertion, but to their making an argument; and this is not "I think" that that always virtually accompanies an argument, but it is: "Don't you think so?". MS 636, 24-6 [1910]

"In this passage, Peirce does not become a defender of the 'thing-in-itself' but of the transcendental unity of the object, which, if recognized, would have led Kant to Peirce's own idealist/realist conception." This is the possibility that Peirce recognizes when he accepts that his doctrine implies objective idealism (CP 6.163 [1892]), although he does not agree with the intellectualism of Hegelian dialectic; Hegel misses what Peirce calls Firstness and Secondness, that is to say the spontaneity of events and their brute occurrence (Peirce, 1998 [1903], 177). But at least Hegel understood that the relationship between reality and the human mind must be a profound continuity. Moreover, he and some of his cleverest interpreters such as Royce understood that this relationship itself is Being, as far as we can conceive of it.

## 2.2 Against the “I Think”

In the same ms 636 we find a second criticism of Kantianism. The “I think” that shows up in the first *Critique* does not guarantee the unity of the object because of the aforementioned lack of continuity between cognitive processes and reality. On the contrary, in presuming to unify a scattered reality, it paradoxically becomes presumptuously omnipotent. The “I think” pretends to reunite knowledge with its object and therefore it takes on an ability that is not its responsibility. Peirce, who considered the “I” as a semiotic effect more than a cause (De Tienne 2005, 98), cannot be anything but ironic about such a hypertrophic view. In another passage some years before (1904) Peirce said:

All the special occurrences of the feeling of similarity are recognized as themselves similar, by the application of them of the same symbol of similarity. It is Kant’s ‘I think’, which he considers to be an act of thought, that is, to be of the nature of a symbol. But his introduction of the ego into it was due to his confusion of this with another element.

Peirce 1998 [1904], 320

Here Peirce is explaining that symbols and their sophisticated relationships to icons and indexes can account for the complex architecture of transcendental deduction and can avoid Kant’s introduction of the Self, above all in its moral consequences that led to an emphasis of the role of the ego in every field of inquiry. This second criticism completes the picture of Peirce’s real-idealism. There is no place in it for any subjectivist turn that might be ascribed to Kant’s Copernican revolution. The Self emerges from the web of signs of reality as one of the crucial knots of its development—but not the only one, nor even the most fundamental. Fallibilism is profoundly implied at every step of Peirce’s realism. Summing up, there are two main attacks against Kant in Peirce’s late position. First, he refuses Kant’s nominalism in the meaning specified above. Second, he criticizes the weakness of the “I think”, above all as an assumption of a view of the Self that serves as a prelude to the solipsism of a certain idealism or to a poor, minimal, transcendental realism. These two arguments against Kant’s philosophy bear the unmistakable mark of pragmatism.

## 2.3 Nota bene

One can find a third important criticism in Peirce’s writings, even if there is no explicit reference to Kant. For Peirce, there is a profound unity between theoretical, ethical, and aesthetic knowledge. Aesthetics

and ethics are not separated from the theorizing of logic; on the contrary, in Peirce's classification of sciences they offer the principles on which logic moves forward (Peirce 1998 [1903], 258–62). As is well known, the entire classification of sciences shows this unity by claiming that logic relies upon ethical principles and the latter upon aesthetic principles. Here, Peirce is quite distant from Kant's distinctions of fields of knowledge as stated in the three *Critiques*. Certainly, some scholars have tried to assert the idea that Kant proposed a similar unity that emerges completely only in the third *Critique*.<sup>5</sup> This may be the case according to the philology of Kant's writings, even if the debate is still open.<sup>6</sup> Peirce, however, had not read the third *Critique*—his Kant was the author of the first *Critique*, which he knew by heart, and of which he became increasingly critical in conjunction with his development of the pragmatist metaphysics.

### 3. Anti-Kantianism in other classical pragmatists

The work of other classical pragmatists confirms that anti-Kantianism is an essential part of pragmatism, with pragmatists on both sides of the ocean criticizing various aspects of Kant's thought (Maddalena 2015, 10–29). Their critiques are often harsher than Peirce's, even though they often focus on the same points. Here I will give a quick overview of some of their arguments.

William James's criticism of Kant is based on the same elements as Peirce's. In his article "The Pragmatic Method", he ironically invites thinkers to "do without him [Kant]", because he "bequeaths to us not one single conception which is both indispensable to philosophy and which philosophy either did not possess before him or was not destined inevitably to acquire" (James 1904, 687). Some years later, James's *Pragmatism* accuses Kant of intellectualizing experience, which does not present itself according to the measurements of time and space, understood in Kant's terminology as intuitions of the intellect (James 1907, 177–8). According to James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (James 1902, 350–1), the complete intellectualization of experience done by Kant—beginning with the experience of space and time—is the result of the transcendental

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<sup>5</sup> This point is often at issue in discussions during conferences and lectures. I have to thank Rosa M. Calcaterra, Guido Baggio, Gabriele Gava, and Sami Pihlström for reminding me of this possibility, which has a long history in the Italian philosophical tradition.

<sup>6</sup> See Allison 2004 for the debate over *The Critique of Pure Reason* and Lyotard 1991 and Garroni 2011 for the debate on all three *Critiques*.

doctrine of apperception, mediated by idealist principles of logic and dialectics. The “I think” is the point James takes issue with as the source of abstraction and the origin of Hegel’s idealism, whose rationalist monism James opposed in all his works. Curiously, James’s work shares much with Peirce’s in their common opposition to Kant, but James did not adhere to real-idealism. In *A Pluralistic Universe* (James 1909, 240–1), James added a distinctive religious component to his criticisms of Kant. While focusing on idealism, to which he was harshly opposed, he locates the derivation of the idealist Absolute in Kant’s “ego of apperception”. According to James, this legacy accounts for the intellectualist turn of the idealist concept of Hegel’s Absolute. This turn derives from Kant’s intellectualist philosophy and has little to do with the authentically religious. According to James, the original religious content in Kant came from the second *Critique*, but idealism did not get the pivotal concept of the Absolute from this content.

Dewey asserted similar criticisms against Kant. In his early writings (Dewey 1884), he maintained that the noumenon-phenomenon distinction leaves a gap between the real and the ideal. He added a criticism of the weakness of the “I think” as the unifying principle of experience, which, according to Dewey, involves only an intellectual and formalistic unity, devoid of any content. Years later, in his book *German Philosophy and Politics* (1915), Dewey added a further charge of dualism between nature and morality to these youthful criticisms, which were borrowed from Hegel. He even ascribed the imperialist spirit of First World War Germany to this dualism rather than—as is more usual among scholars—to an interpretation of Hegel’s idealism (Johnston 2006, 540). Dewey’s criticism focuses on Kant’s separation of morality from nature and the knowledge of nature. This separation means that moral laws do not have to respect nature and science, but rather spring solely from an inner command of duty. Furthermore, in Kant’s description, this command is deprived of any content and, therefore, is apt to be filled with authoritarian content. In *Experience and Nature* (1925, 50), Dewey returns to Kant, classifying him among philosophers who held a dualist metaphysics, and, in *Logic* (1938), he once again claims that the idealist Absolute derives from Kant’s dualistic conception of knowledge and metaphysics (Dewey 1938, 537).

George Herbert Mead’s critique begins with morality but eventually comes around to the same elements we have seen in the other pragmatists. According to Mead in *Movements of Thought in the Nineteenth Century* (Mead 1936, 25–50), Kant’s fundamental interest is to affirm the ruling role of human power in society. Kant attempts this affirmation by means

of the universalizing rule of human will (Mead 1936, 30–1), but he never really succeeds because specific contexts and situations are an intrinsic part of moral problems. According to Mead, Kant's assuming the role of lawgiver is also the key to understanding his research into the field of nature: Kant's aim in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is to affirm that "man gives laws to nature" (Mead 1936, 31). Mead underlines the paradox of a critique of experience that finds the unity of experience itself only in the "ponderous construction" of "the transcendental a priori unity of apperception" (Mead 1936, 45). This theoretical tool somehow organizes what comes from the "thing-in-itself" understood as another reality, which is the condition for our actual experience (Mead 1936, 46). Mead concludes that we can have experience only because we postulate something beyond experience. For this reason, Kant falls into metaphysical dualism, exactly as described in Dewey's account of his philosophy. Once again, the "thing in itself", the formality of the "I think", and the Self's tremendous transformation in the moral ruler are questioned. For Mead as for the other pragmatists, the point is that we are not severed from reality, so that we have to be either masters of it (as Kant wants us to be) or servants of it (as prescribed by the traditional metaphysics). Mead sees knowledge as a complex interaction. Experience is not a fixed object but a cluster of processes and problems that we are required to solve.

The European pragmatists exhibited a similar attitude toward Kant. The unity of sciences is one of Giovanni Vailati's starting points for his anti-Kantianism. According to Vailati, Peano's former collaborator and mentor of the Italian pragmatists, Kant did not consider the crucial influence of other disciplines—primarily aesthetics—on theoretical knowledge. Much worse, he did not understand the importance of the genealogical study of disciplines, including psychology, even though his studies on judgments and categories ultimately relied upon it. Moreover, Vailati criticizes Kant because he does not take into account the importance of the evolution of disciplines. Vailati underlines that when Kant was still writing his first *Critique*, which relied on Newtonian physics, the non-Euclidean geometries had already apparently rendered his ideas obsolete. Vailati reaches very radical conclusions, though expressed only in a letter to Papini, in which he quotes an article which appeared in *Le Figaro*, according to which Kant "devoted his genius to disprove theories that no one had ever supported and to defend theses that no one had ever doubted, and concludes by saying that the free spirits admire him for the doubts that were his starting point, and non-free spirits admire him for the dogmatism at which he arrived" (Vailati 1971, 398).

The founder and leader of *Il Leonardo*, the Italian pragmatist journal that enjoyed a short-lived but real success, was Giovanni Papini. This journal existed from only 1903 to 1907, at which time Papini changed his mind about pragmatism and the publication died. However, during the time of his adherence to pragmatism, Papini wrote the book *Il crepuscolo dei filosofi* in which he devoted a chapter to Kant, polemically analyzing him as a man, a moralist, and a theorist of knowledge. As to the first of these, Papini presents an ironic picture of Kant's rationalism by pointing out that Kant taught geography and yet "had never gone outside Königsberg more than ten miles" (Papini 1906, 5). With regard to morality, Papini criticizes Kant for the form of his categorical imperative and for his postulate of freedom. According to Papini, Kant must have derived both from feelings of universality and religious responsibility, because they cannot have come from rational analysis. At the end, Kant's rationalism relies on an uncritical acceptance of certain feelings at the expense of others. Similarly, Kantian theorizing requires an unknowable and inexplicable a priori. On the theoretical side, Papini jumps on the same "two worlds" criticisms pursued by other pragmatists. According to the young Italian thinker, Kant's a priori is unknowable. Since a priori knowledge is still part of knowledge, how can we know the a priori in an analytic way, separating it from that to which it has always been conjoined? (Papini 1906, 26–7). The a priori is inexplicable because, even if we admitted to knowing it, we would not be able to comprehend how it emerged into our knowledge since "Kant did not want to do psychogenesis and not even psychology" (Papini 1906, 27). The same strategy applies to the noumenon: How can Kant mention what should not even be knowable? And if he knows it, how did this knowledge come about?

Papini adds an interesting criticism of Kant's theory of judgments, probably taken from Vailati. Are analytic judgments really necessary? Papini distinguishes between two meanings of the term "necessary". If "necessary" means "what cannot be otherwise", then everything that has already happened would be necessary but not a priori (Papini 1906, 36); if "necessary" means "what cannot be said the opposite of without absurdity"—for example mathematics—then we would have only one type of connection due to the conventionality of definitions: the definition implies the concept that, if amended, would fall beyond it. There is a problem of names and definitions, which the analytic-synthetic distinction cannot explain. What is analytic was initially synthetic, and today's definitions are always subject to new synthetic evolutions over time.

The intellectualism of the a priori is also the central point of F. C. S. Schiller's critique of Kant. Schiller was professor of philosophy at Oxford, wrote for *Il Leonardo*, and often invited William James to England. As did Papini and Vailati, Schiller charges in his paper "Axioms as Postulates" (1902) that Kant's views in the first *Critique* are covertly psychological. According to the German-British thinker, Kant's a priori does not respect the way in which we experience reality. In the end, the construction of the a priori is only a way of disguising Kant's Platonic dualism of form and matter. Schiller does not criticize the postulation of a priori truths as a clever way of seeing experience, but he despises the idea of ignoring their psychological nature, or of viewing them as anything other than aesthetic devices. If they were considered only axioms needing a postulation, Schiller would not oppose them; in this case, their history and psychogenetics should be studied (Schiller 1902, 431). Kant applies this option to practical reason, and Schiller would have liked him to apply it to theoretical knowledge as well. Instead, Kant's intellectualism hinders him from considering "the fact that the living organism acts as a whole" (Schiller 1902, 434). In the way in which Kant states them, "the most intelligent reader cannot but feel that the dualism of the Pure and Practical Reason is intolerable and their antagonism irreconcilable", while the dual character of the doctrine imposed "upon Kant as both the Cerberus and Heracles of the Noumenal world is calculated to bring ridicule both upon him and upon his system" (Schiller 1902, 436).

#### 4. A short conclusion

Pragmatists have collectively criticized Kant because of his separation between reality and knowledge, between the unknowable "thing-in-itself" and the knowable phenomenon (while often confusing the transcendental object and the "thing-in-itself"). Moreover, they all questioned the role of the "I think", and the a priori principle of knowledge. Finally, with each stressing different nuances, they thought that Kant's initial theoretical separation of knowledge, morality, and aesthetics issued in bitter fruits at both the moral and political level. As we have seen in this short overview, there are many variations and specific branches of this opposition to Kant, but it is integral to the viewpoint of both American and European pragmatists. Obviously, pragmatists' anti-Kantianism may be wrong on Kant from a philological point of view, but it is a fundamental characteristic of their thought, stemming from their strong and clear rejection of any



sort of intellectualism and their synthetic, profound view of the continuity between theory and practice, facts and values, synthesis and analysis, language and action.

Peirce had a most profound view of continuity as the keystone of the pragmatist architecture, and he knew Kant's *First Critique* by heart. It should therefore not be surprising that, of the pragmatists, his attacks on Kant were the most sophisticated, nor should it be surprising that the relevance of his progressive abandonment of the German thinker is the most difficult to understand. This paper has provided evidence of Peirce's historical and theoretical evolution with respect to Kant's thought, sufficient evidence that it is time for scholars of Peirce and pragmatism to accept anti-Kantianism as intrinsic to the thought of Peirce and the movement generally. Scholars should remain free to develop a new form of Kantian pragmatism on new bases, but without any longer attributing its development to Peirce or classical pragmatism.

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# Kant's Universalism versus Pragmatism

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## 1. Introduction

While some forms of pragmatism, ideas of pragmatist thinkers, and even some pragmatists themselves are easily recognizable as Kantian, and while Kant's critical philosophy can obviously be applied to issues raised by pragmatists, just like his critical philosophy can be challenged and varied from a pragmatist point of view, it is not easy to precisely explicate the relationship between Kant's critical philosophy and pragmatism. As a matter of fact, given the diversity of pragmatism, such an explication would be next to impossible to provide. As recognized by many, thinkers labeled as pragmatist—or pragmaticist or neopragmatist—do not necessarily have much in common (cf. e.g., Haack 1992, 351; Pihlström 1996, 13). Bluntly put, if a common denominator between pragmatists is difficult to find, then it is all the more difficult to pinpoint the exact similarities and differences between pragmatism and Kant or Kantianism. Besides, "Kantianism" is not a clear notion either—indeed, it would be equally difficult to define.

Hence a disclaimer: Given that pragmatism denotes and connotes so many things, I simply assume here that certain tenets can be regarded as specifically pragmatist. These tenets may not hold true for every so-called pragmatist thinker, but each of them has been endorsed by thinkers known to be pragmatists, and they certainly come up in general introductions to pragmatism (cf. e.g., Hookway 2016, McDermid 2017). As far as Kantianism is concerned, I shall focus on the original Kant.

I have three intertwining, assumedly core pragmatist tenets in mind. First, pragmatism gives precedence to the practical or experiential consequences of any given theory or categorization (cf. e.g., Lewis 1923, 175–6).

Second, pragmatism prioritizes experimental problem-solving attitudes over ivory-towerish theorizing. Third, pragmatism is against apriority if by this one suggests the possibility of some sort of foreknowledge that gives us truths or principles that are not only absolutely independent of experience but infallible and eternally fixed (cf. esp. Lewis 1923). In all, pragmatism is a view according to which theory and practice go hand in hand (cf. e.g., Pihlström 1996, 11, 34). On the whole, these tenets suggest that pragmatism is largely an anti-universalist branch of philosophy. In contrast, as I explain below, Kant's critical philosophy is in many respects universalistic to the core.

In the context of this article, I understand universalism as a view according to which some points of view, attitudes, values, norms, kinds of knowledge, cognitive frameworks, and, in particular, the principles governing them, are universalizable, and as such, transcend actual human practices. Given that actual human practices, however loosely we formulate this notion, clearly evolve and change just as much as theories and the criteria they must meet in different scientific, moral, and aesthetic communities, it seems that a true pragmatist must abandon such universal principles once and for all.

This is not to say that a pragmatist cannot take a universal point of view *per se*. However, I do think that the pragmatist must avoid taking such a view in the specific sense that it involves laying out a set of basic preconditions for some phenomenon independently of the factual variances and contingencies the phenomenon in question reveals within the context of our actual practices and experiences. As I see it, this kind of static and ahistorical universalism rests at the core of Kant's transcendental philosophy, but is alien to the pragmatist agenda (cf. e.g., Pihlström 1996, 245).

Of course, one might simply reject such an "anti-empirical" route as unrealistic, but at least one plausible argumentative strategy follows it. It goes as follows. Let's take *A* for granted. Necessarily, for *A* to be possible, something has to be the case. To put it differently, and a little more verbosely, there must be a fixed set of fundamental principles that found, constitute, and govern *A*, otherwise no such thing as *A* is possible, which is to say that there is no such thing as *A*. Moreover, to be in cognitive touch with *A* requires (at least some kind of) a grasp of those principles. (It may also be that *A* is cognitively unavailable to a given person or community at *t* due to a total lack of acknowledgment of such principles at *t*. In what follows, *A* stands for taste, morality, and cognition, respectively.)

I begin by demonstrating that there are two kinds of universalism present in Kant's critical philosophy, and I show how these emerge in Kant's aesthetics, Kant's ethics, and Kant's theory of cognition. What I call relative universalism is limited to a human point of view. What I call absolute universalism transcends the human point of view and is supposed to extend to rationality as such. Still, both kinds of universalism share the idea that there is something necessary and fixed in our human undertakings, whether these be aesthetic, moral, or scientific. The question then is whether, or to what extent, the kind of universalistic demands or presuppositions we find in Kant's critical philosophy conflict with the apparently anti-universalist pragmatist tenets.

## 2. Relative universalism in Kant's aesthetics

Matters of taste are often seen as totally subjective and without objective standards. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, they say. Kant's aesthetic theory, as presented in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790), is an interesting blend of subjective and objective elements. Kant simultaneously accepts a lack of definite standards and denies that beauty is just a matter of personal taste. Indeed, Kant seems to think that if taste were merely a matter of personal pleasure, it would not even properly be called taste. Despite being a matter of pleasure, taste also indicates something common, something shared, something irreducible to our private likes or "the agreeable" (Kant 2000 b [1790], 97–8; AA 5:212–3, *passim*).<sup>1</sup>

As far as individual claims concerning beauty are concerned, the intersubjective character of taste requires us to judge the beauty of things in a very specific way. Briefly put, we must judge disinterestedly, without any ulterior motives towards the object in question. Equally importantly, we must not judge the object according to concepts—roughly, what we know about it and what we believe its purpose to be—but according to the way the object affects us in our judging of it. In other words, the maker of an aesthetic judgment must judge "on the basis of what he has before his sense" (Kant 2000 b [1790], 116; AA 5:231; see also 5:350). This specific kind of attitude towards the object distinguishes aesthetic judgment from cognitive judgment, where one must judge "on the basis of what he has in his thoughts" (*ibid.*). Still, in order for the aesthetic judgment to count as an aesthetic judgment of taste as opposed to an aesthetic judgment of mere

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<sup>1</sup> 'AA', followed by a volume and page number, refers to the so-called Academy edition of Kant's collected works. See References for other abbreviations.

sensation, an additional criterion must be met: namely, that we attend to the formal features of the object or our representational state (Kant 2000 b [1790], 174; AA 5:294; see also e.g., 5:190). Only in this way can one reflect “on his own judgment from a universal standpoint” (Kant 2000 b [1790], 175; AA 5:295). As Kant also puts it, when making genuine judgments of taste, we assume “universal voice” (Kant 2000 b [1790], 101; AA 5:216). That is to say that we expect that others agree with our judgment universally, making Kant's aesthetics explicitly universalistic. However, this kind of universalism is so only relatively or comparatively, because the demand on the universality of the judgments of taste is relativized to judges who share, or are presupposed to share, the same specific cognitive basis for aesthetic estimation, including the ability to rise above private sensation. What is more, Kant explicitly states that the universal voice is “only an idea” (Kant 2000 b [1790], 101; AA 5:216).

Though Kant admits that the universal voice is just an idea or—perhaps closer to the point he wants to make—an assumption under which to proceed in matters of taste, he clearly wants to insist on something stronger. I think that Kant's key point is that such an idea is necessary in the sense that if there were no truth in such an idea, there would not be taste in the first place. In other words, to make sense of the fact—assuming that it is a fact—that there truly is taste and true beauty instead of mere agreeableness is to assume a universal foundation for it, even if that foundation is merely a principle of judging that is relative to human standpoint and “ideal”—i.e., not to be attributed to things in themselves, but to a purposive relationship among certain cognitive faculties of the judges (cf. Kant 2000 b [1790], 224–5; AA 5:350–1).

Somewhat curiously, especially from a pragmatist point of view, it appears to be totally irrelevant to Kant's universalistic approach that we do in actuality know that there is no agreement in matters of taste, and that we may always doubt whether we actually succeed in judging in the way described above (e.g., Kant 2000 b [1790], 121–2; AA 5:237). Kant's universalistic conviction seems to come purely from so-called transcendental considerations. Accordingly, experiential data that would prove him otherwise simply do not exist.

### 3. Absolute universalism in Kant's ethics

Kant's ethics, as presented in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785) and *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), is universalistic in a stronger

sense than Kant's aesthetics. For starters, morality is not bound to the human point of view. The ultimate moral principle, the so-called categorical imperative—"act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law" (Kant 2005 [1785], 73; AA 4:421)—is supposed to bind every imaginable rational agent without exception (*ibid.*, 90; AA 4:442). That which is morally good is so absolutely and universally, period.

The categorical imperative, in its suggestion of universal moral law, is no less than the ultimate criterion for morally legitimate judgments and ethical norms. At the same time, it is a kind of test. Are you doing the right thing? If your guideline for the act you are about to perform complies with the universality demand made by the categorical imperative, then yes, you may rest assured that you act in a morally good way. But if your guideline for the act you are about to perform only complies with your own needs, then you are not going to act morally at all. Alternatively put, to act morally is to act in a certain way because it is a duty to do so, not because we (necessarily) like it (*cf. e.g.*, Kant 2005 [1788], 171–2; AA 5:38–9).

Though Kant's moral theory is highly complex and the real-world applicability of the categorical imperative can be questioned, his basic point is quite appealing. To begin with, though Kant does not want to claim that morality has nothing to do with feeling, he nevertheless wants to show how morality, or our "moral disposition" (Kant 2005 [1788], 201; AA 5:76), cannot be based on any sort of feeling. Emotions and feelings come and go, vary from one circumstance to another, and are inherently private and personal. Clearly, such thoroughly contingent factors could not provide the required communally binding force that makes morality stand to its name. Cognitively speaking, to be able to reason morally is to be able to apply a universal principle to the empirical world, and, indeed, from a point of view that transcends our limited, less-than-ideal, and complexly conditioned experiential situation. What is more, it is only then that we may also recognize that moral law could not be any other way, and, even closer to the point I would like to emphasize, that if it were, then morality itself would not be possible in the first place.

To put it differently, there must be something in our moral reasoning that does not fall prey to the contingencies of everyday feelings or other impulses and prejudices. This is why morality must be based on something extra-empirical. Morality cannot be based on our "animality", but must instead originate from "the moral law within me" (Kant 2005 [1788],



AA 5:161)—even if test cases for the categorical imperative do originate empirically and externally. In the end, as Kant would have it, the ultimate principle of moral reasoning must be embedded in rationality itself. Indeed, not only does morality transcend actual human practices, but its ultimate standard is totally independent of how we human beings actually happen to act, and furthermore, how we happen to be constituted as far as our specifically human nature is concerned (Kant 2005 [1785], 90; AA 4:442).

#### 4. Relative and absolute universalism in Kant's theory of cognition

In Kant's theory of cognition, as presented in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/1787), we encounter both kinds of universalism. On the one hand, there is space and time as humanly necessary form(s) of sensible cognition that hold true for at least every human cognizer (Kant 2000 a [1781/1787], A 26–7/B 42–3; B 72).<sup>2</sup> Generally speaking, this is to say that at least as far as cognitive experience goes, we are spatiotemporally restricted beings, and given this limitation, the only legitimate object for scientific and other cognitive undertakings is the spatiotemporally confined empirical world of experienceable things, including ourselves as bodily creatures. Furthermore, unlike the actual empirical contents of our experience, the spatiotemporal form of experience is not only constant, but preconditions any actual empirical content our experience might possibly have.

On the other hand, there are the categories as necessary forms of thinking. Just as with space and time, Kant ultimately links these categories with the possibility of experience: it is only by means of the categories that we can think about objects of experience (A 93/B 126). Only this time, similarly to Kant's approach in ethics, he does not limit the categories to human beings, but seems to think that to have any kind of rationally structured experiential cognition, no matter who the cognizer or thinking being is or exactly what kind of sensory constitution it has, experience must be structured in accordance with the categories.<sup>3</sup>

Though Kant is not explicit on the matter and does not spend much time explaining the categories, I think he has the following in mind.

<sup>2</sup> From this point on, I only use the standard A/B-references: 'A', followed by a page number, refers to the 1781 edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, 'B' refers to the 1787 edition.

<sup>3</sup> Divine intellect, capable of intellectual intuition, would be an exception (cf. e.g., A 256/B 311–2; AA 5:405). Within Kant's critical project, such an intellect is merely an object of speculation, but also serves as a reminder that our humanly limited cognitive constitution greatly restricts the scope of our knowledge claims.

In thinking about the spatiotemporal objects of experience, we necessarily employ certain structural features thanks to which we can refer to those objects—whatever they are—as more or less stable entities with or without such and such properties, just like those objects simply must have (or at least must be represented as having) location, spatial extension, duration, and so forth to be objects for us in the first place. In addition, thanks to the constant structure of our thinking, we may come to think of any possible objects of experience in terms of magnitude (e.g., mass) and interaction, or as a participant in events, or—crucially—we do not come to think them at all. Briefly put, the Table of Categories (A 80/B 106) is supposed to have all the possible basic ways of thinking of objects inscribed in it.

As Kant almost puts it, you either apply the categories or you do not think, just like you do not speak a language unless you speak it according to a certain set of rules, however imprecise your explicit knowledge of the grammar. Furthermore, just as actual languages differ in grammar but still have certain elements in common—which suggests the existence of some kind of universal grammar (cf. e.g., Chomsky 2002)—all meaningful determinations of spatiotemporal objects share the common categorial framework despite the possible differences and variations in the empirical concepts used in such determinations.

It is important to acknowledge that the Kantian categories are supposed to be purely formal elements of our cognition. As such, they are not informed by empirical content, but are absolutely unspecific in this regard. Indeed, the categories ground the possibility of any such experiential content in the first place, which is why it would be absurd for Kant to allow the possibility that we may categorize experience as we will (cf. e.g., Lewis 1923, 175).

## 5. Kant's universalism and pragmatism: In opposition or not?

How well do Kant's universalistic demands, which we find in his aesthetics, ethics, and theory of cognition, agree with pragmatist tenets? At first sight, it may seem that Kant is clearly an anti-pragmatist thinker whose theoretical commitments are quickly problematized from the pragmatist point of view. For starters, Kant thinks that *a priori* and *a posteriori* elements are neatly separable. This trend is visible in all three *Critiques*, beginning with the *Transcendental Aesthetic* (Kant 2000 a [1781/1787]; see also e.g., Kant 2005 [1788], 270; AA 5:163). Moreover, Kant does not seem to see any reason to question whether he has found the correct set

of *a priori* principles (cf. Hookway 1985, 63, 87). On the contrary, he thinks of them as universally binding, and even sees some of them as independent of human experience as such, even though his basic point would usually be that there must be principles governing human cognitive, ethical, and aesthetic undertakings, and that such principles are independent of the particular instances of such undertakings given in actual experience, thus providing the framework under which the actual instances become possible.

There are no signs that Kant would regard the context-sensitive practical or experiential consequences of his theoretical commitments as particularly important. It may also seem that he is quite blind to the social dimension of taste, for example (cf. Shusterman 1989). Indeed, if you ask a pragmatist-minded philosopher, they may argue that Kant, while laying out law-like principles from his ivory tower, ends up totally downplaying the role of actual experience and the complex entanglements of human practices. Then again, if we were to ask Kant himself, he would probably reply that if you take actual human practice as your starting point, you end up with contingencies. Or indeed, in a sense—as I have been hinting at above—you end up losing such things as (genuine, correctly understood) taste, morality, and cognitive experience. This is because if Kant is right, then such things are possible only because there is a certain necessitating structure underlying them, and the role of philosophy is to discover their governing principles.

Obviously, there are many difficult and problematic issues in the previous paragraphs, and many more beyond. For example, there is the cognitive question about the possibility, role, and scope of aprioristic theorizing. Relatedly, Kant's commitment to all-encompassing rationality, which culminates in his practical philosophy, would be another big issue. Of course, one could ask similar questions about the supposed inseparability of theory and practice demanded by pragmatists. One could also ask whether some particular pragmatist would agree or disagree with Kant in the end. Peirce, for example, seemed to be a firm believer in universal moral standards—or at least Peirce can be read this way (Hookway 1985, 59, 65). Similar universalistic tendencies might be found behind Peirce's notion of ideal science. In fact, Peirce may have shared Kant's conviction that not everything can be fallible. It might also be argued that just like Kant's system, Peirce's system of categories is supposed to be absolutely universal, not empirically falsifiable, and his theory of signs also seems to be a thoroughly *a priori* enterprise (Hookway 1985, 63, 81, 108, 126).

Even Lewis, with his anti-universalist conception of *a priori*, is clearly not against apriority as such, though Kant would hardly find that kind of “pragmatized” version of apriority plausible.

In any case, in the rest of the text I will cover the idea that there must be something necessary and immutable in (or “behind”) our various human undertakings—a kind of fixed core. The basic idea is this: The ability to continue to track, communicate, and evaluate, say, Aristotle’s ethical ideas or Newton’s scientific claims, means taking part in the same reasoning processes that these thinkers did. As I see it, the critical Kant is after such reasoning processes and their purely formal elements in the domains of theoretical philosophy, moral philosophy, and aesthetics. As formal and universal, they are elements shared by every actual application, practical circumstance, or cognitive framework. (Besides, no such maximal projection could be empirically supported, not even in principle.) As already suggested, this is to say that we cannot be anti-universalist in all respects. For instance, referring to objects in terms of their properties—which I take to be an application of the category of Substance—is such a basic element of cognition that it is simply indispensable (cf. Hookway 1985, 146). No change in logic or physics or any other human practice changes that. Even if we were to find a bearer-property relation as irrelevant in a certain scientific explanatory context, we would still be indirectly referring to just that, and would continue to do so in our everyday life anyhow.

Certainly, Kant’s categories can be seen as tied to the theoretical commitments of Kant’s time, and to Newtonian physics in particular—just like any system of categories can be regarded as non-absolute (e.g., Westerhoff 2005, 218–9). If so, the category of Cause and Effect, for example, can be said to reflect a certain kind of conception of causality that only holds good under certain mechanistic presuppositions. So, basically, when our conception of causality changes—as it has from Aristotelian philosophy to Newtonian physics to the theory of relativity to quantum mechanics—Kant’s category of Cause becomes at least partially obsolete, just as his Euclidean conception of space and time becomes obsolete after the introduction of other kinds of geometries. Accordingly, a pragmatist-minded philosopher could claim that Kant’s theory of space-time is successful only insofar as it finds practical Euclidean application (cf. Lewis 1923, 177).

As the ultimate principles of cognitive experience, I think that Kant’s space-time and categories should be understood in a very primitive and rudimentary way: We apply them or represent in accordance with them whenever we refer to locations, durations, properties, magnitudes, events,

interaction, existence, and so forth in whatever exact way such an application actually takes place. Bluntly put, it is simply impossible to do without them. So, the claim goes, whatever differences there are between our ways of understanding causality today and back then, the category of causality represents that which is shared by both instances. The specifics beyond this core (or form, as Kant would call it) might just as well evolve and change from one framework to another, but the form itself does not. In this minimalist sense, some of the norms governing natural sciences—or indeed all kinds of cognitive undertakings—do apply universally (cf. Pihlström 1996, 220). Otherwise there would basically be no inquiry in the first place. Or as Kant suggests in the second *Critique* in defense of the *a priori* method, without “true universality” there would not even be “rational inference and so not even inference from analogy” (Kant 2005 [1788], 146; AA 5:12)—just to give an example of what an anti-universalistic strategy would mean according to Kant.

To give a rough illustration of this, let us imagine both Aristotle and Newton dropping rocks to the ground. Both think about moving things and make generalizations on the basis of the alterations they both witness. In short, both explain the causal behavior of the rocks. In doing so, both apply exactly the same categories and share exactly the same basis of spatiotemporal determination of the rocks' places. No commitments specific to Euclid have to be made, though Kant would insist that whatever they perceive can be given a mathematical approximation in Euclidean terms. The reason Aristotle and Newton conceptualize things differently is not due to their different categorial frameworks (in Kant's sense), but their different repertoires of empirical concepts and the different genesis thereof. Most crucially, to understand the differences in their procedures is to understand the common reasoning processes at the basis of both procedures, however precise or imprecise our knowledge of the governing principles of those processes may be.

Suppose we meet a space alien—like the one in *Arrival*. Sharing our thoughts might be painfully difficult, but assuming it would be possible, as it is in that movie, what could explain this other than a shared categorial framework? In other words, the deep structure of our thinking—and language, for that matter (again, cf. e.g., Chomsky 2002)—would have to be the same.<sup>4</sup> And if this is so, then the categories could not be socially

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<sup>4</sup> The following quotation from Frege's *Grundgesetze* is most fitting here: “But what if beings were even found whose laws of thought flatly contradicted ours and therefore frequently led to contrary results even in practice? The psychological logician could only

produced in any strict sense (*pace* e.g., Lewis 1923, 177). In a similar vein, they must be independent of actual human practices, except for in the trivial sense that the actual application of such principles is obviously embedded in actual human practices and serves different purposes in different contexts (see also Pihlström 1996, 346). In other words, there must be an element in them that grounds some such practice rather than an element that simply comes with it. In yet other words, both human and alien experience and mind would have to have—*pace* Lewis, using his own words—“a character which is universal, fixed, and absolute” (Lewis 1923, 177).<sup>5</sup>

Of course, as I have been suggesting, such an absolutely universal character has to be construed very minimally, and, as I have been suggesting, Kant’s main intention was to do just that. This is so at least as far as his theory of cognition is concerned, but I think his approach in ethics and aesthetics is ultimately the same: go and find the ultimate governing principles of moral thought and taste.

In all, this has the consequence that a properly Kantian thing to do is to limit fallibility (cf. Gava 2016) by demanding fixed formal-universalistic restrictions on cognition about the world. (Assumedly the “matter” has its say too, of course.) Bluntly put, many things in our cognitive construction of the world might be “pragmatically malleable”, but not all of them—including in particular the deep structure of the reasoning processes themselves (cf. Pihlström 1996, 220, 345; see also Lewis 1923, 177; but see also Pihlström 1996, 202).<sup>6</sup> Otherwise, for all I know, Kant might just as well accept the pragmatic tenets.

## 6. Conclusion and further remarks

In the above, I have proceeded from what I take to be Kant’s point of view and sought possible tensions between Kant’s way of thinking and

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acknowledge the fact and say simply: those laws hold for them, these laws hold for us. I should say: we have here a hitherto unknown type of madness” (Frege 1982 [1893], 14 [xvi]). I thank Tapio Korte for bringing this passage to my attention.

<sup>5</sup> If this means commitment to the “absolutely universal human nature” (Lewis 1923, 176) criticized by Lewis, then so be it. Notice, however, that the line of argumentation I am following here actually suggests more than that: namely, that certain preconditions or core features of human cognition must be preconditions of cognition and language use in general.

<sup>6</sup> Pihlström (1996, 202) writes: “If all criteria of rationality are abandoned, no edifying conversation can take place”. I wholeheartedly agree, but would also insist on taking it one step further, as I think Kant also would: namely, either we have some absolutely fixed criteria or no conversation would come about in the first place.

pragmatism—or, more precisely, Kant's universalistic approach and tenets I presumed to be exemplarily pragmatist. I believe that I have located at least one crucial point of departure: namely, the idea that our cognitive, ethical, and aesthetic undertakings do have a universal character—a kind of fixed core. As such, it must be something independent of all kinds of practical considerations or pragmatic variations which might be related to such undertakings in their actual applications. Indeed, this fixed core must be prior to any actual human practices in the specific sense of apriority that refers to the ultimate preconditions of cognitive, ethical, and aesthetic undertakings as opposed to something that comes and evolves with the actual instances of such undertakings.

Though there are some obvious difficulties with such a transcendentalist approach, it is, to my mind at least, quite tempting. To begin with, it makes sense to think that for there to be, say, genuine morality, it must have a universal foundation—a kind of deep structure that does not change even if actual moral practices do. (Of course, this assumes that these practices cannot change thoroughly, or if they did, then they would not be moral practices anymore.) You may consider that deep structure as a kind of truth-maker if you like. Indeed, even if Kant's attempt at revealing such a truth-maker failed, the following crucial idea could and should be preserved from his ethical project: it is only because we can track something like the moral law that we can make sense of ourselves as moral agents in the first place.

Logic is another telling example. As far as I can tell, inventions of new logical systems typically do not, nor are they supposed to, alter the most basic logical laws or principles—such as those underlying the inferential structure known as *modus ponens*. In fact, a change in something so fundamental would not just mean a change in logic. Instead, it would render thinking as we know it unrecognizable.<sup>7</sup> Somewhat similarly, one might argue that allowing exceptions to moral law would be like allowing

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<sup>7</sup> On a side-note, although I think this is the way Kant sees universality in logic and its connection to thinking, I do not think Kant's *categories* should be understood as purely logical principles—as Peirce seemed to (cf. Hookway 1985, 18, 83). This is to say that even if some logical forms from Kant's Table of Judgments can be shown to be reducible to each other in some post-Aristotelian system, their counterparts in the Table of Categories do not only remain recognizably different thought acts, but continue to reflect different thought contents applicable to different kinds of particular cases (cf. Peirce 1974, 300; CP 1.560). Relatedly, the abovementioned universal character or fixed core need not make specific reference to any particular system of logic, but rather to that which makes *modus ponendo ponens* and the like valid in the first place.

exceptions to *modus ponens*, the ultimate point being that through such exceptions the whole enterprise in question would collapse.

What is more, by recognizing such core elements in various domains, we can make sense of the fact that despite their differences, our theories, values, norms, world-views, and so forth are largely comparable and cross-evaluable—somewhat like different languages might not be interchangeable but are nevertheless translatable, at least in principle. This presumes not only a shared standpoint, but a ground independent of any particular standpoint (cf. Pihlström 1996, 380). In the above, I tried to capture this with the example of Aristotle’s and Newton’s uniquely different yet importantly similar approaches to science. In other words, both study roughly the same thing within or with the help of the same basic sensible-conceptual structure—minimally construed according to space-time and the categories—though it must be recognized that their different repertoires of *empirical* concepts can drastically color their respective operational frameworks.

Put this way, it all comes down to commensurability. The notion of truth requires it just as much as the possibility of communicating with aliens. Indeed, there must be perfect commensurability at some level in order for us to have an “intersubjective order” (Garrath 2016). Kant’s two kinds of universalism—relative and absolute universalism—can be seen as attempts at securing that order: one from the human point of view, the other from the point of view of rationality *per se*.

In other terms, the Kantian analysis suggests that something like “pragmatic contextualism” (cf. Thayer 1981 [1965], 352–7)—i.e., the view according to which the context determines the relevance of the categories used to interpret a given object or phenomenon—cannot go all the way down. Instead, there must be domain-specific extra-contextual limitations to our aesthetic, ethical, and cognitive undertakings.

Now, if all of this sounds like too much, or too aprioristic—or too *assured* (cf. Hookway 1985, 63)—there are ways to soften the above claims without having to reject the universalistic approach altogether. (Here I am already thinking of how to reconcile Kantianism and pragmatism, though such a detailed analysis must be reserved for another occasion.) I have two such ways in mind, both of which are pragmatist in spirit, yet familiar to Kant as well.

First, one might point out that sometimes we simply have to presuppose either relatively or absolutely universal frameworks. For example, when we evaluate Aristotle’s virtue ethics, we proceed ahistorically under



the assumption that Aristotle is speaking basically about the same thing as contemporary ethicists regardless of the obvious differences between the actual normative contexts of Aristotle and ours. As a matter of fact, proceeding this way is the practically most purposeful thing to do in an ethics class, say.

Second, one might take up certain principles as granted without committing to the idea that these principles determine our aesthetic, ethical, or cognitive undertakings in any absolute sense. This is to say that the *a priori* principles should be regarded as regulative, as sorts of necessary presuppositions or background hypotheses that guide our empirical research, without ever providing—not even in principle—the last word on the subject, so to say. To borrow Peirce's term, we have "intellectual hope" (Peirce 1974, 221–2; CP 1.405–6) at best. At the same time, perhaps some such merely regulative assumptions are simply indispensable for us, and, in this sense at least, relatively universal. For example, "always seek for more and more unified ground of explanation" seems to be one such background assumption operative in scientific research (cf. e.g., A 647–50/B 675–8; see also Repo & Laiho 2009, 274). Moreover, it might just as well be the case that such an assumption—or maxim of reason as Kant may wish to call it—has the most desirable pragmatic consequences in theory building, which calls for accepting it in place of some less influential alternative.

Of course, I had no such heuristic or regulative stance in mind at all above, but wanted to insist on something stronger—something more foundational—just as Kant himself did with his so-called constitutive principles. As important as they are, confining ourselves to the kinds of "pragmatized" principles just described might have less desirable consequences as well. At worst, our philosophical investigations become free-floating, without precise reference point—a consequence both Kantians and pragmatists surely want to avoid. This, I think, should be kept firmly in mind as we ponder the future path of pragmatism.<sup>8</sup>

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PART II

METHODOLOGY AND  
COMMUNICATION

# Sense, Sign's Sense, and Gesture. For a Quasi-Transcendental Semiotics

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## 1. Introduction

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant states that transcendental is “our mode of cognition of objects insofar as this is to be possible *a priori*” (Kant 1998, B 25), that is to say, the mode through which “we cognize that and how certain representations [*Vorstellungen*] (intuitions or concepts) are applied entirely *a priori*, or are possible (i. e., the possibility of cognition or its use *a priori*)” (ibid., B 80). In the *Prolegomena*, he then specifies that the word “transcendental” does not signify “something that surpasses all experience, but something that indeed precedes experience (*a priori*), but that, all the same, is destined to nothing more than solely to make cognition from experience possible” (Kant 2004, 127).

Therefore, transcendental means both the *that* and *how* of representations are possible only in the link between *pure* and *empirical*.

Now, since the transcendental is related to cognition which is related to judgments, which in turn are possible only through fundamental propositions [*Grundsätze*], then transcendental seems destined also to the *that* and *how* of language. The problem of synthetic judgments seems, in fact, the same as the problem of determining the meaning of a possible reference to an object from a universal point of view. The issue concerns the formal conditions of possibility for transition from/subsumption of sense to meaning, in other words, the conditions of possibility for the application of categories of possible meanings to the sense of what can be known as a perception in space and time. Here, the transcendental doctrine of the faculty of judgment and particularly of the transcendental scheme as the

sensitive condition under which only the concepts of the intellect can be used comes into play.

In this paper, I wish to offer a new theoretical solution to the issue raised by the Kantian transcendental scheme concerning the connection between the sensible manifold and the unity of the concept. To do this, I intersect Frege's notion of sense [*Sinn*] as distinct from meaning [*Bedeutung*], with Morris' semiotics and his idea of the "sign vehicle" (Morris 1938a, 1946), and with Maddalena's theory of gesture (Maddalena 2015).

The paper will be developed as follows: I expose the core passages of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* on transcendental schematism; then I refer to Frege's distinction between sense and meaning, Morris' notion of "sign vehicle" and Maddalena's theory of gesture. I use them for developing the last part the argument in favour of the notion of gesture as a dynamic sign vehicle bringing the sense to sign, and for suggesting the possibility of working out a *quasi-transcendental semiotics*.

## 2. Kant's transcendental scheme

As Rorty (1981, 148 ff.) argued, Kant has set a milestone in the path of a conception of knowledge as cognition of propositions rather than of objects, by maintaining that we are aware of intuitions only in their synthesis through the concepts which are such in their application to the intuitions only. In particular, Rorty referred to paragraph 15 of the first *Critique* in which Kant argues that, although the manifold of representations can be given in a sensitive intuition, the *conjunction* of the manifold cannot be contained in the sensitive intuition as "capacity (receptivity) to acquire representations" (Kant 1998, B 33). The combination/conjunction is "an act of the spontaneity of the power of representation [*Actus der Spontaneität der Vorstellungskraft*]", that is a *synthesis of the understanding* (ibid., B 130). The combination cannot be given in turn by objects. It can be constituted by the subject that connects the sensitive representations in an intellectual representation. It is, therefore, a *spontaneous act of combination* of two concepts—subject and predicate—in judgment, the combination being "the representation of the **synthetic** unity of the manifold [*Vorstellung der synthetischen Einheit des Mannigfaltigen*]" (ibid., B 130–1). The subject at the roots of the possibility of understanding and its logical use of the categories is the *transcendental unity of self-consciousness*. This unity prior to any thought is called *intuition*, namely the *original-synthetic unity of apperception* which cannot be accompanied by any representation.

The *I think* accompanies all representations which, otherwise, would “either be impossible or else at least would be nothing for me” (ibid., B 131–2). And since it is an act of spontaneity at the basis of the act of combination in judgment, the unity of apperception cannot be regarded as belonging to sensibility. Kant calls it the *pure apperception* as distinguished from the empirical. He calls it also the *original apperception*, as it is that self-consciousness which produces the representation *I think*, that is, the representation which must be able to accompany all other representations and cannot be accompanied by any further representation. He also calls its unity the *transcendental* unity of self-consciousness at the basis of any possible *a priori* cognition.

Involved here is that the identity of the conscience in the combined representations presupposes the synthetic unity of apperception, which is “the highest point to which one must affix all use of the understanding, even the whole of logic and, after it, transcendental philosophy; indeed, this faculty is the understanding itself” (ibid., B 134 n). The unity of apperception is, therefore, identified with the understanding, of which the “supreme principle” is the *Grundsatz* in the whole of human cognition (ibid., B 135). *Satz* can be translated in two ways: either as “principle” or “proposition”. *Grundsatz* can, therefore, be translated in both directions: either as “supreme principle” or as “supreme proposition”. In the following sentence, Kant seems to lean toward the second interpretation. He argues that the necessary unity of apperception is “itself identical”, that it is *ein analytischer Satz*, an analytical proposition. *Principle* is identical with *proposition*. Furthermore, Kant uses “proposition” and “judgment” as synonyms, so that he can argue that synthetic *a priori* judgments are possible, by relating the formal conditions of *a priori* intuition, the synthesis of the *imagination*, and its necessary unity, in a transcendental apperception (ibid., B 197).

The supreme analytical proposition is based on the logical principle of non-contradiction, which is the universal principle of any analytic cognition. Such a principle applied to the supreme proposition affirms that the self of the conscience cannot be different from what it is.<sup>1</sup> However, Kant suggests another thing, namely that, as far as transcendental apper-

<sup>1</sup> “Now, in every judgment I am always the **determining** subject of that relation that constitutes the judgment. However, that the I that I think can always be considered as **subject**, and as something that does not depend on thinking merely as a predicate, must be valid—this is an apodictic and even an **identical** [namely *tautological*] **proposition**; but it does not signify that I as **object** am for myself a self-**subsisting being** or **substance**. [...] That the I of apperception, consequently in every thought, is a **single thing** that cannot be

ception is an analytical proposition, it needs a synthesis of the manifold given in intuition, since without such synthesis the uninterrupted identity of self-consciousness cannot be thought. The question is, then: what kind of synthesis?

In the previous, tenth paragraph, Kant refers to the synthesis in the most general sense as the *action* of bringing representations together and comprehending their manifoldness in one cognition (Kant 1998, B 103). He then refers to the synthesis of the manifold of sensible intuition calling it *figurative* (*synthesis speciosa*), and distinguishing it from the synthesis of the understanding (*synthesis intellectualis*). The *figurative synthesis* is the result of the power of *imagination* (*Einbildungskraft*), namely “a blind though indispensable function of the soul [*einer Funktion der Seele*]” (ibid.), without which any cognition is impossible.<sup>2</sup>

Imagination is, thus, the faculty of representing an object even *without its presence* in intuition. And since intuition is sensible, the imagination should belong to sensibility, for it can give a corresponding intuition to the concepts of understanding on account of its subjective condition. However, the synthesis is an act of *spontaneity* of imagination. The imagination is, therefore, not only reproductive but also *productive*, for it determines the form of sense *a priori* in accordance with the unity of apperception. The transcendental synthesis of the imagination is “an effect of the understanding on sensibility and its first application [...] to objects of the intuition” (ibid., B 152).

All that being said, the problem of subsuming the figured synthesis under an intellectual synthesis remains. The pure concepts of understanding are, in fact, heterogeneous in comparison to sensible intuitions. The problem of synthetic judgments is, therefore, that of determining the meaning from a universal point of view as a possible reference to an object. The issue concerns the formal conditions of possibility of transition from sense to meaning. That is, in other words, the issue of the condition of possibility for the application of categories of a possible meaning to the sense of what can be known as a perception in space and time. And this is where the transcendental doctrine of the faculty of judgment, and particularly of the transcendental scheme as the sensitive condition under which only the concepts of the intellect can be used, comes into play.

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resolved into a plurality of subjects, and hence a logically simple subject, lies already in the concept of thinking, and is consequently an analytic proposition” (Kant 1998, B 407).

<sup>2</sup> In an autographed note on his working copy (first ed.), Kant substituted *einer Funktion der Seele* with *einer Funktion des Verstandes* (understanding); cf. Kant 1881, 45.



## 2.1 Transcendental scheme and the monogram as a complex sign

Since the synthesis of representations is rooted in imagination, the synthetic unity required for judgment is based on the principle of supreme unity, that is, as aforementioned, a *Grundsatz*, an analytical proposition. But the principle of the logical self is accessible only through its exemplification.<sup>3</sup> The empirical self exemplifies the logical self, but it implies the latter as the condition of possibility of every general synthesis always already exemplified. The logical self is given in time, and as the unity of time is not thinkable as a concept, rather as a condition of possibility for the determination *a priori* of the sense, this is where the transcendental scheme comes into play as a third homogeneous element between understanding and sensibility.

The transcendental scheme is a “mediating representation [...] yet intellectual on the one hand and sensible on the other” (Kant 1998, B 177). On the one hand, the concept contains the synthetic unity in general, on the other, time as the formal condition of the manifold of internal sense is contained in every empirical representation of the manifold. In other words, *time* is the *homogeneous element* common to sensibility and understanding, its transcendental determination being homogeneous as regards the category of the unity of manifold. And since time is the scheme of the concepts of understanding, it also mediates the subsumption of the latter under the former. *The sensitive manifold is mainly temporal*, and it implies the *becoming* of manifoldness, namely the *act of synthesis*, which is, let us repeat, the action of combining different representations together and comprehending, that is, synthetizing, their manifoldness into one cognition.

The transcendental scheme is in itself always only a product of imagination, and it is distinct from the *image* (*Bilde*) (ibid., B 179). Kant gives the example of the image of five points “.....”, defining it as an image of the number five, and distinguishing it from the number 5, which is the universal *mode* imagination proceeds to connect to a concept, an image. This *mode* is the scheme on the basis of the sensible concept (*sinnliche Begriff*). The scheme constitutes, therefore, the *sign* for the sensible concept, and it is a rule to determine our intuition through an *image*. In other words, the

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<sup>3</sup> “The proposition of the identity of myself in everything manifold of which I am conscious is equally one lying in the concepts themselves, and hence an analytic proposition; but this identity of the subject, of which I can become conscious in every representation, does not concern the intuition of it, through which it is given as object, and thus cannot signify the identity of the person [...]; in order to prove that what would be demanded is not a mere analysis of the proposition ‘I think,’ but rather various synthetic judgments grounded on the given intuition” (Kant 1998, B 408–9).

scheme mediates among an object as it appears to the subject, the empirical intuition, and the concept. *It is, indeed, what determines the sense through the sign.* As Kant argues:

the **image** is a product of the empirical faculty of productive imagination, the **schema** of sensible concepts (such as figures in space) is a product and as it were a *monogram* [italic added] of pure *a priori* imagination, through which and in accordance with which the images first become possible, but which must be connected with the concept, to which they are in themselves never fully congruent, always only by means of the schema that they designate. The schema of a pure concept of the understanding, on the contrary, is something that can never be brought to an image at all, but is rather only the pure synthesis, in accord with a rule of unity according to concepts in general, which the category expresses, and is a transcendental product of the imagination, which concerns the determination of the inner sense in general, in accordance with conditions of its form (time) in regard to all representations, insofar as there are to be connected together *a priori* in one concept in accord with the unity of apperception.

Kant 1998, B 181

The scheme is nothing but *a priori time-determinations*, that is, “the sensible concept of an object, in agreement with the category” (ibid., B 186). And it is the only way to provide concepts of understanding with a relation to objects, thus with *meaning* (*Bedeutung*). Therefore, *the meaning is the relationship between concepts and objects*. Kant gives the example of the concept of dog, which “signifies a rule” in accordance with which the imagination can identify “the shape [*Gestalt*] of a four-footed animal in general, without being restricted to any particular shape that experience offers me or any possible image [*Bild*] that I can exhibit *in concreto*” (ibid., B 180).<sup>4</sup> The meaning of the concept of dog is exemplified by images, and it has to be representable as a way to provide the concept with *sense*. In other words, the meaning must be the condition of exemplification of concepts.

To sum up, the imagination produces something to give to some sensible figures (*Figuren*) a conceptual form. Such a something produced by imagination is a *scheme* which mediates among empirical intuitions, namely objects of experience, and the concept, namely a determined meaning, the nature of which is “as it were” that of a *complex sign*, namely a *monogram*.

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<sup>4</sup> As Matherne argues, “we could think of the sensible aspect of a schema as involving a *gestalt*, i. e., a sensible, holistic presentation of a concept” (Matherne 2014, 188).

Now, in “The Transcendental Doctrine of Method”, Kant defines monogram as an “outline” [*Umriss*] “of the whole into members” (A 833/B 862), and in the “Transcendental Dialectic” as “a wavering sketch” [*schwebende Zeichnung*], composed of “individual traits, though not determined through any assignable rule”, which mediates between various experiences [*verschiedener Erfahrungen*],<sup>5</sup> “such as what painters and physiognomists say they have in their heads”. These *Erfahrungen* are necessarily *vague*. The monogram is here similar to “an incommunicable silhouette [*nicht mitzuteilendes Schattenbild*]”, an *indeterminate image* which can, though only improperly, be called an “ideal of sensibility”, because it is supposed to be “the unattainable model for possible empirical intuitions”. And yet, at the same time, it is “not supposed to provide any rule capable of being explained or tested” (A 570/B 598).

A monogram is therefore a sensible, holistic, still indeterminate *figure* (composed of individual traits) of how the various marks of a meaning become manifest in a unified sensible way. It is a “nascent” meaning, like a point on the border between two surfaces—that of the sensible manifold and that of conceptual unity—that is vague in still having a sense *in individuo* (a kind of “ideal of sensibility”<sup>6</sup>), and, even if not representing a semantic rule, it would eventually become general, as representing the possible meaning. The scheme is the mode of imagination which determines the sense by attributing to the latter a complex sign (monogram), having a still vaguely significant character.

## 2.2 Frege's “sign's sense” and Kant's schematism

Now, the “complex sign” can be considered *as* what Frege defined a “*sense of sign*”, that is, a mode of presentation of the sensible figures not yet determined through any assignable semantic rule. To better understand the connection between Frege and Kant we have to refer to “The Transcendental Aesthetics”. Here, Kant argues that the effect of an object on the capacity for representation is *sensation*. The intuition related to the object through sensation is empirical, and the “undetermined object of an empirical intuition is called **appearance** [*Erscheinung*]” (Kant 1998, B 34). The sensitive intuition is only given in the process of mediation, that is, through the formal conditions of time and space. These conditions determine the *sense* of appearance; they then can be seen as the “mode of

<sup>5</sup> The English translation of *Erfahrungen* in this passage is “appearances” (Kant 1998).

<sup>6</sup> As Kant argues, an ideal is “an individual thing” merely determined through the idea (A 568/B 596; A 574/B 602).

presentation" of something as *sense* and as determinability of sense by concept/meaning.<sup>7</sup>

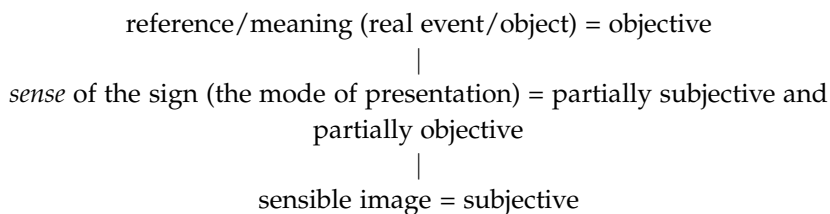
The expression "mode of presentation" used here is Frege's expression. Frege conceives the "sign's sense" as the mode of presentation of the sense by a sign. Taking Frege's example of the observation of the moon through the telescope, we can consider the optical image of the moon projected in the telescope as one-sided and dependent upon the standpoint of observation, but it is still different from the retinal image of the observer, and from the moon as an object. The optical image is still objective, "inasmuch as it can be used by several observers" (Frege 1960, 60), whereas the retinal image is subjective because each one would have his retinal image. In other words, similar to the glass object in the interior of the telescope, space and time are the formal conditions for the sign's sense to designate the "moon" through an image that is analogous to the Kantian scheme. That image of the intuition is the sign's sense, namely the sensible image (retinal image) of empirical intuition.<sup>8</sup> The real object is, instead, the reference or *meaning*. The distinction between meaning, sense, and image depends on the gradual approach to objectivity. The meaning is objective as the object, the sensible image is completely subjective, whereas the sign's sense "may be the common property of many and therefore is not a part or a mode of the individual mind" (Frege 1960, 59).<sup>9</sup> The sign's sense partially depends on the observation point, that is from the subjective perspective, but it can also be understood by other subjects, and this is proved by the fact that "mankind has a common store of thoughts which is transmitted from one generation to another" (Frege 1960, 59). Thus, the condition of possibility of a sign's sense is related to a diachronic network of *senses* of sign and meanings. We may schematize Frege's distinction as follows:

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<sup>7</sup> J.P. Nolan argued that "Kant should not use 'Sinn' in any but those contexts concerned with sensibility" (Nolan, 1979, 116). Despite Nolan's view, I will try to develop an interpretation of the notion of *Sinn* as partially akin to Frege's notion of "*Sinn des Zeichens*".

<sup>8</sup> "If the reference of a sign is an object perceivable by the senses, my idea of it is an internal image, arising from memories of sense impressions which I have had and acts, both internal and external, which I have performed" (Frege 1960, 59).

<sup>9</sup> "If two persons picture the same thing, each still has his own idea. It is indeed sometimes possible to establish differences in the ideas, or even in the sensations, of different men; but an exact comparison is not possible, because we cannot have both ideas together in the same consciousness" (Frege 1960, 60).



The relationships that usually intervene among sign, sense of sign, and reference are

to the sign corresponds a definite sense and to that in turn a definite reference, while to a given reference (an object) there does not belong only a single sign. *The same sense has different expressions* in different languages or even in the same language. To be sure, exceptions to this regular behavior occur. To every expression belonging to a complete totality of signs, there should certainly correspond a definite sense; but natural languages often do not satisfy this condition, and one must be content if the same word has the same sense in the same context. Frege 1960, 58. Italics added.

It is worth noting that Frege argues that a sense can be meaningless, but a meaning cannot be senseless. He then suggests distinguishing the signs having only a sense from signs having sense and meaning, naming the first ones “images” (*Bild*) (Frege 1960, 63). Such images are not related to the question of their truth value,<sup>10</sup> but rather to subjects’ aesthetic delight (as that of painters). Nevertheless, as Frege argues, the sense of two signs, “a” and “b” may differ from each other, and thereby the thoughts expressed are different, not having the same cognitive value.

Now, Frege’s reference to the sign’s sense as an *image* is particularly interesting. The sense of sign is, in fact, something related to the dynamic nature of the construction of sense through sign. In this regard, pivotal is Frege’s reference to the actor and implicitly to the latter’s linguistic and gestural behaviour on the stage as an *image* (Frege 1960, 63 n).

We can then see Frege’s “image” as the dynamic *mode* of presentation of the sense (similar to the Kantian’s *Gestalt*) as the *mode* of giving a complex sign, mediating between sense and concept.

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<sup>10</sup> “We are therefore driven into accepting the *truth value* of a sentence as constituting its reference” (Frege 1960, 63)

### 2.3. Scheme of action, figurative synthesis, and sign

Makkreel suggests that “as a schema a monogram cannot be empirical and must be understood as a rule for generating configurations of lines” (Makkreel 1990, 31). However, the question that arises is how do I recognize an object or event previous to my experience of it? Since, according to Kant, all our cognition begins with experience, and the transcendental is nothing more than what makes cognition from experience possible, this means that, to understand the concept of e. g., a dog, an empirical counterfactual is needed. So that the scheme does not remain on a purely syntactic level, namely a mere relation of signs without any cognizable determination, it has to be considered primarily as a *scheme of action* related to experience. Thus, previous to the application of the rule of the scheme which involves the determination of *sense through the sign* as the condition for judgment, the process of comprehension, namely the process of interpretation through the mediation of object or event, should be initiated. Otherwise, we would have to presuppose a previous comprehension of the concept of the object, e. g., the dog, that is to say, we would have to presuppose an innate comprehension of empirical concepts.

The question about the transcendental structures of *meaning (Bedeutung)* is the same as the question about the conditions of possibility of determination of the *sense of a sign (or of a complex sign determined by individual traits)*: what are such conditions? Are they related to a formal structure of meaning as concepts presupposed by the semantical and logical-syntactic nature of signs, or have we to assume an action which realizes the determination of sense through the production of sign empirically? According to the first approach, a transcendental semantics is developed assuming an already complete theory of meaning as correspondence (cf. Hogebe 1974). According to the second approach, the process of determination of sense is part of a semiotic process in which the rules of determination of sense and intensionality refer to a *synthetic act of constructing a complex sign*, that is, what Kant calls monogram as mediating between sense and concept.

Assuming that the *image* is a product of the empirical productive imagination, and the *schema* of the *figures in space* is a product of pure *a priori* imagination, that the scheme can be seen as a *scheme of action* related to experience, being the homogeneous element between the *dynamic* sensitive manifold and the unity of concept as meaning, and that *imagination* as the faculty between sensibility and understanding *produces* both the image and schema and *determines* the passage between dynamic sensitive manifold and intellectual unity, we can then suppose that imagination

determines the sense by *producing* complex signs composed by individual traits which act as semantic and syntactic elements for understanding. Monogram, in fact, interweaves signs analogous to that which figurative syntheses do through the scheme of time. Since concepts are predicates of possible judgments, the scheme provides them with semiotic and syntactic elements. Within this framework, time would be interpreted as the diachronic form, on the basis of a syntagmatic relationship among the elements of different signs (phonemes and other material characters). Time is, in fact, the formal condition of passage from sense to the concept. In this sense, we speak of the *scheme of action*, for the scheme is not limited to a purely syntactic level. Thus, the mechanism of language seems to be rooted in it; the scheme being the semiotic condition of the conjunction between sensation, sign, and that to which the sign refers.

At this point, however, there is an issue which we have to face: How are the complex signs built, and how also are their syntagmatic relations?

To face this issue, I propose to intersect the above reflections on Kant's transcendental scheme and Frege's concept of sign's sense with Morris' notion of "sign vehicle". What in fact Frege calls the "*sense of sign*", namely "the mode of presentation" of the reference (Frege 1960, 57), seems to be very close to Morris' idea of the relationship between sign and *designatum* or *significatum* (Morris 1938a, 23; 1948).

### 3. Morris' sign vehicle

A "sign vehicle" is a *sensible event*, namely a physical perceptual event that functions as a sign (Morris 1938a, 1946, 1964).<sup>11</sup> Morris distinguishes between "sign vehicle" and "sign", arguing that the first is anything physical (a physical perceptual event such as a sound, a movement, etc.) that acts as a sign; the second is something that directs behaviour towards something, the observability of the "sign vehicle" not involving that of the sign.

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<sup>11</sup> Morris often overlaps "sign vehicle" and "sign". The *sign* is part of a semiotic process consisting of six factors: (1) the sign vehicle (s), namely what acts as a sign, (2) the *designatum* or *significatum* (D), which indicates what the sign refers to, (3) the interpretant (I), which indicates the effect that the sign has (4) on the interpreter and (5) the context in which the sign is used. A further factor is (6) the *denotatum*, which differs from the *designatum* (or *significatum*) because while the latter indicates a type of object that has properties that the interpreter recognizes thanks to the presence of the sign vehicle, regardless of the presence of real objects or situations, the former is the reference object of a real object.

In the context of this paper, I refer to sign vehicle as a *sensible event* interpreted as determinability of sense which is also seen as the recognition of an image yet still indeterminate. In the case of *sign factors in perception* that are the sensible event that we are focusing on here, the signs become “interconnected because the sign vehicles are interconnected” (Morris 1938a, 12). Sign vehicles are then the sensible side of the *interpretant*, namely a habit, which an individual has, to construct some sense of signs.<sup>12</sup> In other words, sign vehicle is the sensible construction of the passage from sensible event and the sense of the sign which stimulates some responses to it. Now, Morris’ idea that a sign vehicle has a semantic dimension in so far as there are semantic rules “which determine its applicability to certain situations under certain conditions” (1938a, 24),<sup>13</sup> seems similar to Kant’s idea that a concept is applicable to a sensible image in so far as there are some “rules” which determine its applicability to certain empirical intuitions under certain conditions. The sign vehicle *designates* the object for the sign’s sense, being, in a Kantian perspective, the sensible image of the empirical intuition. And it thus supports the three types of relationships with the sensible event (existential dimension), the signifying process (pragmatic dimension), and the relationship between signs (syntactic dimension).<sup>14</sup>

Now, similar to Kant’s proposal, there are also, in Morris’ theory, some problematic issues. Particularly, according to Morris, the sign vehicle is used to denote objects similar to “models”, following the rules for the use of a sign vehicle by means of other sign vehicles whose rules of use are not themselves a matter of discussion. To assume this rule, if, on the one hand, it safeguards the semiotic theory from a *regressus in infinitum* in the determination of the rules for the use of a sign vehicle, on the other hand, in assuming that there are some rules of the use of sign vehicles already determined and out of discussion, Morris does not solve the problem of the relation between the unity of concept and the indeterminate mani-

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<sup>12</sup> The interpretant characterizes the pragmatic dimension of the semiosis in Morris’ theory: it indicates the disposition of the interpretant to respond to a sign. Dewey has criticized Morris’ use of the notions of “interpreter” and “interpretant”, accusing him of misinterpreting Peirce by converting the interpretant into an interpreter. Morris admits his attempt to carry out Peirce’s approach to semiotics in a resolute way, but also criticises Dewey for not being able to see the close relationship between these two concepts in Peirce (Morris 1948, 289)

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Morris 1938a, 6–7.

<sup>14</sup> “If the reference of a sign is an object perceivable by the senses, my idea of it is an internal image, arising from memories of sense impressions which I have had and acts, both internal and external, which I have performed” (Frege 1960, 59).



fold sensible experience which provokes the semiotic process. In other words, the question of Kant's schematism remains: how do I recognize the rule of application of a sign vehicle to a sensible event that I am experiencing? Morris tries to reply to this question by appealing to the pragmatic dimension of sign vehicle. Previous to the application of the rule of the application of sign vehicle, which involves the determination of *sense through the sign* in the process of comprehension, the process of interpretation through the mediation of object or event should be initiated. Indeed, the semiotic process represents the *scheme of action* related to experience. However, following his rules for the use of a sign vehicle, a previous comprehension of the concept of the object, namely the same sign vehicle that should follow the sensible event, is presupposed. In fact, it seems that it is not possible to disregard the ideal dimension in the process of interpretation of a sign vehicle by an interpreter. Even if we invert the order between concept and sign vehicle, referring to the concepts as present when sign vehicles of a certain type occur, the difficulty is not solved. A sensible event of the view of e.g., a dog recalls to the individual the concept of dog which "signifies a rule" in accordance with which the imagination can identify the shape of a four-footed animal in general, without being restricted to any particular shape that experience offers to the individual or any possible image that he can exhibit *in concreto*. As seen above, the concept of dog is exemplified by images, and it has to be representable as a way to provide the concept with *sense*, which in Morris' semiotics is the sign vehicle. Then one should ask oneself if concepts cannot be identified with the interpreters of these signs. Nonetheless, this does not solve the question of the definition of the experience prior to sign vehicle, offering no explanation of the passage from non-signity to signity.<sup>15</sup>

There is, however, a fundamental difference between Kant and Morris that could help to break this deadlock, namely the different meanings they have of the *a priori*. According to Kant, *a priori* is the knowledge that takes place independently of experience, attributing to judgment necessity and rigorous universality. Distinguishing the "pure" *a priori* knowledge, which is that with which nothing empirical is mixed, and the *a priori* which is in the simply logical, chronological or psychological sense, he refers to the "pure" *a priori* as at the basis of the structure of knowledge. Morris (1937), on the contrary, refers to "*a priori*" as the product of a dynamic process. In particular, he does not consider the *a priori* as static and im-

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<sup>15</sup> On this critical aspect of Morris' theory see Hoguebe 1974, Garroni 1977.

mutable, but rather subject to change through contact with new data that we come across through its use, and through changes in a *continuous spiral process*. This implies that the *a priori* is variable and must be interpreted as the result of empirical generalizations, or rather of regularity, transformed over time into rules. Behind this idea is Morris' assumption that static formalism that evaluates meaning in terms of significance is only possible admitting that the system of meanings is *stable* but not static, that it is in the becoming process because it primarily refers to the becoming nature of human beings. Morris' "*a priori* variable", therefore, indicates a set of meanings through which empirical data are approached to and to which logical analysis refers. In this perspective, every *sensible event* is already a *sign vehicle*, since the same distinction between the non-signic and signic dimensions is part of the semiotic process, the latter being already included in the perceptive activation and the identification of the sensitive stimulus. But being already a sign vehicle does not mean that we have the same universal structure for our immutable rational "essence", rather because we construct our way to mediate with reality in our evolving process. On this point, Morris follows Peirce's idea that there is no *primum cognitum* and Mead's theory of signs that supported the bio-social and procedural nature of logical thought, highlighting its constitutive sign character on the basis of the constitution of behavioural habits.<sup>16</sup>

From this perspective, we can face the question about the conditions of possibility of the determination of *sign vehicle* related to a formal structure of meanings as concepts. In particular, we can try to reply to the question of how the sign vehicles construct the sign's sense and what act realizes the determination of the sense of the sign vehicle through the empirical production of the sign.

What we need to identify is a process of determination of sense as part of an act of constructing the sign vehicle in a context of habits of responses to some empirical stimuli. Our proposal, then, needs some further development, appealing to another aspect that derives from the Pragmatist tra-

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<sup>16</sup> As Morris (1938b) claims, his behavioural semiotics is the result of the combination of Peirce's general theory of meaning and logic as general semiotics with Mead's social psychology. According to him, despite the difference between Peirce and Mead with regard to their philosophical attitude—the first more metaphysical, the latter more connected to the context in which the thought was taking place—Mead's theory of signs appeared to be in agreement with Peirce's results through logical analysis, without making it necessary to interpret these results in an idealistic manner. Morris tried to integrate the two perspectives in the elaboration of a pragmatic semiotic that combined traditional empiricism, logical positivism, and critical pragmatism.

dition, namely the concept of gesture. In fact, we might try to indicate the act of the interpretant as a *gesture* that synthesizes through the sign vehicle the sensible image of the object. In particular, a *gesture* has to be regarded as a dynamic *sensible* synthesis *bearing* an *identity* between the sensible manifold of the sign vehicle and the *sense of sign*. I propose, in fact, that the notion of gesture, defined from a pragmatic logic-semiotic perspective, could contribute to overcoming the sensibility-understanding dichotomy, that is, the dichotomy between the sensitive dimension of experience and the logic-semantic dimension of thought, helping to understand how the mode of presentation of a dynamic sense is given dynamically. On this point, however, I will not appeal, as might seem natural for my references to Morris' semiotics, to Mead's notion of gesture. Mead's conception of gesture, in fact, is clearly related to the beginning of acts which serves as a stimulus for a response of another organism (Mead 1934). That is, as Morris (1946, 43) argues, more similar to a signal than to a sign vehicle.

For my aim, I need a notion of gesture which already presupposes some complexity, because I am referring here to the way of connection of the sensible manifold with the unitary concept in a logic-semiotic process. Therefore, in what follows I will refer to Maddalena's theory of gesture.

#### 4. Maddalena's theory of gesture

In *Philosophy of Gesture* (2015), Maddalena proposes a new paradigm of synthetic reasoning that considers gestures as the ordinary way in which we carry the meaning of *identity through change*. The word "gesture" is taken from its Latin origin "*gero*", the etymology of which is "I bear", "I carry on", but also "I produce", "I show", "I represent". As Maddalena puts it, gesture is "any performed act with a beginning and an end that carries a meaning [...] pragmatically understood as the cluster of conceivable effects of an experience" (Maddalena 2015, 69–70).

With his "conceptual tool", Maddalena aims at overhauling the Kantian distinctions between synthetic and analytic reasoning as well as between subject and object, and at overcoming the sensibility-understanding dichotomy. A gesture coincides, in fact, with a synthesis bearing with it the recognition of an identity between two parts of a transitional experience. He refers to the "forms of the synthesis" and to the analytic composition of gesture synthesis, revoking through singular gestures, which substitute Kantian empirical intuitions, the schema part-whole, preserving necessity within the same part-whole schema. In other words, gesture

is a sort of dynamic *outline* of the *whole into members*, which is a complex sign similar to a monogram.<sup>17</sup> In fact, the monogram can be considered as the synthetic construction of the sense of a sign related to the *production* of it from some single sign vehicle in which universal meanings convey as hypotheses. In other words, the determination of the image as the sense of the sign is produced by means of a gesture that allows the connection between the indeterminate sensible event as sign vehicle and the vague sense of the sign. To know “something in a vague way [...] is the beginning of any definition and any gesture” (Maddalena 2015, 82). This means that vagueness is an intermediate kind of reasoning. And this vagueness is related both to the various experiences [*verschiedener Erfahrungen*] and to the wavering sketch [*schwebende Zeichnung*] which mediates between various experiences [*verschiedener Erfahrungen*]. The gesture, therefore, is similar to an *act* of reasoning that determines the sense by attributing to the latter a complex sign having a still vague significant character. And a monogram is similar to a sensible holistic still indeterminate *Gestalt*, a “nascent” meaning, like a point on the border between two surfaces—that of sensible manifold and that of conceptual unity—that is vague yet still has a sense *in individuo* (a sort of “ideal of sensibility”<sup>18</sup>); this eventually becomes general, through its representing the possible meaning of the change from sensible experience to intellectual concept. From this perspective, the sensible representation and the monogram could be considered as a more elementary form of “*moving pictures of thought*”.

I then would modify Maddalena’s definition of gesture as follows: a gesture is a sign vehicle, namely an act with a beginning and an end that carries a *sense*, and that sense carries some possible cognitive and behavioural values. Then, we may say that a gesture is a *synthesis* in which

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<sup>17</sup> It is not by chance that one of Maddalena’s approaches to studying the change is Peirce’s *existential graphs* (the other being that of logical modalities). In particular, according to Peirce and to the synthetic way of reasoning, “working” is the necessary and sufficient condition of reality. Generally speaking, *existential graphs* are the basic iconic level of relationship with the dynamic reality, and it is accordingly the original “evidence” of change through continuity for their being moving pictures of thought which represent “the creation of explanatory conjectures” (Maddalena 2015, 56). The basic idea is that the *conclusion of a synthetic reasoning is perceived in all its generality*, and that the existential graphs are synthetically conveying universals into singulars, the generalization being the analytic result of the diagrams which are “the synthetic happening of generals” (Maddalena 2015, 57). Now, in the context of the reflection developed here, the diagram can be seen as one of the ways of constructing the sign, such as Kant’s monogram.

<sup>18</sup> As Kant argues, an ideal is “an individual thing” merely determined through the idea (A 568/B 596; A 574/B 602).

the initial vague experience of the sensible manifold is linked to the generalized unity of a *sense of sign* through a singular action in that determinate part of experience that refers to our body. In other words, gesture has a complex function, namely that of representing a synthetic process which creates new semiotic habits to some sensible experience.

Now, if the gesture is the synthetic performance of continuity, the latter can be known only *a posteriori* through its expression in the product of a synthesis. We therefore witness a reconstruction of both the analytic/synthetic distinctions as two essential parts of the experience processes. The analysis of elements composing the synthetic reasoning is always *a posteriori*, different from Kant's affirmation that analytic judgments are always *a priori*, as *a priori* is the unity of apperception as *ein analytischer Satz*. But since there is no *primum cognitum*—as Peirce stated in the context of his criticism of intuition and as we have seen Morris takes up in his idea of “*a priori* variable”—we have to conclude that synthetic and analytic reasoning are two sides of the same process of “embodied” experience.

## 5. Gesture as an act of synthesis

We can now recover Kant's notion of schema. If we assume time as the formal condition of the mode of presentation of something as appearance and as *sense*, time is then at the basis of the constitution of apprehension of the transcendental scheme. Time is the condition of passage from sense to a concept. As seen above, we speak of a *scheme of action*. The scheme, as it is in the case of the monogram, presents both sensible and intellectual dynamic dimensions. So, the scheme precedes the concepts, but they are also unified under the unity of time, which accompanies all the synthesis in continuity. Time as the form of internal intuition is included in the continuity of the self's perceptions of the objects; it is thence the *medium* of passing from the indeterminate sensible manifold to the determinate object of concept. The scheme can be seen as the *how* between image and concept; it is the condition of determinability of sense, which can be nothing but a sign-vehicle.

However, it goes without saying that an image is a sensible form occupying a space. The idea of a *figurative synthesis* suggests that the schemata of pure intellectual concepts first conceived in terms of time, not only may (as according to Makkreel 1990, 31) but *do* also incorporate some *spatial qualities* associated with the schemata of pure sensible concepts.

How could we think about an image as a vehicle sign that does not fill space? Now, if the construction of graphic signs, namely monographs, needs time, which is the condition of the synthesis of images, and if these graphic signs are traced in space, we could imagine the construction as a *gesture* carrying with it the dynamicity of time *and* space. The *sense* of sign is akin to an aesthetic dimension rooted in the gesture as regarded as an act with a beginning and an end, constructing an image of motion that carries a *sense*. In other words, a gesture is a *sensible event* carrying with it both the sensorimotor dimension and the determinability of sense. Such a sensible event is a sign vehicle which determines the sense of sign, allowing the recognition of a sensible manifold in the unity of a graphic act by focusing on its potential cognitive values different from determinate meaning. Meanings are in fact, in this framework, concepts that arise empirically, namely *a posteriori*. Schemes as the product of a construction are the (empirical) determinability of sense. Therefore, if we consider gesture as an act, or better a synthetic act, we can interpret the sense of a gesture as part of a “common store of senses transmitted from one generation to another” (Frege 1960, 59).

So, to sum up, my main idea is that gesture determines the sense of sign through the construction of the image of sense starting from a sign vehicle. For this reason, it can be regarded as a para-linguistic sign which is part of the syntagmatic construction of linguistic sense through graphic and phonetic elements (Saussure),<sup>19</sup> highlighting the intersection of reality, sign vehicle, and sign’s sense. The gesture is, therefore, a dynamic semiotic device which moves in time and space carrying with itself a *sense*, which in turn carries some potentially different cognitive values. It is a conceptual tool that allows us to highlight the indissoluble unity of the different characters of sensibility and the determining logical-semiotic character of thought. It constructs its own sense, producing the graphic sign for the concept. For this reason, the pragmatic dimension is presupposed in the semantic and syntactic dimension: gesturing (acting, writing, saying) has physical value, and since it produces itself on the threshold of thought, it makes something happen, namely a synthesis of “sense” and “sign”. It has a sensible nature, and since it is rooted in the phenomenological/appearance dimension, it can be seen as a vague image communicating something to someone. Since it constructs a sign as re-

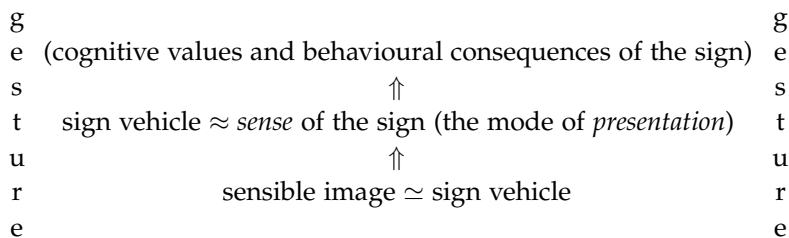
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<sup>19</sup> Monogram can, therefore, be considered as a kind of *signifier* (cf. Saussure 1965 [1922]) which provides concepts with a relation to objects.

lated to a sense, that is, a sense's sign, it allows the connection between sense and sign.

We can now provide a provisional definition of gesture as follows: *a gesture is an act of synthesis that functions as a semiotic para-linguistic device constructing hypothetical senses of a sign.*

The hypothetical character is related to the logical category of possibility and to the idea that there can be different cognitive values for different interpretations of gesture and then different cognitive and behavioural consequences.<sup>20</sup> In this respect, Frege's scheme is modified as follows



Frege's view of different signs senses related to different cognitive values is consistent with the view according to which gestures carry the possibility of conferring more than a sign to more than a sense. Time is the formal condition of its possibility and the dynamic nature of the construction of sense open to the construction of *identity through change* (Maddalena 2015).<sup>21</sup> This idea seems to be more akin to Frege's idea of the sign of sense as an image (*Bild*) as well as a behavioural-linguistic sign (as it is for the actor as an image).

To refer to a sign as an image, as a figure that has no meaning but makes sense, offers us the possibility of recalling the transcendental scheme and to trace in the sensation the anchoring factor of the mediating activity of gesture as a logical-semiotic tool not yet determined, and therefore vague as the experiences that it mediates, that *builds* in time and space *the sense of a sign* recognizable in the *image* of the scheme.

## 6. Conclusion. For a quasi-transcendental semiotics

The proposal I am making here as a synthesis of the entire reflection carried out so far is as follows. We could try to put together the sign vehicle

<sup>20</sup> On this point see Mead (1934) and Morris (1946)

<sup>21</sup> In this respect, insight is needed into Peirce's notion of teridentity as "the continuity of possibilities of an individual considered to be a changing object in its becoming" (Maddalena 2015, 61).

as a sensible event *via* Morris, the idea of the sensitive representation *via* Frege and the Kantian monogram. In doing so, it would be possible to read the sensitive representation and the monogram as more elementary forms of *moving pictures*. A gesture is therefore the construction of this moving picture which has to be repeatable to become a *rule* determining the sense of a sign potentially, that is to become a *scheme of action*. Such rule functions as criteria of reference for the observability of performances and re-performances of gestures, becoming a common social property and therefore a tool to communicate and understand common senses. However, in consequence of the evolutionary and processual nature of human knowledge, rules of determination of the sense of signs are not static and immutable elements. As seen above, referring to Morris' variable *a priori* to express a set of meanings in terms of which empirical data are approached in logical analysis, the *a priori* is not static or immutable; it rather undergoes change through contact with the new data which are encountered through its use, and through changes in human interests and purposes. Every change provides new content to logical analyses which in turn affect the content and structure of the *a priori* in a spiral process (Morris 1937, 51). Therefore, the *a priori* has to be interpreted as the product of some empirical generalizations, namely regularities transformed through *time* in rules.

The hypothetical and fluctuating character of semantic rules has then to be considered as the benchmark of a quasi-transcendental semiotics. The adjective quasi-transcendental is meant here to point out the hypothetical and fluctuating character of semantic rules. In line with Morris' idea of the *a priori*, the quasi-transcendental semiotics is in an ambivalent position between constitutive<sup>22</sup> and constructive semiotics. There is no tautological identity, as there was for the Kantian transcendental *apperception*, and it is not related to a referential theory of meaning. For this reason, the use of the expression quasi-transcendental has to do first with the pragmatic character of the acts of synthesis. Such character comes before both semantic and logical-syntactic aspects, whereas the regulative character has to do with the hypothetical modifications and the creative construction of signs that would determine both the semantic rules and their variations.

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<sup>22</sup> In the sense of the Kantian conditions of possibilities—that are neither totally logical nor empirical—in passing from sense to concept.



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# Kant and Pragmatists: On the Supremacy of Practice over Theory

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## 1. Introduction

The perspective from which I would like to explore the Kant-and-pragmatism issue is a perspective which emphasizes the importance of the relation between theory and practice, awareness of this relation, and the deliberate influence on its subject.<sup>1</sup> In my opinion, this is a genuine and crucial feature of the pragmatist movement, which changes from Peirce through James and Dewey to the neopragmatists, and this change is not chaotic—this is a tendency to increase the supremacy of practice over theory. Thus, this is a perspective from which I shall attempt to look at Kant’s vision of philosophy, morals, and science; I shall examine the thesis of Kant being a precursor of some ideas crucial to the pragmatist movement (e. g., Peirce 1998 [1905], 332–3; Putnam 1988, 42–2) and his ideological proximity to pragmatism. The purpose of this paper is as follows: Firstly, I shall analyse and compare Kant’s, Peirce’s, Dewey’s, and Rorty’s reasons for claiming the primacy of practice. I have chosen Peirce’s, Dewey’s, and Rorty’s positions among all pragmatist thinkers as they are the most explicitly expressed and they remain in interesting relation to each other (e. g., Peirce’s and Dewey’s discussion on Dewey’s *Studies in Logical Theory* (1903) which in fact concerns the role of practice in human cognition

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<sup>1</sup> This is a revised and enlarged version of a paper presented in July 2017 at the Pragmatist Kant Conference, in Berlin. I want to thank the following organizers of the Conference: Sami Pihlström, Krzysztof Piotr Skowroński, and Maja Niestrój, for their kind invitation and all participants for insightful, stimulating, and friendly discussions and in particular for comments on my paper.

processes or Rorty's critical comments on Peirce as "the most Kantian of thinkers" (Rorty 1982, 161). Kantian roots in Peirce's philosophy are also significant.

Secondly, I shall attempt to answer the questions: on Kant's pragmatism: "How pragmatic is his postulate concerning the supremacy of practice over theory?" and on Kantian pragmatism: "How much of Kant's legacy concerning theory-practice relation is present in the pragmatist thought?" I shall consider also whether and how Kant's view on the capacities of the mind and their relation to each other could enrich the pragmatist view, or whether maybe, in spite of his (outwardly) pragmatist claim of the primacy of practice, Kant's doctrine remains isolated from the pragmatist spirit.

Finally, I shall explore the consequences of the pragmatist approach to the theory-practice distinction and rejection of Kant's stance to this subject-matter. I shall analyse what differences of visions of human intellectual activity Kant's and pragmatists' doctrines provide us with and what their strengths and weaknesses are.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. Immanuel Kant

When followed through the history of philosophy, traces of the thesis concerning the supremacy of practice over theory lead to the passages of Kant's second Critique on "the primacy of pure practical reason and its connection with the speculative" (Kant 2015 [1788], 97–8). Moreover, traces of the term "pragmatism" also lead to Kant—this is at least how Peirce justifies his decision of choosing this term for his doctrine (Peirce 1998 [1905], 332–3).

Let us now consider in what sense and why Kant introduces the terms "practical" and "pragmatic".

Kant was a philosopher who had much to say about the distinction between theoretical and practical philosophy and between the practical and speculative reason, as this distinction was his way to face the problem "how to preserve the unlimited rights of modern science, its mathematical method, and the ensuing Cartesian spirit without surrendering genuine ethics" (Lobkowitz 1967, 123). His idea was to establish two entirely dif-

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<sup>2</sup> At this point, I can only mention the problem of the pragmatists' approach to the theory-practice distinction. In fact, I treat it more like a tool to compare Kant's and the pragmatists' stances than like a subject-matter itself. An attempt to address the question of theory-practice distinction in the pragmatists' thought is made in my latest book (Hensoldt 2018).

ferent domains of competence: of modern mathematical physics and of ethics. As the domain of the modern physics is the phenomenal world, the noumenal world is exclusively the domain of ethics.

However, Kant had to face a long history of the use of terms such as “philosophy of morals”, “practical philosophy”, and “ethics” in a significantly wider sense than referring to only supersensible realities. This is the reason why Kant introduced a distinction between “practical” and “pragmatic”. To my knowledge, the first time Kant mentioned this distinction was in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, where he distinguished between the practical and the pragmatic (Kant 1998 [1781], 674). In *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, he developed this distinction, by identifying three types of principles (imperatives): the technical principle, the pragmatic principle, and the moral principle. In each of these cases, the mode of the will’s necessitation is different: “either *rules* of skills, or *counsels* of prudence, or *commands (laws)* of morality” (Kant 2012 [1785], 30). The pragmatic imperative relates to counsels of prudence. Kant mentions two meanings of prudence: “worldly prudence” and “private prudence”. Both of them are skills to reach given aims: “to have influence on others in order to use them for his aims” or “to unite all these aims to his own enduring advantage” (Kant 2012 [1785], 29). In fact, Kant approves only of the latter use of prudence, whereas the first one he calls “slyness”. More important to me now is the fact that pragmatic imperatives are always formed in order to reach an empirical aim. This is the reason why Kant differentiates between pragmatic imperatives and moral imperatives, the latter being directed towards supersensible aims. The distinction helps Kant to exclude from practical philosophy disciplines such as political economy, dietetics, or eudaemonistic ethics (“universal doctrine of happiness”)—the disciplines of which domains belong to the sensible world.

One could expect Kant to limit the domain of normative ethical judgements to the same domain which is determined by the categorical imperative. This was not, however, Kant’s strategy. In *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, Kant introduces the “pragmatic knowledge of man” whose subject-matter is human free actions of self-creation: “what *man* as a free agent makes, or can and should make, of himself” (Kant 1974 [1798], 3). Yet, what has to be emphasized is this: pragmatic knowledge considers “man as a *citizen of the [phenomenal] world*” and these aspects of human existence are also subject to ethical judgements, including categories of right and wrong, sin, and moral value (not only of advantage and disadvantage or usefulness). Moreover, Kant seems to be convinced

that pragmatic and moral accounts are (quite often) consistent with one another.

Having made a sharp distinction between two capacities of the mind, the practical and the speculative one, Kant declined the view that they can remain isolated. In his view, such an isolation would result in a conflict of reason with itself. Otherwise, when the supremacy of practical reason over the speculative is postulated, not only the agreement of the reason with itself is preserved, but also there is no damage inflicted on one of the most important tasks of the speculative reason, which is to “constrain speculative frivolity”. In Kant’s view, this primacy of practical reason is possible and even desirable, because the reason in question is pure and insensitive to empirical determination of any sort (which is, according to Kant, always self-love or personal happiness); thus, the exclusion of pragmatic issues from the domain of practical philosophy makes this primacy possible.

### 3. Charles Sanders Peirce

In 1905, Peirce justifies his choice of the term “pragmatism” in the following words:

for one who had learned philosophy out of Kant, as the writer [. . .], and who still thought in Kantian terms most readily, *praktisch* and *pragmatisch* were as far apart as the two poles, the former belonging in a region of thought where no mind of the experimentalist type can ever make sure of solid ground under his feet, the later expressing relation to some definite human purpose. Now quite the most striking feature of the new theory was its recognition of an inseparable connection between rational cognition and rational purpose; and that consideration it was which determined the preference for the name pragmatism.

Peirce 1998 [1905], 332–3

Let us notice that, in this passage, Peirce in fact does not maintain that he is a follower of Kant’s doctrines of the capacities of the mind. On the contrary, he personally finds no use in Kant’s distinction between the practical and the pragmatic, as he is not going to study (or even to refer to) the domain of practical philosophy (in Kant’s perception). However, he admits considering and using Kant’s terminology, which, naturally, cannot be perceived as unimportant. There is also one more very Kantian feature in this passage—this is Peirce’s attachment to rationality. Peirce,

like Kant, is convinced that it is the human rationality which is the source of a connection between the theoretical and the practical.

Yet, Peirce recognizes the nature of this connection differently. According to Kant, this connection is in fact the supremacy of practical reason and is indispensable as it guarantees the agreement of the reason with itself, but, at the same time, it neither expands the cognitive insights nor provides new cognitively justified propositions (Kant 2012 [1788], 154). From Peirce's standpoint, reasons for a connection between the theoretical and the practical are completely different and have no relation with a *a priori* perspective. I would classify them within three groups which are connected with each other, yet refer to various arguments.

The most important argument is the pragmatic maxim itself. It was Peirce who first formulated the maxim of pragmatism and introduced it in "How to Make Our Ideas Clear". This is the maxim which is the original expression of the pragmatist view that there is a close connection between the theoretical (thoughts, sentences, words, signs, etc.) and the practical (experience and conduct). The general message conveyed by the maxim is that, if one asks about meanings of words, signs, theories, etc., one has to look for their practical consequences, for rules of conduct they oblige us to follow. As Peirce, whilst formulating the maxim of pragmatism, had in mind scientific concepts, hypotheses, and theories, the practical consequences and rules of conduct required for "making clear" meanings of these concepts, hypotheses, and theories must be of a general nature. I would call this first argument "the semantic argument", though one can obviously argue that it can be referred to as "logical" or even "linguistic". In fact, all three groups of Peirce's arguments for theory-practice connection hold many common features with logic, as they refer to normative rules of human reasoning.

The close relation between theory and practice is also a consequence of Peirce's rational agent argument (formulated in "The Doctrine of Chances" and "The Fixation of Belief"). Having argued that human cognition (including scientific hypotheses) is essentially probabilistic, Peirce considers its influence on human conduct, and he admits:

Although probability will probably manifests its effect in, say, thousand risks, by a certain proportion between the numbers of successes and failures, yet this, as we have seen, is only to say that it certainly will, at length, do so. Now the number of risks, the number of probable inferences, which a man draws in his whole life, is a finite one, he

cannot be absolutely *certain* that the mean result will accord with the probabilities at all. Peirce 1992 [1878], 148

[...] death makes the number of our risks, of our inferences, finite, and so makes their mean result uncertain. Peirce 1992 [1878], 149

On this view there is, in fact, no guarantee that a single decision (made in an actual life situation) based on logical and/or scientific assumptions would be the best one for life interests of the decision maker. However, this is not the most important issue—as Peirce argues. If one is to be consistent in her/his thinking, decision-making, and conduct, if one is to be rational, one has to follow rules of rational conduct in practice (in everyday life), although they are only of a probabilistic nature.

Rejection of the theory-practice dichotomy also results from a philosophical standpoint called synechism. Peirce explicitly names his approach synechistic in his paper “Immortality in the Light of Synechism” (Peirce 1998 [1893], 1–3). At the beginning of the paper, he refers to the maxim of pragmatism as a formulation of his philosophical synechism. As the core claim of this approach, Peirce introduces a belief that “continuity governs the whole domain of experience in every element of it” (Peirce 1998 [1893], 1). This view certainly remains in conflict with all possible forms of dualism, including the theory-practice dualism. According to Peirce, dualism is “the philosophy which performs its analyses with an axe, leaving as the ultimate elements, unrelated chunks of being” (Peirce 1998 [1893], 2). Hence, the synechistic argument for the close connection between theory and practice claims that a sharp cutting between these two kinds of human activities leads to serious misunderstanding of human cognition and reasoning processes.

What I have to mention here, though very briefly, is that in some of his papers Peirce seems to be inclined to accept the theory-practice dichotomy, although in other papers (most of them), his standpoint is opposite. Particularly nonstandard and ambiguous in this aspect are his *Cambridge Conferences Lectures* (1898). In the first lecture entitled “Philosophy and the Conduct of Life”, Peirce objects to “the Hellenic tendency to mingle philosophy and practice” (Peirce 1992 [1898], 107) and argues that true scientific investigation (including philosophical investigation) must not be conducted with the requirement of utility and with regard to vitality. These ambiguities in Peirce’s stance might be—and in fact have been—a subject-

matter of separate books (e. g., Atkins 2016, Marsecar 2016) which we cannot address here.<sup>3</sup>

At the end of this section, I would like to highlight Kantian features of Peirce's approach to the theory-practice distinction. Although his understanding of the practical side of this distinction is different than Kant's, he is attached to the belief that a theory-practice connection is based on a strictly rational ground. This is most visible in his insistence that practical consequences which are to be included in the meanings of concepts, hypotheses, theories, etc., have to be of a general validity and commonly understandable. The manifestation of Peirce's Kantianism is also present in his balancing between synechism and dichotomy—it can be interpreted as a kind of fear of, and at the same time escape from domination of everyday life, which is too strong, from not always rational or even subjective motives in our cognition.

#### 4. John Dewey

Dewey's views on the relation between the theoretical and the practical can be found in most of his works—if they are not formulated explicitly, they can be quite easily deduced. However, in at least three of his papers, the theory-practice distinction is the subject of explicit analyses: "What Pragmatism Means by 'Practical'", "The Development of American Pragmatism", and "The Logic of Judgements of Practice". Let us examine the

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<sup>3</sup> The aim of this paper excludes developing this motif further. However, it has to be mentioned that Peirce's position on theory-practice distinction, including his famous *Cambridge Conferences Lectures* (1898), has been researched by prominent scholars. According to Christopher Hookway, Peirce's notes on theory and practice in the 1870s and 1890s are inconsistent as they suffer from the lack of proper vocabulary that would grasp the distinction (2002, 21–43). Cheryl Misak holds that there is no serious tension in Peirce's work considering theory and practice and that Peirce's distinction of scientific inquiry and inquiry into vital matters is not fundamental (Misak 2004). Vincent Colapietro has argued that Peirce is not really imposing a strict partition of theory and practice; rather, theory should be conceived as one kind of practice (Colapietro 2006). Mats Bergman highlights the connection between Peirce's advocating theory-practice dichotomy and his intention to keep philosophy free from the external demands (Bergman 2010). Aaron Marsecar perceives Peirce's approach to theory-practice distinction as evolutionary; he associates this evolution with the development of Peirce's account of ethics and concludes that in his late papers (in the 1900s), although Peirce still held a distinction between theory and practice, his approach was more perfected and coherent (Marsecar 2013 and 2016). Peirce's *Cambridge Conferences Lectures* (1898) (particularly the rules of "sentimental conservatism" introduced in the first lecture) are also a subject-matter of Richard K. Atkins's research presented in his latest book (Atkins 2016).



third paper. This is one of the chapters (14<sup>th</sup>) of a book *Essays in Experimental Logic* (1916), in which Dewey objects to the theory-practice antithesis, holding that theory is a mode of practice. He does not prove it in a strict logical sense of the word; however, he discusses it on a variety of grounds: i. a., presenting science as a very specialized kind of practice with origins and aims in everyday life. Science is not only the most emancipated mode of practice, but it is also that mode of practice which emancipates experience (Dewey 1916, 439). Dewey was the first to explicitly deny the theory-practice dualism. Neither Peirce nor James had done this. Conceiving science as a future and practice oriented intellectual activity, Dewey also had to conceive philosophy in this way.

Dewey's strong antidualistic position in respect to the theory-practice dichotomy has its roots in his early paper in logic: "Thought and Its Subject-Matter", where Dewey rejects the conception of pure logic and introduces "applied logic" (Dewey 1903, 6). Dewey argues that, although universally valid laws of reasoning are laws of pure logic, in practice (i.e., in cases when a subject-matter of reasoning is the object of human experience and inquiry) it is not pure logic but applied logic ("the epistemological type of logic") which we need. This logic deals with:

thinking as a specific procedure relative to a specific antecedent occasion and to a subsequent specific fulfilment [. . .]. From its [applied logic's] point of view, an attempt to discuss the antecedents, data, forms, and objective of thought, apart from reference to particular position occupied, and particular part played in the growth of experience is to reach results which are not so much either true or false as they are radically meaningless—because they are considered apart from limits. Its results are not only abstractions (for all theorizing ends in abstractions), but abstractions without possible reference or bearing. From this point of view, the taking of something, whether that something be thinking activity, its empirical condition, or its objective goal, apart from the limits of a historic or developing situation, is the essence of *metaphysical* procedure—in the sense of metaphysics which makes a gulf between it and science. Dewey 1903, 8–9

Dewey's position expressed in the foregoing passage is in some aspects close to Peirce's. They share the belief that laws of logic have no value solely in themselves, but only if they are useful in science, in particular in empirical sciences. Dewey, similarly to Peirce, holds that roots of laws of logic lay in attempts to solve actual problems (mostly empirical) which emerge from more and more complicated scientific challenges.

However, Peirce saw Dewey's conception of logic as completely different from his own. He wrote a critical review of *Studies in Logical Theory* (Peirce 1958 [1904], 188–90) and also a letter to Dewey, expressing doubts about Dewey's approach to logic (Peirce 1958 [1904–5], 239–44). Peirce objects to Dewey's rejection of pure logic. According to Peirce, logic in a strict sense ought to deal with the validity and the strength of arguments; it is not—as Dewey holds—a theoretical study of the norms that should guide us when we inquire. And only pure logic is open to new applications and might be useful in completely new situations. On the contrary, the laws of logic expressed by Dewey will depend on biological and historical views (Hookway 2012, 102–9).

## 5. Richard Rorty

In his critique of the theory-practice dualism, Richard Rorty goes even further than Dewey. What is characteristic of this critique or rather denial is that Rorty's argumentation always involves critique of the Platonic and Kantian model of developing philosophy. As Kant's philosophical system is built on two pillars, epistemology and philosophy of morals, Rorty's considers and censures both of them.

Inspired by Dewey's idea of experience being a mutual reaction between an organism and its environment, Rorty criticizes all attempts to model knowing on seeing (Rorty 1979, 139–48) and to consider all results of cognition processes as corresponding somehow with reality. He claims that these attempts are useless and misleading. There is no sense in using the metaphor of correspondence with reality, regardless of whether it refers to sentences which should correspond with reality to be true, or notions of things which should correspond with reality. Neither does it matter, to Rorty, what is meant by "reality" ("Platonists" and "positivists" do not refer to the same concept when discussing what may become an object of necessary and indubitable cognition)—the idea of correspondence is always based on the metaphor of cognition meaning to look at something (Rorty 1979, 39). This metaphor is so deeply entrenched in the European culture that it is a source of various intuitions, and this is why it is so difficult to dispose of it (Rorty 1979, 127; Rorty 1982, xxx); however—Rorty claims—it is like a very dangerous illness; it infects not only our vision of cognitive and communicative activities, but also more general and more basic visions of human position in the world and in the society.

According to Rorty, we are in disposition of much more comfortable and efficient ways of estimating the quality of our beliefs. One of the best of them is to answer a question whether and to what extent they can help us reach our goals. This is undertaking a pragmatist point of view and leads to acceptance of the pragmatist maxim (or one of its versions), which claims that only those beliefs, statements, conceptions, and hypotheses are meaningful of which acknowledgment results in practical consequences. Rorty's reading of the pragmatist maxim is much more relativistic (Rorty would say "historicistic") than Peirce's. He admits that there is nothing such as a common ground, which allows for determination of which practical consequences are worth considering, or to validate cognitive claims. Rorty puts it very clearly in the following passage:

When we say that our ancestors believed, falsely, that the sun went round the earth and that we believe, truly, that the earth goes round the sun, we are saying that we have a better tool than our ancestors did. Our ancestors might rejoin that their tool enabled them to believe in the literal truth of the Christian Scriptures, whereas ours does not. Our replay has to be, I think, that the benefits of modern astronomy and of space travel outweigh the advantage of Christian fundamentalism. The argument between us and our medieval ancestors should not be about which of us has gotten the universe right. It should be about the point of holding views about the motion of heavenly bodies, the ends to be achieved by the use of certain tools. Confirming the truth of the Christian Scriptures is one of such ends, and space travel—the other.

Rorty 1996, 40

Referring to this famous example of revising the model of our Solar system, Rorty encourages us to look at it in a new way—he argues that the categories of truth and falsity are not the optimal ones for description and understanding of this turn in the history of science. Rorty states that modelling knowing on seeing is now completely useless: "the intellectual tradition to which they belong has not paid off, is more trouble than it is worth, has become an incubus" (Rorty 1982, xxxvii). Attempts to define what being an adequate representation of reality means—whether in case of ideas, beliefs, theories, or judgements—result in "wasting philosophical energy". There is not much chance for them to be successful, and, even if they are, they will not become a tool of choosing beliefs whose approval would help us in reaching our goals. As Rorty argues against the correspondence idea of truth, the only criterion left for estimating values of theories is their (subjective) usefulness in making our lives easier, our

beliefs more coherent, our societies more just, or in justifying our other beliefs:

He [the pragmatist] shares with the positivist the Baconian and Hobbesian notion that knowledge is power, a tool for coping with reality. But he carries this Baconian point through to its extreme, as the positivist does not. He drops the notion of truth as correspondence with reality altogether, and says that modern science does not enable us to cope because it corresponds, it just plain enable us to cope.

Rorty 1982, xvii

Thus, this critique of the correspondence theory of truth and the introduction of pragmatist tools for validating conceptions and theories results in rejecting the theory-practice distinction conceived as division into two domains: of cognition and of conduct with independent criteria of success for each of the domains. In Rorty's view, no specifically theoretical criteria are left, as "it is the vocabulary of practice rather than of theory, of action rather than of contemplation, in which one can say something useful about truth" (Rorty 1982, 162). In consequence, the concept of theory is deprived of its characteristics as a result of a specific cognition. Hence, when we cannot speak of so-called conceived theories, which were achieved by theoretical cognition, the notion of theory becomes purposeless. This occurs because sense of distinguishing this type of cognition lied in the fact that it provided us with results in a specific form, that is, the form of theory.

Rorty examines some of Kant's views on philosophy of morals in his book *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, especially in the chapter "The contingency of selfhood". He reads Kant's philosophy of morals in such a way that the moral law is a result of completely theoretical *a priori* cognition and that all human actions—if they are to be morally validated—have to be viewed from the perspective of this purely theoretical moral law: "The Platonic and Kantian idea of rationality centers around the idea that we need to bring particular actions under general principles if we are to be moral" (Rorty 1989, 33). If so, the domain of morality is indeed strictly theoretical in spite of the fact that Kant calls it (perhaps misleadingly) the domain of the practical reason. Hence, from Rorty's view, there is in fact no supremacy of practice over theory in Kant's doctrine because human actions are always considered from the position of the *a priori* moral law, which, in Kant's view, is the paradigm of theoretical cognition.

## 6. Conclusion in the matter of use and meaning of concepts “theory” and “practice”

When Kant postulates the connection between the practical and the speculative reason, he considers this connection possible solely because he distinguishes clearly between the practical and the pragmatic, and this connection is established between the practical (not the pragmatic) reason and the speculative one. On the other hand, when Peirce chooses the name for his doctrine, he is absolutely certain he does not want the term “practicism” or “practicalism”, as his doctrine does not consider the practical in Kant’s sense. Thus, Peirce—in spite of calling himself Kant’s pupil who “still thinks in Kantian terms most readily”—is not interested in (if not neglects) the practical in Kant’s terms.

Does this difference in terminology—Kantian “practical” *versus* Peircean “pragmatic”—reflect a difference in interpreting Kant’s postulate of supremacy of practice over theory? Is it thus justified to use Kant’s term “supremacy of practice over theory” for the pragmatist conception? This is the term which describes Dewey’s approach to the theory-practice relation quite well. Rorty’s view was more radical—in fact, in his view there is no sense in using the term “theory”. However—he would probably say—if we are, for some reasons, to distinguish between theory and practice, it is practice which reigns supreme. Nonetheless, it has to be emphasized that, even if Dewey and Rorty had accepted this Kantian formulation, they would have interpreted it from the pragmatist point of view and in consequence the meaning of it would have been clearly different to them than to Kant. Now, Peirce’s case is much less ambiguous. Peirce, nonetheless one of the founders of pragmatism, is at times dubious about supremacy of practice as a threat to the “real scientific spirit”. Thus, he probably would not have accepted Kant’s postulate of supremacy of practice at all.

Moreover, one more aspect should be taken into consideration. Kant’s supremacy thesis is built on the supposition of a clear separation between theory and practice, and without this supposition it could not be formulated. However, fading of a theory-practice distinction can be observed from Peirce to Dewey and Dewey to Rorty. I would even risk claiming that this is a process of (traditionally conceived) theory dissolving in practice. In consequence, domination of practical perspective specific to the pragmatist standpoint means that traditionally theoretical domains are deprived of their homogeneously theoretic character and acquire some of the attributes originally assigned to the practical domain, unlike in Kant,

where the homogeneity of two domains is preserved and the speculative reason is only forced to accept some of the practical postulates but does not accept them as acts of cognition; hence, it remains supreme in its cognitive competence. Thus, the pragmatist thesis on domination of practice over theory is not exactly Kant's thesis.

## 7. Concerns . . .

The process of fading of the theory-practice distinction has its further non-trivial consequences. If all laws and norms of reasoning are culturally and historically dependent, we lose an opportunity of estimating them and choosing better ones, as there is, in fact, no justified criterion for such an estimation. When Putnam discusses this conviction, he uses the term "naturalized reason" and does not agree that reason is completely immanent: "Reason is, in this sense, both immanent (not to be found outside of concrete language games and institutions), and transcendent (a regulative idea that we use to criticize the conduct of all activities and institutions)" (Putnam 1985, 234).

Putnam's belief that reason is partly transcendent is very Kantian, and indeed he does not deny his esteem for Kant. Yet, Kant's approach to human rationality is not easily adopted on the pragmatist ground. The reasons for this—as I can see them—are two. Firstly, Kant would have never accepted the meaning which pragmatists linked to the phrase "supremacy of practice over theory" and, as this implies, he would have never accepted the pragmatist thesis concerning this supremacy. Secondly, in spite of differences among various thinkers of the pragmatist movement, all of them accepted (in such or other form or in such or other interpretation) the "supremacy of practice over theory" thesis. The implication of this position is—as I have attempted to show—a (gradual) reduction of the universal and the rational traditionally conceived and replacing them with the historical, the biological, and the emotional.

Putnam made an attempt of such an adoption, arguing that all normative judgements need to fulfil some universally necessary conditions to be valid, and that we need such normative judgements in order to argue for such important values as democracy and open society. Rorty, commenting on the foregoing issues, holds that the previous belief cannot be in agreement with pragmatist stance, and the latter requirement is impossible to satisfy (Rorty 1993). Even if Rorty is right (I am inclined to think he is), Kantian-style devotion to reason might have its advantages, espe-

cially in the current political situation: in times of the rise of nationalism and irrationalism in many countries of the world. That is why I find the following questions troubling. What can be done in order to save (or to restore) the ability of arguing conclusively for values in general, and in particular for democracy and open society? Is it possible to do it in a non-dogmatic way?

These questions express—in my opinion—longing for rationality. However, this is not longing for rationality in exactly Kant's sense but rather for a somewhat imprecise new idea of rationality. There is no come-back, no chance to enter once again into the same river. I would say that what we need is a new idea of rationality. Though I do not mean here anything in a Wittgensteinian sense—this is rationality limited to a concrete language-game, as such a conception of rationality does not provide us with opportunity of arguing for values independently of the culture, tradition, or religion we belong to. We need an idea which would be a fusion of Kant's and Wittgenstein's or Rorty's ideas.

## 8. . . . and hopes

The pragmatist approach to the theory-practice distinction and, thus, to the concept of rationality provides us with new tools and new promising perspectives. We become more aware of our interests, positions, prejudices, aims, historical and biological limits which strongly influence human cognition. Dewey and Rorty would say also that thanks to this process we stop believing in possibility of objective cognition, a belief which is one of the most dangerous reasons for human mistakes and violence. As I have tried to show, Peirce made attempts to save the objectivity of cognition, but he was not fully successful as he had to marry antagonistic values: objective—or at least intersubjective—cognition on the one hand, and synechism on the other hand. The conviction of being in disposition of an objective absolute truth has often been a motif, a reason, or a justification for forcing this truth—by various ways—on others. By contrast, the lack of this conviction makes us more inclined to listen, to understand, and even to accept other points of view.

Rorty introduces the figure of an ironist to demonstrate connections between one's conviction of one's unmistakability and one's solidarity with others. An ironist is a person who "has radical and continuing doubts" about vocabulary she uses, and also radical conviction that utterances she formulates are not closer to reality than utterances using different vocabu-

laries and formulated by others (Rorty 1989, 73). The ironist's standpoint might seem to have an influence only on her life as she seems to be concentrated first of all on herself: on her convictions and her desires, on a vocabulary she employs, changes, plays with, and which is a tool of her self-creation. However, this awareness of contingency of one's point of view, one's vocabulary, one's aims and values strongly improves one's moral sensibility. Rorty argues that the feeling of solidarity with other human beings does not concern *a priori* all people all over the world, but depends on our understanding of the concept of "we"; this depends on which similarities and which differences between people we find—often prior to reflection—crucial. And this depends, to a large extent, on the vocabulary one employs. The ironist, aware of contingency of her final vocabulary, is more inclined (than a "metaphysician" who takes his vocabulary as the only correct and true) to conceive acknowledged similarities and differences between people as contingent, relative, and possibly changeable, since they are expressed in concepts which are also contingent. This results in her inclination to extrapolate the concept of "we" over other people who previously have been classified as "they". Rorty argues that the process of neglecting an increasing number of originally considered as important differences (of tribe, religion, customs, race, *etc.*) is a sign of moral progress and greater human solidarity. However, this solidarity is not the effect of "recognition of a core self, the human essence, in all human beings", but of ability to rebuild one's vocabulary and to re-define such concepts as "we", "one of us", "our sort of people" (Rorty 1989, 192). Every time the feeling of solidarity is extended over marginalized people, who have been instinctively perceived as "they" rather than "us", some people lose some reasons to be cruel; some social spaces of cruelty disappear or at least decrease.

In the pragmatist movement from Peirce through James and Dewey to Rorty, the theory-practice distinction can be observed to gradually disappear. One of the signs of this process is questioning the sense and possibility of a pure theory. All this has two kinds of consequences. The modern concept of universal rationality loses its significance and influence, which results in the vanishing of tools of objective estimation and universally valid argumentation. At the same time, however, pragmatism becomes a philosophical movement more and more aware of and concentrated on the practical, in which the supremacy of practice over theory manifests itself in a greater social engagement and philosophy expects itself to be socially responsible. This expectation is fulfilled in two main



forms. On one hand, there is growing interest in different aspects of social exclusion and in that which philosophy could do to counteract them. On the other hand, there are attempts to practice philosophy—in all its disciplines—in such a way as to not create intellectual space inviting the exclusion of others. In Rorty’s view, the whole epistemology, regardless of doctrine, is an example of creating such a detrimental invitation. Thus, in his opinion, socially responsible philosophy means philosophy without epistemology. The other good example of this line of thought is Richard Shusterman’s conception of pragmatist aesthetics, the aim of which is, among others, to prevent exclusion of various social minorities because they contribute neither in creation nor in perception of so-called high art. According to Shusterman, “even in its most liberational moments, high art seems an oppressive obstacle to socio-cultural emancipation” (Shusterman 2000 [1992], 145), and only rejection of a distinction into high art and popular art has a potential to initiate a process of this emancipation.

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# Kant, Pragmatism and Epistemic Constructivism

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## 1. Introduction

The philosophical debate progresses through formulating solutions to philosophical problems. This paper calls attention to Kantian and pragmatist contributions to a constructivist approach to cognition. Though they are related as forms of epistemic constructivism, Kant is not in any obvious sense a pragmatist and pragmatism is not a form of Kantianism. I will rather be suggesting that pragmatic constructivism goes further than Kantian constructivism, but that both fall short of what I will be calling a historical approach that remains to be worked out.

The paper begins with considering the relation of epistemic constructivism to forms of realism before turning to Kantianism and then to pragmatism in arguing two points. Though Kant is sometimes seen as a metaphysical realist, I further suggest that he rejects metaphysical realism in favor of epistemic constructivism. I suggest that, if Kant is an a priori thinker, then pragmatist a posteriori constructivism is preferable to Kantian a priori constructivism, but that both fall short of historical constructivism.

## 2. Constructivism vs. realism

Since this paper turns to comparing and contrasting Kantian and pragmatic views of “constructivism”, it is important to be clear about these terms. Since constructivism reacts to realism, we can begin with realism.

Realism, like ice cream, comes in many flavors, including aesthetic or artistic realism, empirical realism, naïve or direct realism, anti-realism, and so on. Aesthetic or artistic realism is a style favored by some artists. Social realism is sometimes adopted by Marxists on political grounds. The classical German idealists all favor types of empirical realism. Anti-realism is any form of the view that we do not and cannot know the real. G.E. Moore infamously claims, though he does not give any textual reference, that all idealists deny the existence of the external world. “Metaphysical realism” is any form of the claim to cognize reality or again the mind-independent world. Unless otherwise specified, by “realism” I will have in mind two points: there is a mind-independent world, or reality, also called the real, and realists think that, in appropriate circumstances, we can grasp the real.

Realism, though not under that name, goes all the way back in the tradition to Parmenides. According to Bertrand Russell, in virtue of his argument from language to the world, Parmenides is the first philosopher (Russell 1945, 150). It is more plausible that he is the first “modern” philosopher, that is the first one to hold an identifiably modern view about knowledge.

Metaphysical realism remains popular in the current debate in such different fields as physics and interpretation theory. Stephen Weinberg, the quantum physicist, thinks that unless science uncovers the structure of the real world, it is not worth doing (cf. Weinberg 1988). The conviction that “interpretation” yields knowledge beyond the endless interpretive debate is widely held in hermeneutics (Hans-Georg Gadamer, Martin Heidegger, Donald Davidson), aesthetics (Monroe Beardsley), legal interpretation (Antonin Scalia), and so on. In other words, and despite other differences, physicists, theorists of interpretation, and others agree that we can and in fact do know reality.

The view that we know reality goes all the way back in the Western tradition. Parmenides’s claim that thinking and being are the same is often understood as suggesting that reality exists and that in suitable circumstances we in fact grasp it, or, in another formulation, thought grasps reality (cf. Burnyeat 1982, 3–40). Different forms of this canonical view echo through the entire later tradition up to the present. For instance, in rejecting the so-called God’s eye view, in his internal realist phase, Putnam argues that, like the fable of the blind men and the elephant, different observers have different vantage points on the same reality.

Metaphysical realism, which has always been widely popular, is both attacked as advancing a claim impossible to defend and defended as a nec-

essary condition of cognition. Constructivism is a second-best approach that arises from the ruins of metaphysical realism. Those who think we do not and cannot cognize the real contrast realism with epistemic constructivism that I will be calling constructivism, or any form of the view that we know only what we in some sense “construct”.

Constructivism arises in ancient pre-Socratic philosophy. Parmenides’s claim for the unity of thought and being (cf. Laertios 28 B3; Clement of Alexandria 440, 12; Plotinus 5, 1, 8) can be understood in different ways and suggests no less than three crucial approaches to cognition: metaphysical realism, or the view that we know reality; scepticism, or the epistemic view that we do not and cannot know, for instance because we do not know reality; and constructivism, or the view that we do not know reality but know and can know only what we can be said to “construct”. Constructivism comes into the modern tradition through Hobbes, Vico (cf. Child 1953), and independently through Kant. Depending on how “constructivism” is understood, it is widespread throughout the modern debate (cf. Rockmore 2004). Contemporary constructivists include the psychologist Piaget, defenders of the Copenhagen approach to quantum mechanics, educational theorists, psychologists, avant-garde Russian artists, and so on. In what follows, I will be focusing on “constructivism” as a shared epistemic commitment in Kant, pragmatism, and others.

### 3. On interpreting Kant's critical philosophy

This brief description of the distinction between constructivism and realism provides a standard common to Kant as well as many, but not all, forms of pragmatism. I will discuss Kant before turning to pragmatism and then to remarks on both Kant and pragmatism. Obviously, we ignore Kant at our peril. Kant is clearly singularly important, one of the handful of really great thinkers, on some accounts even the single most important modern thinker. A measure of his importance is that, in different ways all, or nearly all, later innovations in the debate run through Kant. Though Kant is now and has always been enormously influential, it is no secret that there is very little agreement about his position. It seems safe to say that Kant is as difficult to interpret as he is important. In a sense, there are as many versions of the critical philosophy as there are readers of it.

There are many difficulties in reading Kant. Here are some examples. He is not a careful writer. He appears to be inconsistent since he often fails

to discard early texts when his view changes. He has trouble choosing between inconsistent alternatives. I come back to this point below.

Kant, who was aware that his position posed interpretive difficulties, suggested it is easy for those interested in the critical philosophy to grasp the whole, roughly, as Fichte suggests, the spirit of his position. Yet there is not now and never has been agreement about the whole of the critical philosophy. A further difficulty derives from his exaggerated claim that there was no philosophy worthy of the name before him. This suggests that he perhaps inconsistently reacts to such predecessors as Hume, Wolff, Leibniz, Plato, and others. Since he believed that he had forever brought philosophy to a high point and to an end, he absurdly insists nothing can be changed without reason itself falling to the ground. Yet later thinkers thought the debate was still open. Kant's successors were unwilling to accept the suggestion perhaps best known in the Young Hegelian claim about Hegel that, in the critical philosophy, philosophy itself comes to a high point and an end. Beginning with Reinhold, Fichte, and Hegel, his contemporaries and successors insisted that Kant belonged to the ongoing debate and sought to isolate the Kantian wheat from the Kantian chaff as it were.

Many, perhaps all, important thinkers evolve over time. Though Kant suggests his position is independent of the preceding tradition, he responds to key aspects of the philosophical debate. His response to Hume's attack on causality to defend Newtonian science is widely known. Elsewhere I have argued that in denying a reverse causal inference from effect to cause, in rejecting intellectual intuition, and in denying cognition of mind-independent reality, but not empirical reality, Kant responds to Plato. I do not want to repeat that argument here. Suffice it to say that the interest in metaphysical realism as the cognitive gold standard takes the form of representationalism, or the correct representation of reality, in modern thinkers including Descartes, Locke, and others (cf. Dickerson 2004). Kant's view of representationalism evolves from an initial commitment to epistemic representationalism that he later rejects in adopting an inconsistent constructivist approach.

#### 4. Phenomenon, appearance and representation

To explain this point, it is useful to distinguish between three terms Kant uses inconsistently in framing his cognitive theory: "phenomenon", "appearance", and "representation". "Phenomenon" refers to the contents of

mind of whatever kind. "Appearance" designates an unknown and unknowable cause of which it is the effect. "Representation" accurately or again correctly depicts the cause of which it is the effect. All appearances are representations, but only some representations are appearances. The difference between an appearance and a representation is that the former denies and the latter affirms the so-called anti-Platonic backward inference from effect to cause.

Plato affirms intellectual intuition that Kant denies. Kant follows the Platonic rejection of a backward causal inference but denies intellectual intuition. He needs, for this reason, to explain cognition through another mechanism. Kant rejects as absurd the suggestion that there could be an appearance without anything that appears. He rather thinks that an appearance presupposes an unknowable cause, namely reality, also called the thing in itself, or noumenon, of which it is the effect (Kant 1998, B XXVII, 115).

Representationalism and constructivism are alternative epistemic approaches, that is alternative ways to solve (or resolve) the cognitive problem. Kant's early representationalist view of cognition presupposes a legible account of representation as well as a growing realization, visible in his writings, of the inability to understand "representation". If we examine his writings, the simplest, most adequate interpretation is that Kant begins as a representationalist before later slowly but steadily evolving into a constructivist. Kantian constructivism derives from his steady interest in cognition but growing dissatisfaction with a representational approach. In following Kant's own suggestion, there is a widespread but mistaken tendency to divide Kant's evolution into pre-critical and critical periods. According to this view, Kant, who was a pre-critical thinker, at the onset of the critical period became a critical thinker. Yet the situation is in fact more complicated. On inspection, Kant appears still to be committed to representationalism early in the critical period before turning, later in that same period, apparently during the preparation of the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* against representationalism and towards constructivism as an acceptable alternative.<sup>1</sup>

Kant's interest in a representational approach to cognition is signaled in the Herz letter (February 1782) early in the critical period. In his letter, Kant points to his identification with representationalism in writing:

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<sup>1</sup> Since this is not a study of Kant, I leave open the question of whether the *Prolegomena*, which was written in the interval between the two editions of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, belongs to Kant's representationalist or on the contrary to his constructivist phase.



"I asked myself, namely, on what grounds rests the reference of what in us is called representation (*Vorstellung*) to the object (*Gegenstand*)?" (Kant 1999, 133). In a fuller treatment, it would be necessary to analyse this important document in detail. Suffice it to say here that the Herz letter shows Kant's concern to justify representation as an effect caused by the cognitive object, or reality. Many observers, for instance Heidegger, think that, since this letter was written early in Kant's critical period, it is reasonable to take the letter as pointing to the concern Kant was occupied with in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (cf. Heidegger 1997). If this is correct, then, at least for anti-constructivist readers of Kant, it provides a reason for preferring the first edition of Kant's treatise to the second edition, when he has already clearly left representationalism behind in turning toward constructivism.

The mature Kant's interest in a representational approach to cognition as late as the critical period suggests that he is committed to some form of epistemic representationalism. Since this is a widely favored modern cognitive approach, at this point Kant seems not to be breaking with representationalism as he is concerned with carrying it to a new and higher level. Yet this is at most only part of the story. On inspection, Kant's references to representation in his writings tell a different tale. They depict a growing realization of the insuperable difficulty of and disillusionment with representationalism as an epistemic strategy that is replaced as early as the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* through a turn to constructivism.

Descartes, who is a representationalist, claims to overcome any legitimate doubt in infallibly inferring from the mind to the world. Before the onset of the critical period, Kant, perhaps under the influence of Descartes, apparently takes the representationalist approach as a given. In a pre-critical text, *The Only Possible Argument in Support of A Demonstration of the Existence of God* (1763), he suggests that "the word 'representation' is understood with sufficient precision and employed with confidence, even though its meaning can never be analyzed by means of definition" (Kant 1992, 116). In the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* when he is still committed to representationalism, he later writes, in seeming to equate appearances and representations that "all appearances, are not things, but rather nothing but representations, and they cannot exist at all outside our mind" (Kant 1998, A 492, 511). Yet his view of representationalism quickly changes. In the "Dohna Wundlacken Logic" (1797) in the critical period, Kant explicitly denies that representation can even be defined (Kant 1997).

And finally in the *"Jäsche Logic"* (1800), another text from slightly later in the critical period, he unequivocally claims that representation "cannot be explained" at all (Kant 1992, 440).

We can summarize this part of the discussion in putting Kant's turn from representationalism to constructivism in the historical context. I have been suggesting that we can usefully understand Kant's approach to cognition against a historical background stretching back to ancient philosophy. In Parmenides's wake, metaphysical realism nearly immediately becomes the cognitive standard. Plato follows Parmenides's suggestion that to know requires the capacity to grasp or again to cognize reality, in short the world. For Plato this entails that, as Kant also thinks, since we cannot rely on a backwards inference from effect to cause, appearances do not represent. Kant, who, unlike Plato, denies intellectual intuition, initially follows the modern concern with representationalism. Yet he later realizes that this approach fails to solve the post-Platonic version of the cognitive problem. The difficulty lies, as Plato already shows, in the insuperable difficulty of representing reality, or in Kantian language, in showing that the thing in itself can be represented. In other words, since Kant agrees with Plato's rejection of the backward causal inference, he rejects representationalism. More generally, Kant agrees with Plato but disagrees with modern thinkers since he concludes that it is not possible but rather impossible to cognize metaphysical reality. This is the meaning of Kant's suggestion that the thing in itself can be thought but can neither appear nor be known. In other words, since an appearance is the appearance of something, reality appears, that is appears in the form of sensation, but, since there is no intellectual intuition, it can neither be represented nor known (cf. Kant 1998, B 565–6, 535).

## 5. Kantian constructivism

If Kant had done no more than restate a form of the anti-Platonic approach, the critical philosophy would at most be the high point in a long series of modern forms of representationalism that finally fail to solve the cognitive problem. Yet Kant not only restates the traditional approach, but also independently proposes a basically new constructivist strategy for cognition.

I turn now to Kantian constructivism, his alternative solution to the cognitive problem after he seeks but later gives up his initial effort to formulate a representational solution. "Kantian constructivism" refers to

the so-called Copernican revolution in philosophy, a term that Kant never uses to describe his position, but that he briefly describes in the B introduction to the first *Critique*.

The Copernican Revolution is often mentioned but only rarely discussed in any detail. Hans Blumenberg, the author of an extremely detailed study of this theme, concludes after nearly 600 pages of analysis that Kant probably never read Copernicus (cf. Blumenberg 1987). Yet, even if true, this would not be decisive. We recall that Kant also did not have detailed knowledge of Hume, who is obviously central to Kant's project. It is also unclear if Kant ever read Plato.

Kant's constructivism only emerges after the failure of his initial solution. It is a second-best solution that is frequently mentioned but not well understood. Here are three reasons why, despite the massive Kantian debate, Kantian constructivism is still largely unknown. To begin with, he presents his new-found constructivism very rapidly without either the detail or the care it deserves. Second, his constructivism lies in an uncertain relationship to his representational approach that in the context and even now is extremely novel, an approach that is more often referred to than discussed, and which is rendered more difficult to grasp because of the obvious difficulty in interpreting his obscure reference to the Copernican revolution. And finally, Kant's effort to formulate a representational approach to cognition is sometimes taken as his main, indeed his only, cognitive approach.

Though Kantian Copernicanism is frequently mentioned, few writers devote more than minimal attention to Kantian constructivism. There are at least four reasons to support a specifically Copernican reading of the critical philosophy. To begin with, Kant, as noted, was a convinced Newtonian, committed to defending modern science against Hume's attack on causality. Second, Kant possessed a strong grasp of and contributed to contemporary physics. Like Voltaire, he was committed to Newtonianism. But, unlike Voltaire, Kant was obviously familiar with Newton's *Principia*. In the preface, which was added to the second edition of the *Principia* in 1713, Roger Cotes suggests, according to Blumenberg for the first time (see Blumenberg 1987) that Newton proved from appearances that gravity belongs to all bodies (cf. Newton 1775–1785, II, XIV). This point, that some see as a basic pillar of modern science, has recently been challenged (cf. Chomsky 2017). Further, Kant's contemporaries, earlier Reinhold (see Reinhold 1786–1787) then later Schelling (Schelling, 1958, 599), and, surprisingly, Marx (cf. Marx 2010, "The Leading Article" in No. 179 of the

*Kölnische Zeitung*, 201) drew attention to the link between the critical philosophy and the Copernican astronomical revolution. Finally, this relation can be verified from Kant's preface to the first *Critique*. In simplest terms, one can say that Kant generalizes Cotes's suggestion to relate Newton to Copernicus through a physical explanation of astronomical phenomena.

Kantian constructivism is described in a brief but important and well-known passage. This passage both points to Kant's Copernican turn as well as calls attention to constructivism as an alternative to representationalism. It is not too much to say that this alternative was earlier anticipated in Parmenides's suggestion of the identity of thought and being, but it only emerges as an alternative approach to cognition after more than two millennia of effort that, as Kant points out, record no progress, none at all, towards grasping an independent object, not towards grasping reality.

Kant here takes stock of the present state of the cognitive debate. Though Kant is "officially" an a priori thinker, it is not often pointed out that he very sensibly draws the lesson of many centuries of effort devoted to grasping reality. He proposes to abandon the traditional effort to grasp a mind-independent object in favor of a novel approach to cognition independent of any claim to grasp or otherwise know a mind-dependent object.

If modern constructivism is the acceptable alternative to ancient representationalism, then the emergence of constructivism marks a decisive turning in the cognitive debate. In his reference to constructivism that is as brief as it is important, Kant makes two points that when taken together constitute his so-called Copernican revolution. On the one hand, according to Kant, there has never been progress toward cognizing a mind-independent object. This point suggests the failure to represent or more generally to cognize reality as well as the dependence of Kant's supposedly a priori approach on the a posteriori, or on experience. On the other hand, since, according to Kant, efforts to cognize reality by any means, including representationalism, have failed, he suggests as an experiment, hence speculatively, that we invert the relation of subject to object. In other words, rather than, like so many thinkers, vainly continuing to seek to formulate a theory in which the subject depends on an independent object that we do not and cannot cognize, Kant proposes as an alternative to invert the subject-object relation in making the object dependent on the subject.

## 6. What is pragmatism?

It is a considerable understatement to say that Kant is very complicated. I do not claim that this is more than a plausible but simplified account of his approach to cognition. After this simple sketch of the critical philosophy, I turn now more briefly to pragmatism. It is unclear what the term means since it is unclear what criteria must be met to be a pragmatist. "Pragmatism" is used very widely but, like many widely utilized philosophical words, apparently has no fixed meaning. "Pragmatism" is currently used to refer to an exceptionally wide collection of thinkers including those pragmatists who descend from the classical American pragmatists as well as self-styled analytic or neo-analytic pragmatists.

In part because the pragmatist debate is still very much underway, differences between the views of the main representatives are important, in fact so much so as to threaten the idea that they all belong to a single philosophical tendency. I have discussed Kant against the background of the basic distinction between realism and constructivism. Different forms of pragmatism relate differently to different forms of constructivism and realism. Though there are exceptions, analytic pragmatism is broadly speaking metaphysically realist but non-constructivist, and classical pragmatism is constructivist but empirically realist.

We can focus this point in examining what I am calling classical and analytic pragmatism separately. It has long been known that the early American pragmatists, whom I am calling the classical pragmatists, hold disparate views. As is often the case with respect to a live philosophical tendency, the main participants often disagree. James, who was fiercely opposed to Hegel, differs in this respect from Peirce and Dewey. As he grew older, Peirce came to think that his differences with Hegel were mainly terminological. Dewey was throughout his career closer to Hegel than to Kant (cf. Dewey 2010). We recall that more than a century ago A. O. Lovejoy noted the existence of more than a dozen types of pragmatism (cf. Lovejoy 1908, 5–12).

The classical pragmatists, including Peirce and Dewey, and perhaps James, share an interest in constructivism as the appropriate cognitive approach. This is not the case for analytic pragmatists, who appear often to turn to pragmatism in pursuing agendas unrelated or at least not clearly related to such standard classical pragmatic concerns as constructivism. Classical pragmatists, who notoriously disagree among themselves, are comparatively unified compared to analytic pragmatists. So-called an-

alytic pragmatists, who for whatever reason are often concerned with repackaging analytic wine in pragmatist bottles, include among the pragmatists Kant, the so-called first pragmatist (cf. Macbeth 2012), Nietzsche, the later Ludwig Wittgenstein, W. V. O. Quine, Wilfrid Sellars, Richard Rorty, an epistemic skeptic, Hillary Putnam, Robert Brandom, who earlier described himself as a Hegelian and currently claims to be a pragmatist in linking pragmatism to Fregean semantics,<sup>2</sup> Huw Price, but not John McDowell, and so on. If everyone, or nearly everyone, is a pragmatist and no-one is not a pragmatist, the term becomes more or less meaningless.

## 7. Pragmatic constructivism

Pragmatism, like other important philosophical tendencies, assumes many forms. Our concern here is not with one or another type of pragmatism but rather with the relation between Kant and pragmatism. The strongly representationalist thrust in the modern debate is resisted by Kant, by classical pragmatists of all stripes, and by at least some analytic pragmatists.

For present purposes, I will understand pragmatism in all its many varieties as belonging to the post-Kantian effort to make out cognitive claims in denying representationalism while espousing various forms of constructivism. Representationalism, which is often attacked by pragmatists and non-pragmatists alike, is, on the contrary, apparently assumed as the cognitive standard by analytic pragmatists at both ends of the spectrum. This includes those, such as Rorty, who are committed to epistemic scepticism because we cannot know, or more precisely correctly represent, mind-independent reality, and those like Brandom, who favor inferentialist semantics on the other. But these are extreme instances, which are arguably not representative of analytic pragmatism and even less representative of classical pragmatism. More moderate pragmatists, on the contrary, such as Putnam, resist the siren calls of both scepticism and semantics in participating in the Kantian turn away from representationalism in turning toward constructivism.

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<sup>2</sup> "One of the fundamental methodological commitments governing the account presented here is pragmatism about the relations between semantics and pragmatics. Pragmatism in this sense is the view that what attributions of semantic contentfulness are for is explaining the normative significance of intentional states such as beliefs and of speech acts such as assertions. Thus the criteria of adequacy to which semantic theory's concept of content must answer are to be set by the pragmatic theory, which deals with contentful intentional states and the sentences used to express them in speech acts" (Brandom 1994, 143).

Classical pragmatism, and by implication pragmatism of all kinds, is frequently described as a philosophical movement that includes those who accept some version of the Jamesian view that an ideology or proposition is correct if it works satisfactorily, where “to work” refers to the idea that our view of cognition is not refuted by the facts so to speak. The implicit suggestion that we can rely on independent facts is inconsistent with constructivism of any kind. In different ways, Peirce and Dewey are constructivists. Two participants in a recent volume about Dewey make nearly identical claims that apply to classical pragmatism in general. Kersten Reich suggests that constructivists “see humans as observers, participants, and agents, who actively generate and transform the patterns through which they construct the realities that fit them” (Reich 2009, 40). Kenneth Stickers similarly thinks that “our constructions of reality are not arbitrary but result from inquiry” (Stickers 2009, 83).

Peirce offers an interesting example of pragmatist constructivism in his view of truth, not as grasping reality, but rather as what we come to believe in the long run, including through the process of scientific discovery. Peirce, very much like Hegel, whom he may have in mind, suggests that we do not and cannot cognize metaphysical reality but rather only what is given over time in experience. His view of the so-called long run is linked to his view of “abduction”, a term he apparently coined to refer to the logic of scientific inquiry that proceeds through non-deductive inference in the context of discovery. There is an obvious difference between, say, the context of justification and the formulation of scientific theories. Abduction belongs to the context of discovery in which we generate theories that are only later assessed. In two passages that could have come from Hegel, Peirce says that “[a]bduction is the process of forming explanatory hypotheses. It is the only logical operation which introduces any new idea” (Peirce 1934, 5–5.172) and that abduction encompasses “all the operations by which theories and conceptions are engendered” (Peirce 1934, 5.590). Dewey’s insistence in his *Logic* on the pragmatic relation of theories to resolve specific problems,<sup>3</sup> the view of ideas as instruments or tools that guide our actions and can anticipate future results in terms of which they can be tested and evaluated, can be regarded as a qualified restatement of the Peircean view.

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<sup>3</sup> John Dewey: “But in the proper interpretation of ‘pragmatic’, namely the function of consequences as necessary tests of the validity of propositions, provided these consequences are operationally instituted and are such as to resolve the specific problem evoking the operations, the text that follows is thoroughly pragmatic” (Dewey 1938, IV).

## 8. Conclusion: Pragmatic constructivism today

This paper has argued that Kant and pragmatism differ in many ways, but overlap in their shared conviction that, since representationalism fails, the road to cognition runs through constructivism. We can end with a remark about the utility of an approach to cognition through constructivism. There are at least three different kinds of constructivism that I will be calling logical or quasi-logical, social, and finally historical.

Logical or quasi-logical constructivism is perhaps most prominently featured by Kant. Kantian constructivism, which formulates an a priori account of the conditions of cognition in general, has been called into question in different ways, of which I will mention only two instances. Both instances concern the a priori status of the Kantian theory. On the one hand, as noted, Kant turns to constructivism in drawing the lesson of the failure of efforts to grasp a mind-independent object. In this way he introduces what can be regarded as an a posteriori element into what is in principle an a priori theory. On the other hand, Kant relies on his a priori conception of mathematics. In the meantime, mathematics has arguably lost its claim to certainty. This claim, which once seemed, like Ozymandias, likely to stand forever, was traditional when Kant was active. Yet it was refuted in the nineteenth century as not a priori but rather a posteriori through the discovery of non-Euclidean geometry (cf. Kline 1965). The emergence of other geometries has two consequences. It means Kant is wrong about the a priori status of mathematics, which, if the distinction between the a priori and the a posteriori exhaust the conceptual universe, is a posteriori. It further means that Kant is also wrong about his supposedly transcendental claim that we can discover a priori what is necessarily true a posteriori. In Kantian language we can say that cognition of any kind not only necessarily begins in but is also limited by experience.

In the meantime, Kant's effort to construct an a priori conception of the world (cf. Friedman 2013) and ourselves has given way to various post-Kantian forms of social constructivism. "Social constructivism", a term coined by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, refers to the social situatedness, or form of contextualism, in which humans develop and knowledge is constructed (cf. Berger and Luckmann 1966). The rise of social constructivism, or a social conception of constructivism, suggests that, in virtue of the shift from the a priori to the a posteriori, notably through the anthropological development of the post-Kantian subject, Kantian constructivism has in the meantime been replaced by pragmatic constructivism.



Social constructivism marks a further development, but not the final step in the evolution of constructivism. Historical constructivism differs from both its constructivist relatives through its attention to the link between cognition and history, or cognition and the historical moment. If, as I believe, Hegel is right that we think out of and are restricted by the limits of the historical moment, then it follows that a further step in the cognitive process calls for a robust form of historical constructivism.

I have emphasized the relation of Kant and pragmatism to a historical form of constructivism. It might be objected that we should rather turn toward the future of philosophy in turning away from, in simply ignoring, the past. Yet it seems obvious that we need to understand the past to know what remains to be done.

In conclusion, I would like to suggest that the future of constructivism lies neither in a logical or quasi-logical approach to cognition, nor again in a social approach. It rather lies, after Kant, in further developing pragmatism, and in rethinking constructivism on a robust historical basis.

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PART III

ANTHROPOLOGY,  
PSYCHOLOGY AND  
RELIGION

# Does Pragmatism Need a Concept of Autonomy?

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## 1. Introduction

Although the Greek roots of the word autonomy militate against attributing its invention to Immanuel Kant, it would not be a stretch to argue that Kant created a metaphysics and moral philosophy that gave birth to and insisted upon a type of autonomy not seen in prior philosophical systems (Schneewind 1998, 6). The essence of moral action insofar as it is moral for Kant is found in autonomy. For an action to count as within the bounds of morality, a moral agent must act purely out of respect for the moral law and only out of such respect. Similarly, Kant grounds the dignity that humans manifest as rational beings in their ability to employ autonomous reason rather than being subject to the vicissitudes of impulse as are, apparently, non-rational brutes. The Kantian idea of autonomy is probably as important a concept for the development of the concept of the modern human and its requisite demands for dignity as any other we are likely to find (*ibid.*, 4).

And yet such a high and pure standard creates a problem if one is committed to the principles of naturalism and continuity, as pragmatists tend to be. Moreover, the pragmatic maxim cuts against the very idea of “a thing in itself” apart from one’s experience of it, the very notion that Kant invoked in his critical philosophy in order to preserve a domain for autonomy to reside. Birthed in response to the discovery of evolution by natural selection, pragmatism can do naught but see human beings as evolved creatures that must cope in a world of pushes and pulls of

impulse and desire and who, as such, have no access to a domain of pure reason.

The very idea of a separate realm of autonomous reasons or actions violates the pragmatic principle of continuity in several ways. First, it is difficult to see how anything like autonomy could evolve under the pressures of natural selection whose very nature is defined by the concept of fitness, that is, the relevance of a given choice or adaptation for a specific, local end that is conditioned by the needs and interests of the organism. Second, it is difficult to see what difference the existence of a pure reason (even a pure practical reason) or a noumenal self could make in a naturalistically constrained world. Finally, the pragmatic principle of continuity recognizes the evolutionary principle of conservation of means. That is, any higher mechanism of reason must be built out of parts that were evolved for simpler functions, thus rebutting the faculty psychology at the heart of the Kantian system. A final friction between pragmatism and Kantian autonomy lies in the pragmatists' tendency to focus upon the malleability of individual-other/organism-environment relations. For the pragmatists, there doesn't seem to be a simple, concrete, whole, separate self, which Kant's notion of autonomy requires. Pragmatists tend to focus on concepts like transaction at the expense of boundaries, and fluidity and vagueness at the expense of identity and specificity.

Does this mean that pragmatists cannot avail themselves of the ethically salient notion of autonomy and related conceptions? I think that the answer to this question is no. While the pragmatist will have little recourse to a Kantian conception of autonomy, rooted in a non-naturalistic metaphysics replete with discontinuities that conflict with pragmatist commitments, there is another conception of autonomy that is available to pragmatists that might be compatible with pragmatic commitments. What I have in mind is the concept of "biological autonomy" as articulated by Francesco Varela. At the end of the chapter, I will consider the advantages and disadvantages of a pragmatic appropriation of this concept that comes to us from systems theory and theoretical biology.

One background assumption for my proposal is that pragmatism has been fruitfully stimulated by concepts arising from biology, specifically the theory of evolution by natural selection. Dewey (1983) and others (e.g., Popp 2007), of course, have had a lot to say about the influence of Darwinian evolution on the development of pragmatism in general and on Dewey's thought in particular. Even so, it is important to note that evolutionary biology has changed significantly since Darwin's and, in-

deed, Dewey's time. Evolutionary theory alone has undergone at least three major new syntheses: Weismannian germ theory, population genetics, and Franklin, Watson, Wilkins, and Crick's discovery of the structure of DNA. Moreover, biological theory has benefited from developments in other fields such as systems theory and second order cybernetics that did not exist during the heyday of classical pragmatism. The idea here isn't that pragmatism must be "biologized" or limited to concepts deriving from biological inquiry but rather that it is already a biological philosophy that has been and might continue to be fruitfully stimulated by such concepts.

In this chapter, I examine the features of Kantian autonomy that render it problematic for pragmatists. I then argue that, while problematic, pragmatists probably can't simply do without any sort of notion of autonomy. In the third section, I introduce the concept of "biological autonomy" and explore the potential and the difficulties of using this concept to do the kind of work that philosophical autonomy does in the Kantian system. In general, my claim is that the concept of biological autonomy might be useful for situating and updating the naturalistic project of pragmatism so long as one keeps in mind the dangers of biologizing the humanities and/or reducing the unique situated-ness of human beings to the situation of non-human biological organisms.

## 2. Tensions between Kantian autonomy and pragmatism

There are three main areas in which tensions emerge between pragmatism and a Kantian concept of autonomy: differing conceptions of causation and law, differences with respect to Reason and inquiry, and the implications of the findings of evolutionary biology and research into the functioning of human motivational systems.

### 2.1 Differences with respect to causation and law

Kant's conception of autonomy depends on conceptions of causation and lawfulness with which Dewey and other pragmatists were at odds and criticized relentlessly. While not a determinist, Kant accepts the premises of determinism that were given by the then contemporary understanding of Newtonian physics and, as such, must aver a special form of non-natural causation to avoid the unacceptable implications of determinism for morality, i. e., that if our actions are determined by empirical causes, we cannot be held accountable for our actions and morality is illu-

sory. To solve this philosophical conundrum, Kant invokes the faculty of the Will, which interacts with his conception of autonomy in three ways.

First, for Kant, the Will exercises a special form of causality that is peculiar to rational beings. As Thomas Hill explains, "it is a power to cause changes in the world on the basis of a rationale, which if spelled out would include our beliefs, aims, policies, and an implicit idea of a relevant rational principle" (Hill 1998, 18). Now, depending upon what is at issue when it is claimed that this is a *special* form of causation, a pragmatist need not *necessarily* object to this view and might even endorse it. Pragmatists, such as Dewey and James, embrace the notion that our ideas have causal power and that they play a role in human action in a way that is distinctive for the sorts of beings that we are. Pragmatists would, however, take issue with this claim if *special* were taken to mean non-natural, that is, distinct and disconnected from the kinds of processes that make up the rest of the universe.

The second interaction between the Will and autonomy for Kant involves negative freedom. As Hill explains, a person can "act and cause events without the person's choices being causally determined by prior physical and psychological forces" (Hill 1998, 18). On the face of it, a pragmatist would have no problem with this claim either. Insofar as pragmatists are not determinists, they view human choices as not being *determined* by prior physical or psychological forces. However, as Hill points out, there is a dual aspect to this claim regarding negative freedom. For Kant, one is free in the negative sense only if one is (a) "able to act independently of empirical causes and. . . [b] capable of acting independently of empirical motives" (Hill 1998, 19, fn. 3). Now, while a pragmatist might quibble with the wording of (a), there's no fundamental disagreement there because, as previously noted, pragmatists are not, as a rule, determinists. However, a pragmatist will take issue with (b) insofar as pragmatists are (radical) empiricists. Empirical motives are the only ones that we've got and yet, in their view, we can be free in this sense even if we may choose only among empirical motives. This is possible because pragmatists were different sorts of empiricists than Locke or Hume and because they developed a more sophisticated moral psychology than was available to the British empiricists, a difference that I will discuss below.

The third significant interaction between Will and autonomy involves Kant's conception of positive freedom (Kant 1952 [1788], 29). It is here that a pragmatic understanding of free action is most at odds with the Kantian version because of more thoroughgoing differences in ontology and epis-



temology, and a different orientation toward the concepts of “obedience” and “law”. For Kant, even if our actions are free, they must still be subject to some kind of law (Hill 1998, 19). It is for this reason that Kant offers his innovation to the idea of autonomy whereby humans are both bound by law and free because they give the law to themselves and are, as such, and only for this reason, bound by it. But this innovation is necessary only because of the conception of law as necessarily invariant and objectively given that Kant inherited and that pragmatists, such as Dewey, rejected. Where Kant writes, “Laws must completely determine the will as well, even before I ask whether I am capable of achieving a desired effect or what should be done to realize it” (Kant 1956 [1788], 18), a pragmatist will rejoin that laws are regularities we find in experience and, as such, are incapable of determining anything.

For Dewey, determinism—or “the doctrine of necessity”—rests on a misunderstanding about the nature of the idea of necessity. Whereas determinists view necessity as an objective feature of the world, Dewey argues that, in the strong sense, necessity properly occurs in the context of inquiry as a relation between ideas, not things in the world (Dewey EW 4: 20). Specifically, Dewey claims that necessity does not refer to any sort of compulsion whatsoever but rather to the “degree of coherence” among the constituent factors of an affirmation. He writes, “When we say something or other *must* be so and so, the ‘must’ does not indicate anything in the nature of the fact itself, but a trait in our *judgment* of that fact; it indicates the degree with which we have succeeded in making a whole out of the various elements which have to be taken into account in forming the judgment” (Dewey EW 4: 21). Moreover, the idea of necessity represents a halfway stage in inquiry, one that is midway between the initial stage where we have completely unrelated judgments and the final stage where the parts have been so bound into a comprehensive synthesis that they are barely distinguishable. While more time and effort could be spent unpacking and evaluating Dewey’s argument regarding what he termed “The Superstition of Necessity”, what has already been said should be sufficient to show that Dewey’s conception of necessity and therefore also of determination and laws is radically different from Kant’s understanding of these issues. The upshot is that Dewey doesn’t need a special form of non-empirical causality to ensure the possibility of negative and positive freedom because he doesn’t believe that laws, whether scientific, moral, or statutory, constrain us in the ways that Kant thinks that they must. As such, Dewey doesn’t need the strong form of tran-

scendent autonomy that Kant insists upon to avoid the dilemma between “anarchy and submission” (O’Neill 1992, 300) because, for Dewey and the other pragmatists, this is a false dilemma that rests upon a misunderstanding about the nature of necessity and law.

## 2.2 Differences with respect to reason and inquiry

It should be clear from what has just been said that pragmatists reject the notion that human beings have a distinct faculty called Will that is autonomous insofar as it determines itself according to the dictates of another faculty called Reason. In fact, the pragmatists—James and Dewey at any rate—rejected faculty psychology altogether (Johnson 2014, 24). Thus, another tension between pragmatism and Kantian autonomy is that pragmatists don’t believe that there is a faculty called Reason that could command us, or that we could obey, and obedience to which would constitute autonomy. In place of “Reason”, pragmatists substitute inquiry, which is not a faculty but an activity—essentially problem-solving—that includes the interrogation and refinement of impulses, desires, and goals according to the needs of the situation (Dewey 1988 [1922]). This is a different form of self-rule from Kantian autonomy: it is the notion that we may, given the proper conditions, exercise control over the processes of our own habit-formation.

For the pragmatists, morality isn’t a distinctive sphere of experience separate from, e. g., religion, politics, science, art, or engineering. Reality doesn’t come divided into distinct spheres (Johnson 2014). Any problematic situation can have a moral aspect. It is for this reason that the pragmatists didn’t see the need for a distinct faculty whose purview would be morality. We as human beings are faced with problematic situations, and our task when presented with such situations is to rearrange experience by means of inquiry so that those situations are rendered no longer—or at least less—problematic. Now, parts of those situations will be more and less amenable to transformation by our efforts. Moreover, to be effective, we must utilize the results of past inquiries upon the present problematic situation. These two elements are what commonly go by the name of facts and laws (scientific or moral), but resolving morally problematic situations is, in this view, by no means a question of objectively determining a pre-existing truth or obeying the dictates of a law.

### 2.3 The effects of evolutionary theory and the science of motivation

Autonomy emerged as a fundamental concept in morality in the context of a shift away from a moral theory where “obedience”, whether to the divine will or its temporal analogue, divinely sanctioned princely authority, to an understanding of morality in terms of self-governance (Schneedwind 1998, 4–5). It was Descartes’s view that “God sets up laws in nature just as a king sets up laws in his kingdom” (Descartes, to Martin Mersenne, cited in Margulis and Sagan 2000 [1995], 38). As this new morality of self-governance emerged, the idea of a universal (or at least universally accessible) reason emerged to displace the role that punishment and reward had played under the previous regime (Schneedwind 1998, 4–5). Schneewind notes that the currents that gave rise to the new morality in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were religious and political rather than scientific. However, later developments that came to challenge the dominant conception of morality based upon transcendent autonomy in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries were based in scientific discoveries, specifically Darwin’s theory of evolution by natural selection and advances in empirical psychology.

It was thus that autonomy-based moral theory emerged in the more humanistic setting of the Enlightenment to displace the obedience-based moral theory of the preceding theocentric worldview. As Schneewind notes, the development of Enlightenment humanism, at least in the context of moral theory, was by no means primarily anti-religious. He writes, “If I were forced to identify something or other as ‘the Enlightenment project’ for morality, I should say that it was the effort to limit God’s control over earthly life while keeping him essential to morality” (Schneewind 1998, 8). This project did, however, involve displacing God to some extent and ascribing Godlike powers, whether in the form of an imperious will or an unlimited and universal reason, to human beings. The development of evolutionary theory in the nineteenth century, however, posed perhaps as great a challenge to this aspect of Enlightenment humanism as it did to the theological worldview in undermining the argument from design. This is because this humanism ascribed powers to human beings that were not found in the rest of nature and this ascription required the maintenance of not only a difference of degree but also one of kind between human beings and the rest of nature. Evolutionary theory went a long way toward collapsing the rationale underlying the basis for a radical distinction between human beings and other living things.

If, as Darwin claimed, human beings evolved from “lower” forms of life, it becomes harder to see how humans might have access to anything like universal reason or transcendent will. Two features fundamental to evolutionary theory and embraced by pragmatists stand in the way of accepting the moral psychology implied by Kantian autonomy. First, evolution’s principle of continuity, wherein higher functions are performed by repurposing prior adaptations, suggests that the faculty psychology presupposed by Kantian ethics is unlikely to have been an evolutionary product. Second, according to evolutionary theory, cognitive functions—including moral perception and reasoning—evolved to enhance survival and reproduction; hence, even if they do succeed in mirroring the world from time to time, there is no guarantee that they do so unflinchingly, much less that they represent transcendent truths detached from the everyday world and our empirical motives found therein. Cognitive functions, including moral reasoning, could have evolved to function only in terms of empirical, not transcendental content, thus rendering an evolutionary understanding of human psychology incompatible with Kantian autonomy. As such, to the extent that pragmatists embrace an evolutionary account of the development of human psychology, pragmatists will resist an understanding of morality in terms of Kantian autonomy.

Not only evolutionary biology but also advances in neurophysiology and the sciences of human motivations tend to raise doubts about the Kantian account of autonomy. According to Karl Ameriks, “Kant does not refer to an empirical freedom from particular empirical forces, but to transcendental freedom as a will that is a unique cause wholly independent of empirical determination” (Ameriks 1998, 53). Yet recent work in neurophysiology has shown that all cognition is deeply tied to the limbic system, which functions in terms of biochemical reward and inhibition mechanisms (Damasio 1999 and 2003). Thus, according to this research, the human nervous system could not function at all if it were “wholly independent of empirical determination”. Contra Kant, Dewey thought that only an “Immature and undisciplined mind believes in actions which have their seat and source in a particular and separate being, from which they issue” (Dewey LW 1: 324). Moreover, it is worth noting that, as psychologists and philosophers, both James and Dewey anticipated many of these findings regarding the emotional basis of cognition, including moral reasoning, which therefore represent yet another source of tension between pragmatism and Kantian autonomy.

### 3. Why pragmatism needs (something like) autonomy

Given these tensions between pragmatist commitments and the strong and influential conception of autonomy that is at the heart of Kantian moral philosophy, it is tempting to answer “no” to the question in the title of this paper. If pragmatism is so much and in so many ways at odds with autonomy, why not simply abandon the concept altogether and move on? There are (at least) two sets of reasons why simply abandoning autonomy would be problematic.

The first set of reasons involves the role that autonomy plays in the modern, post-Enlightenment discourse of humanism. Put simply, autonomy is at the heart of the modern conception of what it means to be fully human, endowed with rights and responsibilities that bind us together in a common ethical and political project. As such, the notion of autonomy, in principle at least, serves as a bulwark against forces and institutions that would otherwise undermine this project, such as the rise of the total administrative state. The idea of autonomy helps preserve the notion that persons are not (or at least not merely) objects to be administered. Humans, as autonomous entities, deserve to be consulted about what is done to and for them, even when these things are done for their benefit and especially when they are not.

Having emerged from the (religious) principle of freedom of conscience during the Protestant Reformation (Schneewind 1998, 6–7), today the concept of autonomy is part of the philosophical scaffolding for important human rights like the freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and *habeas corpus* (Normand and Zaidi 2008). It is also fundamental to the dominant conception that we have of ourselves as moral agents who are responsible to and for one another.

The concept of autonomy functions within a larger conception of human beings as bearers of value that serves as an inhibitor to the reduction of all social and political relations to those of pure power. It does this primarily by means of its relationship to the concept of Reason. The notion of autonomous reason shores up the idea that something other than outcomes matters in the settling of disputes. The idea is that there are better and worse forms of persuasion and, in the ideal form of communication, the force of reason holds sway in place of (other) forms of coercion. Autonomy creates a clear relationship between reason and dignity by instituting an ideal of individual sovereignty. This human sovereignty is analogous to and takes its model from divine sovereignty, the two being linked by

mutual—human and divine—access to universal reason. While autonomy has not always been crucial to a robust concept of human dignity, through historical developments that are not easily turned back, it has become so (Schneewind 1998, 5).

The second set of reasons why philosophers in general and pragmatists in particular should not blithely give up on the idea of autonomy has to do with the crucial role it plays in a number of discussions in applied ethics. There are a great many practical ethical situations in which questions of autonomy are at issue, from questions of informed consent and patient's rights to how one must treat human tissues and beyond. Hill (2013) identifies three common themes to the role that autonomy plays in questions of applied ethics. According to Hill, autonomy

1. "is a *right* to make one's own decisions, especially about matters deeply affecting one's own life"
2. "is a *capacity and disposition* to make decisions with *due reflection and independence* of mind" and
3. "is seen as being in control of a life that encompasses a substantial range of activities and relations with others". (Hill 2013, 24)

Hill observes that these notions as applied to individuals mirror those rights that sovereign states generally reserve to themselves, and, while not identical with Kantian principles, Hill argues that a Kantian conception of autonomy might serve to support these principles. Our question, however, having noted definite tensions or perhaps even irreconcilable differences between pragmatism and Kantian autonomy, is whether *only* a Kantian conception of autonomy can serve to undergird "practical autonomy" or, by contrast, we might find a naturalistic and otherwise generally more pragmatically acceptable alternative.

#### 4. Biological autonomy to the rescue?

Francisco Varela articulated the concept of biological autonomy (BA) in the context of theorizing about what is distinctive about living things. Varela notes that autonomy literally means "self-law" and contrasts it with its antonym, allonomy, or external law, which we otherwise understand as "control". Autonomy, he writes,

Represents generation, internal regulation, assertion of one's identity: definition from the inside. [Allonomy] represents consumption, input and output, assertion of the entity of the other: definition from outside. Their interplay spans a broad range, from genetics to psychotherapy. Varela 1979, XII

Living things are autonomous because they are composed of dissipative components and exist in dissipative environments in far-from-equilibrium states. For this reason, they must exert effort to make, unmake, and remake these components and environmental relations to preserve themselves. For Varela, autonomy and control represent two fundamental and distinct paradigms for thinking about information. The fundamental categories for allonomy are instruction and the model is input/process/output. Failure of instruction is conceived as error. By contrast, the fundamental paradigm for autonomy is conversation and failure is conceived in terms of breaches of understanding.

According to Varela, the success of physics, molecular biology, and the evolutionary paradigm have led to the dominance of the allonomous model in how we think about complex systems; however, this model is inappropriate when exclusively applied to living systems. It has led to the dominance of the cognitive paradigm of cognitive processes as representations that are thought to correspond to an external environment. However, he writes, "To take this approach as a general and universal strategy for all aspects of natural systems, including human transactions, seems incredibly limiting" (Varela 1979, XIV). Indeed, he argues,

It is my view that this area of science has been substantially modeled in the image of physics and its technological pathos. One essential difference here however is that *we* and the world that supports us belong to the categories of sentient being and not of atoms and quasars. Consequently, the Promethean approach inherited from physics bounces back at us in a fast and dramatic way. Varela 1979, XIII

Autonomous systems do not operate on an input-output model. Indeed, from their point of view, there is no input and no output of information. Rather, they operate according to their own organizational structure in ongoing ontogenesis. They are perturbed by their own operations and environmental triggers, but they are not controlled by them. Varela explains that (in his sense) autonomy exists "wherever there is a sense of being distinct from a background, together with the capacity to deal with it via cognitive actions" (Varela 1979, XIII).

Moreno and Mossio, who have further developed, articulated, and expanded upon Varela's concept of BA, put the point in this way:

Seen from the perspective of their relations with their environment, individual organisms are systems capable of acting for their own benefit, of constituting an identity that distinguishes them from their environment (at the same time as they continue interacting with it as open, far-from equilibrium systems.

Moreno and Mossio 2015, XXIII

In living (and other autonomous) systems, their being is indistinguishable from their doing (cf., Jonas 2001 [1966]). Living systems, they emphasize, cannot stop their activities without ceasing to be, and, in making this point, they draw a parallel with Spinoza's concept of *conatus*, which appears in his *Ethics*. Unfortunately, there is a great deal that could be said in unpacking the concept of BA, but to do so here would exceed the bounds of space, time, and propriety.

It is worth noting that Kant invoked something like the principle of Biological Autonomy in trying to account for the apparent teleology of living things, the principle of *Bildungstrieb* ("formative impulse"), which Kant borrowed from the naturalist J. F. Blumenbach, as distinct from "that merely mechanical *formative power* universally resident in matter" (Kant 1951 [1790], 274). *Bildungstreib* is used by Kant to account for living beings as "natural purposes". He needs something like this principle because the apparent purposiveness of living beings is otherwise inexplicable by Kant's regulative principle that "all that we assume as belonging to this nature (*phenomenon*) and as its product must be thought as connected with it according to mechanical laws" (ibid., 271). As Jane Bennett explains, "As Kant saw it, one virtue of *Bildungstrieb* as a concept was that it provided a way to affirm the *uniqueness* of the phenomenon of organic growth, which was simultaneously a mechanical and a teleological process" (Bennett 2010, 67).

It is important to note, however, that *Bildungstrieb* differs from BA in one very important way: For Kant, *Bildungstrieb* was merely a regulative principle, useful for biologists in investigating living phenomena but in no way considered to be an actual agency in the world (ibid., 66). (Also, one should note, for Kant *Bildungstrieb* was distinct from the Will, which is found uniquely in "Man".) For pragmatists who might consider adopting the concept of BA, there is no such need for a radical distinction between "real" and "purely heuristic" principles of the sort that Kant routinely invokes. Moreover, owing to their different understanding of the nature



of Law to that of Kant, pragmatists are not, in general, committed to the notion of a purely passive, obedient, and essentially dead matter as Kant was and, as such, have no need to invoke a principle like *Bildungstrieb*. Marcel Quarfood (2006) provides a detailed analysis of this concept in attempting to resolve the conceptual difficulties left by Kant; however, a detailed consideration of these issues lies beyond the scope of this chapter.

There are two main things that BA achieves in the context of philosophical concerns that extend beyond questions limited to the philosophy of biology. First, it allows us to identify entities that have interests, that act upon those interests, and which are defined in terms of the entities themselves rather than by an outside observer. Recalling William James's "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life", in a lifeless universe, there is no possible way that one state of affairs is preferable to another (James 1891). Different arrangements of atoms and quarks are equally valueless. Once biological autonomy emerges, however, entities exist that manifest preferences. Thus, according to James, it is through (something like) biological autonomy that value comes to exist at all.

The second thing that BA provides, as Varela points out, is an alternative to control ideology. BA is "a view of participatory knowledge and reality, which we see rooted in the cognitive, informational processes of nature from its most elementary cellular forms" (Varela 1979, xvi). The implications of this view extend far beyond the concerns of cellular biology. Varela writes,

What is basically valid for the understanding of the autonomy of living systems, for cells and frogs, carries over to *our* nervous system and social autonomy, and hence to a naturalized epistemology.

Varela 1979, xvii

The computational model of sentience leads to a worldview in which external control is the only possible factor to consider, a view that reduces all questions to those of design, or manipulation. Biological autonomy, by contrast, in opening the way to a different mode of understanding complex processes, allows for the emergence of value not as opposed to questions of what is the case but as at the very heart of observation.

In addition to these positive features, BA is preferable to Kantian autonomy for what it does not do. Biological autonomy is naturalistic and therefore does not appeal to any sort of thing-in-itself or insist upon a distinct form of causation. BA does not require or suppose that we have access to universal reason. Finally, BA is not dependent upon an outdated and discredited form of faculty psychology.

That said, there are a few concerns that might be raised about BA. One worry is that, insofar as BA is a scientific concept, developed in the context of theoretical biology, it cannot reflect or deal with humanistic concerns in general or more specifically the demands of ethics. There is a serious side to this concern, but one version of it can be eliminated by considering the wider role that Varela sees autonomy plays in terms of broad, humanistic concerns. He writes,

Unless we take into account that there is an autonomous side to many natural and social systems, we run into troubles, not only in the specifics of research and formalizations, but in the wider scale of our dealings with sentient beings, with life, with the environment, and in human communication. In this respect, the problems of biology are a microcosm of the global philosophical questions with which we grapple today. Varela 1979, xv

What's more, considering the pragmatic principle of continuity, it should not be surprising that features that are found in the simplest living systems have analogues that might be helpful for understanding more the more complex relationships among systems that have evolved from similar, simpler systems.

A second, related concern relates to worries about scientism. Since BA is a scientific concept, one might wonder whether its application to areas beyond the physical sciences amounts to a kind of scientism. This concern, too, is easily dealt with insofar as BA is proposed as an alternative to the Promethean, positivistic scientism that is dominated by the control paradigm. It is also worth pointing out that concepts are borrowed and shared back and forth among various discourses all the time. For example, the very idea of a "machine" originated from the observation of living systems long before this concept was reapplied to the understanding of living systems. The borrowing of a concept in biology for use in the humanities should not be a concern as long as one is aware of the possible ideological uses of such borrowings and attuned to the fact that, as Glynn L. L. Isaac puts it, "Scientific theories and information about human origins have been slotted into the same old places in our minds and our cultures that used to be occupied by the myths" (quoted in Wynter 1997). If we are vigilant about the risks of the ideological uses of science, we should not be troubled by the origins of ideas, even if they were developed in the context of scientific investigation.

Two final concerns about using BA in place of Kantian autonomy raise more serious worries. One is that BA doesn't do enough of the work that

Kantian autonomy does in traditional ethics. It's one thing to say that biologically autonomous entities have *conatus* and quite another to argue that this fact implies that they have dignity or deserve respect. This is a serious concern. Clearly, the concept of BA needs to be further articulated and a lot of work would need to be done to make the concept serviceable as a tool for pragmatic ethics. However, the hope is that, once such work has been done, BA might serve as a sort of non-foundational basis for an expansive ecological ethics, one that focuses on the interdependence of autonomous systems in a way that is largely overlooked by current ethical theory while at the same time avoiding the philosophically problematic notion of intrinsic or inherent value that dominates some strands of contemporary environmental ethics.

A final worry about BA is that it does too much. If an ethical theory built upon BA requires that we concern ourselves with the interests of all biologically autonomous entities, the worry is that such a level of concern is unsustainable. By not being able to ignore the interests or valuing and value-seeking character of a seemingly limitless range of beings, the worry goes, we will find ourselves ethically exhausted. This is a genuine concern, but I would suggest that at this point, given the ecological devastation that we humans continue to wreak upon the planet, and the ease with which we allow ourselves so many moral holidays on any number of fronts, an increased level of moral sensitivity to a wide range of sentient beings is probably a risk that is worth taking. So, the tentative answer I want to give to the question posed at the outset, "Does pragmatism need a concept of autonomy?", is "probably", and I suggest that, with continued development, the concept of biological autonomy, with some caveats, just might fit the bill.

As previously noted, William James argues in "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life" that no transcendental faculties whatsoever are required for understanding the origins of values and norms. Sentient beings, James argues, have preferences and, once they come upon the scene, a moral dimension is added to the universe—one that did not exist prior to their appearance. What I have tried to show is how Biological Autonomy might serve to provide some more concrete details to the pragmatic account in a way that benefits from and is compatible with important work in the biological and various systems sciences. This is not to say that the simple concept of BA does much work ethically at all. Then again, neither does Kantian autonomy. Rather, I have argued that BA is an important key to a pragmatic and ecological approach to ethics that rests not upon

turning humans into “little Gods outside of nature” (Dewey LW 1: 324) but that rather understands humans and other living creatures as deserving of ethical consideration—albeit different forms appropriate to their distinct forms of life—from a point of view that is consistent with a pragmatic commitment to the principles of naturalism and continuity.

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# Pragmatic Evolutions of the Kantian *a priori*: From the Mental to the Bodily

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## 1. Introduction

My aims in this chapter are threefold: first, to offer textual evidence indicating that William James and John Dewey expanded—which simultaneously means criticizing and adjusting—the Kantian project; second, to demonstrate that the pragmatic evolution of the Kantian *a priori* is a transition from the mental to the bodily; and, third, to highlight applied merits of this transition. As with Immanuel Kant’s work, which emerged against the background of Newtonian and Copernican revolutions, pragmatism developed in the context of the next most significant scientific advancement up until that point: Darwinism. Hence in addition to speaking of a transition in thinking brought about by pragmatists, I examine its relation to evolutionary theory.

Evolution by natural selection was one in a small flood of theories of transmutation that began cropping up in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and earlier. It is in fact difficult to overstate the impact of such outlooks and especially Darwinism on the trajectory of biology, social theory, economics, psychology, and quite a bit more. In regards to understandings of mind from the late Modern period onward, a speculative case can be made that evolutionary accounts emphasized such intelligent action as adaptation, which occurs on both a mental and somatic level. Arguably, this partly accounts for the influx of motor theories of mind in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The advent of experimental science played an additional role in updating understandings of mind, while simultaneously supply-

ing links between Kant and pragmatists. This is because experimental science makes progress by actively manipulating and thus altering the world. Kant took inspiration from this and argued that the world must be altered and brought into conformity with cognition to be coherently registered. Pragmatists, also drawing insights from experimental science, maintained something similar, only in this case discussing how bodily activities pull experience into coherent form. Nelson Goodman (1978, x) was accordingly on mark—though for reasons he perhaps did not completely grasp since he did not stress embodiment—when he suggested that Kant pioneered a movement that set the stage for pragmatic philosophies of world-making.

As is likely evident, I strongly believe in the legitimacy and fruitfulness of embodied approaches and consequently defend them, attending especially to pragmatic contributions to their development. I also dislike *casual* dismissals of past intellectual traditions insofar as they are almost invariably unwarranted and follow from misconstruals of what people meant in the historical contexts in which they thought.<sup>1</sup> I accordingly challenge those who neglect the relevance of Kant's philosophy to embodied views, along with those who dismiss the Kantian *a priori* as a dead end. In the hands of pragmatists and like-minded thinkers such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the Kantian *a priori* has evolved into embodied positions that shed considerable light on human experience and have a range of practical implications extending well beyond academic philosophy.

## 2. Kant and James

British empiricists provoked both Kant and James. For Kant it was David Hume; for James it was primarily Herbert Spencer. Kant of course re-

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<sup>1</sup> Note that it is not criticism I object to, but rather casual dismissals. R. G. Collingwood (1939), for example, complained that his Oxford University students often dismissed texts without warrant, particularly through failing to grasp that they answer historically specific problems. This also applies on a more immediate level, so that the meaning of the statement, *I threw the ring in the garbage*, varies depending on whether the question was, *Where is your wedding ring?* or *Where is that cheap novelty ring?* That identical statements have different meanings when answering different questions indicates that we cannot understand texts merely by reading the words in them. We must also investigate problems they were intended to answer. I maintain that an examination along Collingwood's lines can uncover standpoints from which great figures in the history of philosophy make sense, even if one ultimately disagrees and wishes to criticize. In addition to this, and unless there is a widely accepted incorrect view, I think it is more fruitful and pragmatic to focus on what past thinkers got right.

spected Hume enough to recognize that the latter's well-known skeptical conclusions could not be dismissed out of hand. Kant's solution was not to deny the empiricist position with rationalist fortifications, but to effect a reconciliation. In this regard, Kant may be compared to James, even though he was sometimes scathing of his enlightenment predecessor (cf. James 1890 II, 275; 1992 [1898], 1096). James agreed with empiricists that it is by experience that beliefs are justified. He added, however, that beliefs and especially interests can arise independently of experience. These direct our focus and lead us to make rational connections, thereby giving experience coherent form it would otherwise lack (for review cf. Crippen 2010, 2011). In his early and middle works, James (e.g., 1992 [1878a], 1890 II, Ch. 28) accordingly claimed to side with *a priori* psychologists, even while rejecting their emphasis on logical limits.

In responding to British empiricists, Kant and James both inverted the way that Western philosophers had looked at knowledge. According to Kant (1998 [1787]), thinkers before him had held that "cognition must conform to the objects" (B XVI).<sup>2</sup> Citing difficulties with this approach, Kant explored an alternative possibility, "namely that we can cognize of things *a priori* only what we ourselves have put into them" (B XVIII). In other words, we can only register what is brought into conformity with the structure of our cognition. Kant described his approach as analogous to that of Nicolaus Copernicus, who decided to assume that the Sun is at rest, and see what follows (B XVI). This thought literally changes how we must picture planetary paths if we are to picture them coherently at all. Our cognition thereby pulls objects into an arrangement, makes them appear in conformity with it, rather than the reverse. Kant conjectured that the same occurs on a more basic level, arguing that people have knowledge and coherent experience only insofar as the world is *actively* pulled into conformity with certain *a priori*, that is, logical limits (cf. B XVI–B XIX). James likewise maintained there are "*a priori* element[s] in cognition" (James 1992 [1878a] 897, fn.; also see James 1900 II, Ch. 28). Only where Kant specified ones such as "quality" and "quantity", James spoke of subjective interests. He asserted that interests and functionally similar mechanisms

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<sup>2</sup> In the pages that follow, I summarize claims from the second edition of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. No synopsis of Kant could be uncontroversial to anyone familiar with his work and its diverse receptions, but I shall presume—without argument—that readers who have long pondered Kant will recognize my approach as defensible. I will cite sections of Kant's *Critique* that have especial weight, giving page numbers of the second edition as republished within the standard German edition of Kant's works, Kant's *Gesammelte Schriften*, edited by the Royal Prussian (later German) Academy of Sciences.



limit what things we notice and how we proceed “rationally to connect them” (James 1879a, 12; James 1890 I, 287). James accordingly suggested that “interests precede” our experience of “outer relation[s]” (James 1992 [1878a], 897, fn.; also cf. James 1992 [1878b], 1890 I, Ch. 11).

That Kant and James shared this commonality led them to adopt analogous, albeit not identical, approaches to metaphysics—metaphysics here understood as a field concerned with the conditions under which anything can be said to have “reality” at all. Taking a cue from the burgeoning experimental sciences, Kant (1998 [1787]) maintained that reality can only be registered through some sort of active manipulation of it (B XII–B XIV)—that the mind not only acts to impose form on reality, thereby reconfiguring it, but that it must act so in order to coherently register anything as reality at all. The mind does so, again, by operating within *a priori* limits that dictate how reality—which here means the phenomenal world—is put together (B 161–B 166). This “putting together” is an interpretive act; things are united or synthesized—albeit often automatically and pre-reflectively—by means of *a priori* conceptual forms; and synthesizing acts are, in effect, judgments, that is, acts in which affirmations are made about certain things. Kant implied, accordingly, that human experience of reality itself is necessarily judgmental.

Kant’s approach to metaphysics, then, was not to start with a theory about how reality is and from there go to an account of what sorts of judgments can legitimately be made about it. Rather, he began with the assertion that mind is limited to making certain kinds of judgments and from there developed a theory about how reality must be for the mind—a theory, that is to say, about the structures to which reality must be made to conform if it is to be registered at all. His approach, therefore, to legitimating metaphysical judgments such as the principle of causality was not to show that the principle is a fact observed in reality, but that it is a necessary condition of humans experiencing reality as they do. For Kant (1998 [1787]), this meant that the experiential basis upon which empiricists challenge the principle actually presupposes it, thus rendering their refutation self-contradictory (B 233–B 248).

Where Kant justified certain metaphysical judgments on the basis that they are pre-conditions of having any experience of reality whatever, James justified them on the grounds that they are pre-conditions of particular kinds of experiences. James thus approached metaphysics from the same inverted direction, but understood metaphysical inquiry more narrowly as “nothing but an usually obstinate attempt to think clearly and con-

sistently” about fundamental tenets underlying a given field of human thought (James 1890I, 145). Put otherwise, he understood metaphysics as the elucidation of fundamental guiding beliefs that enable particular forms of life activity and therewith certain experiences, and underlying all this, for James, was subjective interests. Oncologists, for example, encounter their world armed with an interested belief that cancer necessarily has causes. In the same way that a statistician can only account for that which is quantifiable, oncologists can only explain that to which causes can be ascribed. This is where they focus their attention, accordingly. In Kantian terms, oncologic realities can only appear as realities insofar as they conform to the principle of causality. Thus the principle demarcates a boundary beyond which oncologists cannot see. The principle is justified, then, not because oncologists show it to be an observable fact in the realities they encounter, but because it is a precondition of them encountering and dealing practically with the reality of cancer as they do.

A point at which James noticeably departed from Kant, accordingly, was in his refusal to recognize any clear separation between what Kant called “constitutive” and “regulative” principles. A constitutive principle is one such as the principle of causality, which, for Kant, is a necessary condition of anything appearing coherently to us. Because constitutive principles delimit how things must appear, they also delimit the sorts of objects about which one can have knowledge (Kant 1787, B 218–B 21). A regulative principle, by contrast, is essentially a pragmatic principle; it is a guideline for action, a teleological rule “*for seeking something we desire*” (Axinn 2006, 85). A regulative principle does not, on Kant’s account, play a role in constituting how reality appears, and consequently does not postulate the existence of objects about which humans can have knowledge. Kant (1998 [1787]) cited belief in God as an example (B 647). The belief guides human action, particularly in moral spheres (B 661–3). Yet God, Kant insisted, is not a reality about which one can have genuine knowledge (B 667–B 670). James agreed that belief in God can only be justified on pragmatic grounds. However, he also held this to be so of causality, especially the principle of causality (cf., James 1890II, 671). Against Kant, furthermore, and approaching an embodied view, he urged that any belief affecting human action is constitutive of experience, and thus of how reality is experienced by us (cf., James 1987 [1902], 460–5).

More broadly, James broke with Kant by extending—and some would say conceptually confusing—the *a priori* to include interests, inclinations and personally held beliefs. Kant tried to show that logical constraints

delimit *a priori* how reality must appear to all conscious beings who encounter things under the spatiotemporal conditions that humans do. In calling these constraints “logical”, Kant asserted that they are universal and necessary. In some sense, James recognized that *a priori* constraints limit how reality appears. Yet he added that while many are necessary, relatively few are universal. That is, he suggested many constraints are only *a priori* or necessary in relation to particular purposes, activities, biological constitutions and psychological dispositions (cf. James 1890 II, Ch. 28). Thus his task was not one of establishing logical limits, but of breaking them down by denying their universality. This denial contributed to his anti-skeptical project, for a metaphysical judgment about all reality is a negative judgment. Materialism, for example, makes the universal claim that all real objects are physical. More formally, it states that for any  $x$ , if  $x$  is real, then  $x$  is physical  $\forall x (Rx \rightarrow Px)$ , and this is equivalent to negating the existential claim that there is no  $x$  such that  $x$  is real and not physical  $\neg \exists x (Rx \wedge \neg Px)$ . Thus on a concrete or existential level, the universal statement is a negative or skeptical judgment about certain kinds of reality. By denying the universality of metaphysical judgments, James did not abrogate skeptical practices, but rather restricted how far we may cast our skeptical nets in a given instance.

Where James fundamentally agreed with Kant, however, and where he arguably amplified one of Kant’s profound insights, was in his conviction that we add to reality. “In point of fact”, he wrote, our world

seems to grow by our mental determinations . . . Take the ‘great bear’ or ‘dipper’ constellation in the heavens. We call it by that name, we count the stars and call them seven, we say they were seven before they were counted, and we say that whether any one had ever noted the fact or not, the dim resemblance to a long-tailed (or long-necked?) animal was always truly there. But [. . . w]ere they explicitly seven, explicitly bear-like, before the human witness came? Surely nothing in the truth of the attributions drives us to think this. They were only implicitly or virtually what we call them, and we human witnesses first explicated them and made them ‘real.’ A fact virtually pre-exists when every condition of its realization save one is already there. In this case the condition lacking is the act of the counting and comparing mind.

James 1904, 472–3

Our judgments, James concluded, change reality; or “[our] judgments at any rate change the character of future reality by the acts to which they lead” (James 1904, 473).

### 3. Bodily evolutions of the *a priori* in James and Dewey

The fact that James's primary target was specifically Spencer—though passed over earlier—is important. It is so because Spencer in fact offered an evolutionary variant of empiricism in a neo-Lamarckian vein. Neo-Lamarckism was indeed an extension of the British empiricist thesis that the environment directly molds organisms. Only it extended the shaping influence to encompass the body as well as mind, and expanded it further to include pressures exerted on both individuals and their ancestors. Though often presented otherwise, Lamarckism—whether in its original or “neo” form—was not mutually exclusive of evolution by natural selection, first made public by Charles Darwin and Alfred Russell Wallace in 1858. In line with this, Darwin left increasingly more room for it in each edition of *On the Origin of Species*. Nonetheless it offered an alternative, and James's rebuttal of Spencer drew on Darwinism, especially its notion of independent cycles of operation, which James (1992 [1880], 622) lauded as “the triumphant originality” of the theory.

In Darwinian evolution, this independence simply means that variations occur for some reason, but are random in regard to whether or not they are adaptive; and then, in a second cycle, the environment either promotes or thwarts variations based on how well they contribute to survival and reproduction. This insight was central to the account of mind James developed in his early and middle period for two related reasons. First, he noted the enormous complexity of the brain, and speculated it is correspondingly instable and accordingly prone to ejecting new ideas not solicited by the environment. Then, based on whether the idea is adaptive or not, it either persists or perishes. Second and more importantly, James maintained environments supply sensory variation, and then depending on our interests or concerns, we either notice or ignore them. Those that enter our notice affect us more. Without the chiseling effect of interests, James insisted experience would be “utter chaos” and consciousness “a gray chaotic indiscriminateness, impossible [...] to conceive” (1992 [1878b], 929; also cf. 1890I, 402–3). This is because we would attend to everything at once; we would consequently register little, and our experience might even be rendered contradictory. For example, in the case of Necker cubes, we might see opposing planes as simultaneously being front and back, thereby rendering something unpicturable (cf. Crippen, 2015).

A key parallel, then, between James and Kant—and later I will add Dewey—that is worth re-stressing is that they did not believe minds are mimetic devices. James—to repeat—saw his account as similar to Kant’s, only with interests supplanting a more formally logical scheme. As James put it in an early work, interests are “the real *a priori* element in cognition” (James 1992 [1878a], 897, fn.), and about 12 years later he claimed to be siding with the “*a priorists*” (James 1890 II, Ch. 28). What I want to argue is that this was the beginning of a pragmatic shift of the *a priori* from the mental to the bodily. It was, to begin with, because it emphasized visceral components in cognition. Although James sometimes drew a line between interests and emotions, he occasionally acknowledged overlap. And leaving aside what he said, conceptual overlap binds the two—for example, to be in love is to be intensely interested in someone. Recent research also establishes neurobiological overlap (e.g., Damasio 1999, esp. 273–4; Gregory *et al.* 2003, Matthias *et al.* 2009, Buldeo 2009). Emotions have a visceral aspect, something most accounts, including James’s, along with everyday life, affirm. This makes them emphatically bodily.

A more literal transition from the mental to bodily occurs with Dewey, and this too relates to shifts that evolutionary theory brought to the intellectual landscape, as well as Kantian debates ongoing in his day. Darwinism—not to mention Lamarckism—stresses adaptation. Adaptation is emphatically related to the body but also intelligence, thus providing a link between motoricity and mind (cf. Schulkin 2004, 8; Nyíri 2014, 136, fn.; Crippen 2017a, 118–9). In line with this, motor theories of mind abounded in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, with Dewey and numerous of his contemporaries anticipating figures such as Merleau-Ponty and in some cases more or less stating what enactivists such as Alva Noë state today.

Dewey in fact granted the rationalist position that we bring certain structures to bear upon our worlds and actively work them into coherent form, while agreeing with empiricists that experience is the basic stuff of mind and knowledge. However, he criticized both schools for overemphasizing the mental side of this. As he put it, “[e]xperience carries principles of connection and organization within itself” by virtue of arising out of “adaptive courses of action, habits, active functions, connections of doing and undergoing” and “sensori-motor co-ordinations” (Dewey 1920, 91). He reasoned that this means even presumably non-conscious organisms such as amoebae have at least preconditions of experience. Dewey later added, in a mix of rationalist and empiricist terminology, that perception is an “act of the going out [. . .] in order to receive” (Dewey 1934, 53).

Thus when we reach out to receive, caress and handle a ceramic jar, glassy smoothness and roundness are realized as perceptual effects; and whereas we can roll the jar between our palms, the same action and hence same experience is impossible with a crate. Here bodily structure and things encountered limit actions and hence experience, supplying a rough analogue to the Kantian *a priori*.

From this it follows—along lines comparable to those expressed by James and Kant—that we can only know things by messing about with them, a view also characteristic of experimental science. In addition to accounting for some of the commonalities between pragmatists and Kant, the scientific backdrop helps explain why Kantian and neo-Kantian views are in the lineage leading to figures such as Merleau-Ponty (cf., e.g., Matherne 2016). In the case of James, who imported scientific methods before they became formalized, the assertion could be both metaphorical and literal. As discussed, he maintained that emotions and interests chisel away at the sensory environment, meaning coherent experience depends on altering things. More literally, he held that beliefs are measured by willingness to act, and actions can have world-changing consequences that supply empirical verification or refutation for our beliefs (e.g., James 1882). Dewey, in addition to appropriating scientific methods, specifically adopted ideas from quantum mechanics and relativity, which posit that observing things changes them and that properties—even so-called primary ones—vary with standpoint, specifically, velocity relative to observation.

Dewey saw all this as variations of what goes on in everyday life where perception and cognition are not internal representations, but qualities of world-altering interrelations in which both extra-organic things and organisms partake. On this view, knowledge is likewise a product of looking around corners, picking up things, prodding, hefting and otherwise systematically altering conditions under which we observe them (cf. Dewey 1929, 87). What we call “sensations”—here distinguished from perception—are primarily important as provocations to consequence-generating action (Dewey 1920, 89–90; Dewey 1929, 112). The fact that our actions and therewith consequences are always necessarily limited means that we cannot believe whatever we want. Perceptual experience is likewise constrained by limits on bodily action. Arms, legs, fingers and other appendages cannot just do anything. Moreover, while they could in principle move in unsynchronized directions, they nearly always fall into coordinated rhythms when dealing with things (cf. Crippen 2014; Crippen

2016a). This happens, for example, when typing. Movements of fingers, arms, gaze, neck and torso all coordinate. It also happens when walking. A hiker's stride presses into a sandy trail, and the trail presses back, modulating and patterning the hiker's gait, so that a series of interactions integrates into experience. Here experience is not merely integrated in the sense that it pulls together, but also because it arises out of a "thoroughgoing integration of what philosophy discriminates as 'subject' and 'object'" (Dewey 1934, 277). Again, the yielding sand modifies the hiker's tread, the hiker's tread the sand; and through this mutual shaping—this integration of one to the other—the sandy quality of soft give is realized and brought concretely into experience.

These explanations have obvious Kantian undertones, and Dewey's account of mind and experience in fact emerged in his ongoing efforts to circumnavigate debates between rationalists and empiricists (e.g., Dewey 1906, 469–75; Dewey 1920, 81–91; Dewey 1922, 30–1; also cf. Crippen 2016b, 2017b). After Kant, the debate mostly transmuted into one between *a priori*ists and empiricists. As in pre-Kantian days, however, it remained centrally a dispute over the extent to which mind imposes form on the world or the other way around. Against rationalists, Dewey (1922) chided that our ways of cognizing follow from our ways of inhabiting worlds, which is to say, from embodied habits. "Ideas [ . . . ] are not spontaneously generated. There is no immaculate conception," he wrote. "Reason pure of all influence from prior habit is a fiction" (Dewey 1922, 30–1). But so too are the "pure sensations" of empiricists, for they "are alike affected by habits" (*ibid.*, 31). Empiricists, Dewey went on to say,

usually identify experience with sensations impressed upon an empty mind. They therefore replace the theory of unmixed thoughts with that of pure unmixed sensations [ . . . ]. But distinct and independent sensory qualities, far from being original elements, are the products of a highly skilled analysis [ . . . ]. To be able to single out a definitive sensory element in any field is evidence of a high degree of previous training, that is, of well-formed habits. A moderate amount of observation of a child will suffice to reveal that even such gross discriminations as black, white, red, green, are the result of some years of active dealings with things in the course of which habits have been set up. It is not such a simple matter to have a clear-cut sensation. The latter is a sign of training, skill, habit. Dewey 1922, 31

In sum, Dewey attacked rationalists for not being empiricists, that is, for not recognizing the priority of experience; yet this is, funny to say, also

why he attacked empiricists. “Our ideas”, he wrote, “truly depend on experience, but so do our sensations. And the experience upon which they both depend is the operation of habits” (ibid., 32).

While criticizing both rationalism and empiricism, Dewey—despite his emphasis on experience—sympathized with the rationalistic view that worlds are brought into conformity with mind; and that it is by virtue of minds having similar structures that common worlds arise, making them possible objects of shared experience and knowledge. Dewey, however, went on to add the world is subject matter for experience and knowledge insofar as we have developed according to the structures of worlds in which we commonly exist. We accordingly find some of our structures “concordant and congenial with nature, and some phases of nature with [ourselves]” (Dewey 1925, 277, also cf. Dewey 1929, 208–22). So far this sounds like empiricism. However, Dewey steadfastly insisted that we—and indeed all organisms—contribute to the habits and patterns of interrelating that make our worlds. As he explained, “habits incorporate an environment within themselves”, and in this sense conform to it, yet they are also “adjustments of the environment, not merely to it” (Dewey 1922, 52). It is to be expected, therefore, that experiences will be similar insofar as we have similar bodies and needs, and thus deploy similar actions in the environment, impacting it and responding to it in comparable ways, the intersection of all this constituting our worlds or experiences.

This position clearly resonates with Dewey’s idea (1981 [c. 1951], 361) of experience as culture, expressed near the end of his life. While meant literally, Dewey also employed the idea metaphorically in earlier writings, once again to challenge the notion of experience as a correspondence of inner life to an outer environment. “Any account of experience must”, he explained, “fit into the consideration that experiencing means living; and that living goes on in and because of an enviroing medium, not in a vacuum” (Dewey 1917, 8). While this is—or at least should be—obvious,

this fact is [...] ignored and virtually denied by traditional theories. Consider for example, the definitions of life and mind given by Herbert Spencer: correspondence of an inner order with an outer order. It implies there is an inner order and an outer order, and that the correspondence consists in the fact that the terms in one order are related to one another as the terms or members of the other order are connected within themselves. [...] [B]ut the genuine correspondence of life and mind with nature is like the correspondence of two persons who “correspond” in order to learn each one of the acts, ideas and in-



tents of the other one, in such ways as to modify one's own intents, ideas and acts, and to substitute partaking in a common and inclusive situation [or world] for separate and independent performances. [...] The aim is [...] to form a new scheme of affairs to which both organic and environmental relations contribute, and in which they both partake.

Dewey 1925, 282–3

In other words, experience is pre-eminently a mutually shaping transaction, as in a conversation.

This implies, once more, that there are always limits on experience and therewith cognition. It also means that both are actively constituted. Even in periods of relative repose, experience is still structured around possibilities of actions, instilled habitually through past dealings. The structure of bodily capacities and things encountered accordingly become something like transcendentals that limit possibilities of experience by constraining possibilities of action—points Dewey expressly acknowledged (e.g., Dewey 1920, 90–1), despite his and James's occasional hostility to Kant. In the case of Dewey, along with James, Kantian frameworks were not extinguished, as numerous scholars recognize (e.g., Carlson 1997, Pihlström 2010). Rather, in the hands of James and Dewey, the Kantian *a priori* evolved from the mental to the bodily.

#### 4. Contemporary implications

In addition to marking an evolution from the mental to the somatic, the pragmatic views outlined—which I have argued are a bodily variant of Kantianism—mesh with recent cutting edge ideas about perception and cognition. This is so in areas ranging from neuropathology to J.J. Gibson's theory of affordances to enactive cognitive science to robotics and AI. For the last part of my chapter, I will explore contemporary implications.

I will begin by elaborating on James's account of interests in order to better locate it in recent work. In addition to roots in Darwinism, James's ideas about interests have antecedents in C. S. Peirce's philosophy. Peirce (1982 [1878]) formalized the first pragmatic definition of meaning when he stated that to ascertain the meaning of an idea, we need only "[c]onsider what effects, which might conceivably have practical bearings, we might conceive the object of our conception to have" (266). An object conceptualized as "hard" conceivably has the effect of marring things which it comes into contact with; one that is "hard" and "heavy", to give a more Jamesian illustration, the consequence of injuring toes upon which it falls.

While borrowing from his slightly older contemporary, James departed from Peirce by stressing the degree to which individual interests decide what effects are attributed to conceived objects. People, he explained, focus on effects that they value, so that a mechanic might see oil primarily as a combustible or lubricator; a carpenter, as a darkener of wood (James 1992 [1879b], 952).

Although James did not emphasize it as much as he might have, conceptual overlaps, as already discussed, connect interests to emotions. There are also neurobiological overlaps, which James of course did not have means of detecting. But in his appropriately titled “The Sentiment of Rationality” (1992 [1879b]), he at least outlined how emotional feelings intertwine with decision-making and belief formation. Inconsistencies—to give one example—clog thought. We find this blockage irritating, and accordingly endeavor to escape, and the flow from thwarted confusion to “rational comprehension” comes with feelings of “relief and pleasure” (James 1992 [1879b], 950). This suggests we are emotionally driven to seek rational comprehension, and emotions often mark when we have arrived.

The claim that emotion guides thought is not of course original to James, with thinkers such as Hume (2000 [1740]) and Friedrich Nietzsche (1954 [1888]) endorsing like positions. However, Hume and Nietzsche maintained that most of our beliefs are consequently without basis, whereas James insisted otherwise, arguing that emotions help disentangle the irrational from the rational, and push us towards the latter. This is not to dispute that there is a great deal of emotionally driven irrationality, as seen in today’s political situation in the United States and elsewhere. At the same time, when it comes to most of the immediate doings dominating everyday life, we do tolerably well. Thus while most of us enjoy foods that are bad for us in excess, we are also emotionally inclined towards nutrient dense fare and adverse to pathogen infected substances that elicit disgust. In this case, our emotional sense of agreeableness and disagreeableness is consistent with our concern for health. Our emotions and interests are accordingly grounded in what colloquially may be called “reality” and to courses of action that are correspondingly rational.

The eminent neuropathologist Antonio Damasio has echoed essentially the same position, albeit focusing overmuch on ideas first expressed in James’s famous 1884 article “What is an Emotion?”, while neglecting ideas introduced in “The Sentiment of Rationality” and similar writings. Specifically, he postulates that holding knowledge in awareness is possible only insofar as one can “draw on mechanisms of basic attention, which

permit the maintenance of a mental image in consciousness to the relative exclusion of others” (Damasio 1994, 197). This thesis, though Damasio again seems unaware, is at the heart of James’s concept of consciousness as “*a selecting agency*” that chooses “one out of several of the materials so presented to its notice, emphasizing and accentuating that and suppressing as far as possible all the rest” (James 1890I, 139). In James’s scheme, such operations require interests; in Damasio’s, they demand emotion, which overlaps conceptually and neurobiologically with interests.

As an illustration, consider a patient of Damasio’s known as Eliot. Eliot was a young man, who suffered brain damage after having a tumor removed. In consequence, he had significantly reduced emotional experience, accompanied by sharply diminished decision-making ability, even though his capacity to weigh pros, cons and repercussions remained intact. His situation appeared analogous to one unable to choose between menu items due to lack of preference and hence emotional pull. Not surprisingly, his professional and personal life fell to tatters. As of 1994, Damasio had 12 other patients with comparable damage, all exhibiting similar deficiencies in emotion and decision-making. A stroke had incapacitated one to the point that she appeared to have locked-in syndrome. However, upon talking to her after she experienced some recovery, Damasio determined this had not been the case. She reported having felt little, and consequently had not found her former state alarming. Accordingly, she had not felt emotionally inclined to express anything. In Damasio’s (1994) words, there appears to have been “no normally differentiated thought and reasoning”, and correspondingly “no decisions made [. . . or] implemented” (73).

Expanding on challenges of his patients, Damasio (1994) yet again almost exactly repeated James’s views. In the case of Eliot, he theorized that his cold-blooded reasoning had “prevented him from assigning different values to different options, and made his decision-making landscape hopelessly flat”. An added problem may have been that this “same cold-bloodedness made his mental landscape too shifty and unsustained for the time required to make response selections” (51). In James’s language, it appears that Eliot’s lack of emotional engagement left him unable to differentially value competing options and to stay interested in and focused on tasks.

From James and Damasio’s standpoints, then, it follows that thinking at least in part depends on emotions and interests. A Jamesian line of analysis, with a little extrapolation, suggests the same for perception.

We might see a river as navigable, as an obstruction, perhaps cooling, drinkable, freezing or dangerous. This means perceiving it in terms of possible actions and their consequences on us, which is to say, in terms of use-values and hence interests. If we did not encounter a surging torrent as emotionally threatening, and waded recklessly in, or a wall as a barrier, colliding with it, onlookers might conclude we are blind. This is more so in light of Gibsonian theories of perception, which are pragmatically inspired (cf. Reed 1988, Heft 2001, Chemero and Käufer 2016), with Gibson (1979, 138) in fact hinting that affordances are emotional. Gibson's theory can accordingly be grasped as a tacit theory of values insofar as it frames perception as the capacity to discern emotionally colored use-values (cf. Crippen 2016c).

Dewey (1934) arguably went beyond James in emphasizing affective aspects of perception. He observed that we "do not have to project emotions into the objects experienced. Nature is kind and hateful, bland and morose, irritating and comforting, long before she is mathematically qualified or even congeries of 'secondary' qualities" (16). He thereby insisted that the perceptual world is emotional all along and that we would not perceive as we do—or as fully—were it not. We experience emotional tugs almost constantly, as when a familiar face pulls our attention or an interesting or threatening street invites us in or repulses us. Later in the same book, Dewey characterized how values, emotions and interests infuse lived space and time:

Space is room, *Raum*, and room is roominess, a chance to be, live and move. The very word "breathing-space" suggests the choking, the oppression that results when things are constricted. [...] What is true of space is true of time. We need a "space of time" in which to accomplish anything significant. Undue haste forced upon us by pressure of circumstances is hateful. Dewey 1934, 209

Such is commonplace in experience and accordingly knowledge, which are nearly always value-laden, as pragmatists especially emphasize (cf. Skowroński 2018). When caught in suffocating traffic, for example, we feel moments thickening and our surroundings weighing in on us, and this characterizes our lived understanding of time and space.

Reinforcing James and Dewey's views and tying them to Gibson is a body of research on affordance theory. The theory holds we perceive things in terms of actions we might take. Lending support to the outlook, experiments have found that participants judge distant grades steeper when in poor health, fatigued, laden with heavy backpacks or suffering

low blood sugar (Proffitt *et al.* 1995, Bhalla and Proffitt 1999, Proffitt 2006, Schnall, Zadra and Proffitt 2010; Zadra *et al.* 2010). Perceived steepness comes with deflation or sometimes excitement if one is a fit and enthusiastic hiker. These emotional timbres, in turn, correspond to the difficulty or ease of navigating one's body, which is to say, the world as a given individual encounters it. Conventional understandings would of course take this as evidence of the non-veridical nature of perception. However, the foregoing account suggests that the just mention perceptual variations follow from the fact that agents are objectively equipped to do different things in given environments and that they accurately register these differences.

This last point applies fairly generally. Thus, for example, it is no mere mental variation that differentiates the human experience of caressing lacquered wood with fingertips from that of a cat digging into it with claws (Crippen 2017a). It is a difference realized in action, and actions delineate the worlds of organisms. Moods and emotions likewise can reflect objective capacities relative to the environment at a given time. They can accordingly delineate worlds by motivating or diminishing actions, with perception reflecting this. To offer an illustration, it turns out that lethargic, depressed moods correlate with aesthetic preferences for enclosed and hence protected spaces. Conversely, energetic moods correlate with preferences for open and therefore explorable spaces (Mealey and Theis 1995). Accounts from phenomenological quarters—both philosophical and psychological—reinforce comparable points, as with Martin Heidegger's (1962 [1927]) discussions of the world delineating implications of care and concern or Nico Fijda's (1986) characterization of emotions as situational, action prompting characteristics. In short, insofar as our attitude is nearly always one of wanting to do, get or avoid something and therefore one of concern or interest, our worlds are emotionally and therefore behaviorally qualified all along.

While emphasizing the interested or emotional and hence visceral aspects of our perception, these accounts are specifically related to the way we deploy actions and habits when dealing with things. Insofar as the body and its relation to environments are at the heart of all this, these outlooks connect to embodied approaches, including Dewey's, but also more recent views. Echoing Dewey's views, for instance, is Herbert Simon's (1996, 51) well-known illustration in which an ant moves intricately as a function of the complexity of the contours over which it crawls. Simon's observations, like Dewey's earlier ones about the amoeba, mesh with recent experiments in which John Long (2011) created "tadpole robots" or

“Tadros” to model evolutionary processes in aquatic environments. Long varied the robots’ tail stiffness, allowing them to compete in a kind of evolutionary game for the equivalent of food, in this case, light, with more successful variations incorporated into the next generation. He reported that successive generations developed better feeding behavior. As he put it, “in a real sense, they got smarter”. Crucially, however, “they did so by evolving their bodies, not their brains” or CPUs (95).

Without insinuating his devices are future Nobel laureates, Long (2011) stressed that “by virtue of being goal directed, autonomous, and physically embodied”, they “have intelligence” (95–96). In the case of Tadros and in fact living organisms, much of the processing occurs through dynamics of agent-environment interactions, with only sparse CPU control—or the neural analogue—exercised (Pfeifer *et al.* 2007, 81). The bodies of Long’s (2011) robots, for example, automatically solve complex physical problems in the process of interacting with water: “In response to the tail’s coupled internal and external force computations, the body, to which the tail is attached, undergoes the yaw wobbles—recoil and turning maneuvers”. Its body accordingly calculates and performs patterns of “acceleration that interact to produce the overall motion of the Tadros according to Newton’s laws of motion” (104). Long argued further that human-like intelligence requires both a body and brain, and accordingly predicted human-level AI will only come in the form of an embodied robot (97). Though speculative, this is generally consistent with other contemporary embodied thinkers, with Noë (2009), a leading enactive cognitive scientist, stating that “[m]eaningful thought arises only when the whole animal is dynamically engaged with the environment” (Noë 2009, 8).

Notice in this scheme that bodily capacities once again set limits on what can be done, and by setting limits, allow for the possibility of at least preconditions of something functionally similar to human cognition. Put another way, bodies fall into coordinated behaviors by dealing with things in the world, and this forms an essential basis for perception and cognition. It might therefore be said that bodily mechanisms stand in for logical ones, and, by shaping activity, structure perceptual and cognitive engagement. Though Long, who is not a philosopher, exhibits no awareness of Kant, James or Dewey, his work displays insights generated by all three. His work also illustrates how Kantian philosophy read through the lens of Dewey and likeminded scholars such as Merleau-Ponty and more recent figures such as Noë can be rendered bodily, and, by this means, go further in explaining the nature of intelligence and future directions in AI.

The connections between visceral, rational and perceptual processes offer similar leads. In addition to their meaning for human subjectivity, they have implications for the dream of conscious AI and in fact suggest a conscious android such as Data from *Star Trek* who possesses formal logic but no emotion would be a contradiction—a point illustrated when Data expresses a preference for doing this or that, which has no basis absent emotion.

## 5. Conclusion

Although this chapter has covered a lot of historical detail—and necessarily so given my injunction about not dismissing the past, combined with the fact that I have focused on Kantian and pragmatic philosophy—my ultimate aim has been to show that the past very much applies to the present. While not all of the contemporary figures discussed show significant awareness of pragmatism, some such as Damasio do. Others not discussed draw extensively on it, for example, ranking neuroscientists such as Jay Schulkin (e.g., 2004) in his many books, along with a growing number of cognitive scientists, for example, Anthony Chemero (2009), Shaun Gallagher (2017) and Richard Menary (2007). By extension, they also build on Kantian debates that shaped the trajectory of pragmatism, albeit doing so almost entirely without any explicit recognition, yet understandably since this is not their focus.

What I hope to have done in this paper, accordingly, is not only to have outlined pragmatic variants of Kantianism, but also to have suggested applied merits and continued relevance of such outlooks. I have endeavored to do this by pointing to how everything from rationality to enactivism to affordance theory to AI can be understood and developed more richly through an understanding of pragmatic evolutions of the Kantian from the mental to the bodily.

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# James and Kant on Empirical Psychology

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## 1. Introduction

A serious confrontation between Kant and pragmatism should take into account their epistemological reflection on psychology, that is to say on the relation between philosophy and psychology. In this respect, in the *Principles of Psychology* (1890), it is clear James's positivistic attempts to keep separate (*divide et impera!*) empirical psychology and metaphysics. As known, Kant sharply distinguished empirical psychology from rational psychology and metaphysics, and criticized rational psychology as "a science surpassing all powers of human reason", then empirical psychology as not a "natural science proper". There are interesting criticisms made by James particularly about Kant's conception of the Ego as a logical function, meant to criticize Kant's dualistic view (phenomenon/noumenon) and to justify his substitution of the *transcendental Ego* by the *present passing Thought* of the "stream of consciousness".

At a closer reading, James's main interest is in epistemology, and that is the reason why he is in a continuous dialogue with Kant's *First Critique* and overall with post-Kantian idealist interpretations of it.<sup>1</sup> In a nutshell, he tries to give a phenomenal description of the unity of consciousness in order to make the postulation of a noumenal Ego, at least in psychology, a useless element. Moreover, his effort to offer a thoroughly sensational description of the reflective aspect of consciousness is to correct the original sin of *mental atomism* upon which both rationalism and classic empiricism

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<sup>1</sup> With the locutions "post-Kantian" or "successors of Kant", James addresses absolute idealists such as T. H. Green, E. and J. Cairds, and also F. H. Bradley and his colleague J. Royce.

psychology rely. Many years later, in more philosophical works, he will be insisting on the anti-intellectualistic or sensible existence of *conjunctive relations* as the way to radically renew empiricism.

My intention is to offer a brief overview of Kant's critiques of psychology, following D. E. Leary's and L. Mecacci's interpretations, and then to focus upon James's interpretation and criticisms of the German philosopher to show the point of the distance between James's empiricism and Kant's transcendentalism. Following James's criticisms of Kantian epistemology, it is possible to understand better his conception of the relation between psychology and philosophy, and therefore the roots of his doctrine of radical empiricism.

## 2. Kant's critique of empirical psychology

The autonomy of empirical psychology from rational psychology, and therefore from metaphysics, was a result of Kant's criticism. One century later, James is still trying to corroborate the autonomy of psychology as a natural science, and he initially believed a rigorous adhesion to the positivistic standpoint to be the way.<sup>2</sup> His view has to be framed within the debate about the relationship between psychology and philosophy that was crucial at that time, particularly among empiricists. In fact, as A. Klein (2007) argued, James was in the standard line of several authors sustaining that psychology had to rely upon a set of loaded metaphysical assumptions, but the task of the psychologist was not to explain such pre-suppositions. Metaphysical questions were to be kept out of psychology books as much as possible. The field of philosophy was the proper locus for systematic investigations.

Kant notably sustained the epochal thesis that empirical psychology could never become a natural science, and many historians read the history of psychology of the Eighteenth Century as a reaction to his verdict (Mecacci 2004). His critical reformulation of psychology, instead, took place within the context of the dualistic vision of psychology inherited from Christian Wolff.<sup>3</sup> The treatise of Baumgarten on *Metaphysics* (1739) was another very important source of Kant's critique of psychology. Also,

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<sup>2</sup> According to Gerald Myers (1981), James's claim is not a convinced adhesion to such philosophical position; his choice rather expresses the need to define limits and possibilities of the new psychology so as to subtract it to traditional metaphysical infiltrations.

<sup>3</sup> According to Wolff, empirical psychology was "the science of what experience teaches us about the soul. [...] it is an inductive science that leads to empirical generalizations about the soul and its activities" (Leary 1982, 19).

empiricist psychologists, such as Johann Nicolas Tetens and his tripartite faculty of psychology, were particularly relevant to his reflection in the field of psychology. His three critiques, notably, reflect the psychological division of the three faculties of knowing, willing, and feeling.

However, according to Leary (1982), Kant first carried on a systematic critique of rational psychology in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781–1787), then he concentrates on empirical psychology to conclude negatively about its possibility to be a natural science. But then, he suggests the adoption of an “anthropological” methodology based on observations of the external sense to redeem a certain version of empirical psychology.

As to what concerns the first step, that is his critique of rational psychology, Kant clearly maintains that rational analysis cannot acknowledge the nature of the thinking subject. This power is not given to human reason. As well known, only cognitive powers of sensibility and understanding, working together, can produce *a priori* synthetic knowledge. In the first chapter of the *Transcendental Dialectic*, Kant addresses the “Paralogisms of Pure Reason”. These are inferential errors committed by rationalists in the psychology field. Kant seems to be partially sympathetic with these authors, since he is convinced that these errors are not merely due to inaccuracy but rather are “inevitable, grounded in the transcendental confusion” that he succeeded in identifying (J. Wuerth 2010, 210). Rather, it is the nature of human reason that is guilty of such illusions.

If more than the *cogito* were the ground of our pure rational cognition of thinking beings in general; if we also made use of observations about the play of our thoughts and the natural laws of the thinking self created from them: then an empirical psychology arise, which would be a species of the *physiology* of inner sense, which would perhaps explain the appearances of inner sense, but could never serve to reveal such properties as do not belong to possible experience at all (as properties of the simple), nor could it serve to teach *apodictically* about thinking beings in general something touching on their nature; thus it would be no *rational* psychology.

Now since the proposition *I think* (taken problematically) contains the form of every judgment of understanding whatever and accompanies all categories as their vehicle, it is clear that the conclusions from this can contain a merely transcendental use of the understanding, which excludes every admixture of experience; and of whose progress, after what we have shown above, we can at the start form no advantageous concept. Thus we will follow it through all the pred-

ications of the pure doctrine of the soul with a critical eye.

Kant 1998, B 405–6

Rationalists are deceived by the concept “I think”, which is, according to Kant, the only subject matter of rationalist psychology. From this proposition, they draw false conclusions about the nature of the soul, namely that it is substance, simple as to its quality, numerically identical, and in relation to possible objects in space. The confusion is mainly due to an undue shift from the exposition of thought as a logical function to a metaphysical determination of the object of thought. From the *unity of consciousness* it is possible to infer the validity of the categories, but not any metaphysical attributes of the subject of consciousness. In his *Deduction* of categories, Kant distinguished two types of self-consciousness. Through “empirical apperception” or “inner sense”, we can know ourselves as existing phenomena, that is to say being aware of our mental states. The “original or pure apperception” is, instead, the pure consciousness of ourselves as thinking subjects. Since, as Wuerth underlines, concepts become determinate only in their connection with sensible intuition, mere consciousness is “devoid of all empirical predicates, completely indeterminate, and thus inadequate for knowledge” (Wuerth 2010, 216). As is well known, Kant distinguished consciousness from empirical cognition or experience. In brief, without mixture with experience, the study of the transcendental “I think” cannot produce further knowledge. But since experience can never provide a solid basis for a purely rational psychology, Kant seems to conclude that psychology can only be an empirical science. The study of our soul has to proceed “under the guidance of experience”, and our investigation should not overcome “the limits within which a content can be provided for them by possible inner experience” (Leary 1982, 22).

Leary mentions two other important references to psychology by Kant. The first one is in the preface of his *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* (1786). There, Kant was considering the possibility of a scientific psychology but concluded that this was not possible.

Therefore, the empirical doctrine of the soul can never become anything more than an historical doctrine of nature, and, as such, a natural doctrine of inner sense which is as systematic as possible, that is, a natural description of the soul, but never a science of the soul, nor even, indeed, an experimental psychological doctrine.

Kant 2004, 7

In his view, natural sciences should be based upon natural metaphysics. For so-called *proper* science to be demonstrative, it needs to be founded on

*pure* principles, not empirical ones. The problem with empirical data of psychology was that they seemed not to have “*spatial dimensions*” and, therefore, it was not possible to relate them rationalistically. It could not even be really experimental according to Kant. As provided by experience, the data of psychology could not rely upon mathematics for the construction of scientific concepts and could only be a descriptive doctrine of the phenomena of our soul. Psychology is inductive and, since it has no a priori elements, can never produce certain knowledge. Another critique of psychology can be found in Kant’s *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798). This text is now on the wave of current reading in Kant’s ethics.<sup>4</sup> However, he seems to be claiming here that empirical psychology could serve a more useful role by disregarding its classic method of internal observation and focusing upon behavioral and relational attitudes of human beings, in a systematic way. Kant was suggesting developing empirical psychology upon a different methodology and with different goals. According to Mecacci, only by making psychology a *science of human conduct*, and not a sort of psychophysics or physiological psychology, it was possible for Kant to foresee a serious psychological inquiry.

### 3. William James’s criticisms of Kant

These glimpses at Kant’s main works are important to understand James’s main references to Kant in relation to his psychology. In his *Principles of Psychology* (1890), James was really trying to make psychology a natural science and, in this view, he obviously makes several critical references to Kant’s transcendentalism.<sup>5</sup>

We should notice that the key-term “transcendentalism” is rather ambivalent in Kant’s *First Critique*. Kant offers two seminal definitions to clarify its specific meaning. The first definition is in the *Introduction* to the second edition of the *Critique*,<sup>6</sup> where he refers to “our mode of cognition of objects insofar as this is to be possible *a priori*” (Kant 1998, B 25).

<sup>4</sup> For further reading about recent interpretations of Kant’s *Anthropology* see Sussman (2015).

<sup>5</sup> “The peculiarity of our experiences, that they not only are but are known, which their ‘conscious’ quality is invoked to explain, is better explained by their relations—these relations themselves being experiences—to oneanother” (James 1976, 14).

<sup>6</sup> In the second edition, Kant makes relevant changes to his definition of transcendentalism in the introduction to the first edition. His modifications gave birth to different interpretations (cf. Cohen (1885), Heidegger (1929), Hinske (1970)). However, scholars have underlined that in both versions Kant stresses the connection between *transcendental* and *a priori* knowledge, without identifying the two.



The second definition is in a way corrective of the possible misunderstandings connected to the first definition, and it is in his *Introduction* to the section on *Transcendental Logic*. There, Kant paradigmatically observes that: “not every *a priori* cognition must be called transcendental, but only that by means of which we cognize that and how certain representations (intuitions or concepts) are applied entirely *a priori*, or are possible (i.e., the possibility of cognition or its use *a priori*)” (Kant 1998, B 80–1). As is known, Kant pretended the transcendental philosophy, as the system of the transcendental modes of cognition, to be the only *scientific* knowledge.

In his 1892 brief article *A Plea for Psychology as a ‘Natural Science’*, James sustains the necessity of a neat separation between the areas of investigation of psychology and philosophy and, on this occasion, he clarified the principal intent of his masterpiece, which was to treat “Psychology *like* a natural science, to help her to become one” (James 1983, 270). His effort was really due to the fact that he did not consider psychology as a natural science yet; rather, he considered her present methodological condition similar to that of physics before Galileo or chemistry before Lavoisier. Natural science psychology has to consider its assumptions as merely provisional and always passible by further revision. It has to renounce any search for ultimate solutions and to assume rather uncritically common sense data, which are the existence of a *physical world*, the existence of *mental states* and the fact that they *know* other things.

The uncritical assumption of data in science was harshly criticized by Peirce, but, as evident, that was a crucial point for James to distinguish the attitude of the psychologist from that of the philosopher. Both the psychologist and the philosopher are *Erkenntnistheoretikers*, but there is a great difference. The psychologist does not investigate the general function of knowledge; he is, rather, interested in particular knowledge.

Kant is implicitly mentioned a few pages later when James is considering the two varieties of the *psychologist’s fallacy*. This is when the psychologist confounds “*his own standpoint with that of the mental fact* about which he is making his report” (James 1981 a, 195). This trick is partially due to the misleading influence of language—in this respect, James maintains that ordinary language carries on an atomistic metaphysics. In fact, since the psychologist must name some cognitive state as the thought of a certain object, he is easily induced to suppose that the thought under examination knows the object in the same way in which the psychologist knows it. The attribution of further or different knowledge, that of the psychologist himself, to the cognitive state observed is a common fallacy

which to James is guilty of having introduced very puzzling questions in science, such as the question of presentative or representative perception, and the question of nominalism and conceptualism.

However, there is a second variety of the psychologist's fallacy which is "*the assumption that the mental state studied must be conscious of itself as the psychologist is conscious of it*" (James 1981 a, 195). This peculiar fallacy is the core of James's critique of the post-Kantian interpretations of consciousness.<sup>7</sup> Kant's disapproval of empirical psychology was also a consequence of methodological limits, or what James addresses as possible fallacies of the psychologists. The accuracy of the psychologists in their reports about mental life was very poor and vitiated from the very beginning.

#### 4. James's consciousness of self

Moving from the new picture of the *stream of thought* that James depicts in chapter nine, the descriptive hypothesis of the consciousness of Self is exposed in chapter ten, and necessarily confronts the classical spiritualist, associationist, and transcendentalist theories of personal identity. James is well aware that his naturalistic account of the Self is in balance with all these schools, but also that what he is proposing is something very different.

The analysis of the stream of thought is a study of the mind from "within" in which James remains loyal to what he calls the empirical method of investigation. In fact, he critically observes that, in a majority of works of psychology, the empirical method is rather abandoned. In these works, the descriptions of thinking begin with sensations as the simplest mental facts and proceed to the synthetic construction of higher and more complex mental states. The originality of James's description of thinking lies in his radically empirical description of consciousness, when he states that the psychologist has to be philosophically naïve and take into account the concrete fact that some thinking goes on in personal consciousnesses.<sup>8</sup> In this view, "thinking" is used for every form of con-

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<sup>7</sup> "On the one hand, 'the [act of] observation itself alters and distorts the state of the object [i. e., the mental phenomenon] observed'; on the other, 'still less does another thinking subject submit to our investigations in such a way as to be conformable to our purposes'" (Leary 1982, 23).

<sup>8</sup> The analysis of the stream of thought is the result of a complex theoretical picture that holds together James's interest in experimental psychology, his romantic education, and a certain philosophical interpretation of Darwinism derived from C. Wright and C. S. Peirce's pragmatic maxim.

consciousness and should be taken as the expression which is most simple and free from assumption. Starting his analysis of the five characteristics of consciousness, James again distinguishes inward-direct awareness of the mental state itself from outward-relational awareness of the mental state by the psychologist. As said before, this difference of perspective can be misleading as to the definition of the content of mental states. The fourth aspect of the *stream of thought*, that is the fact that our thoughts are cognitive, or possess the function of knowing, is a core aspect of James's analysis, but probably the most puzzling one from a psychological point of view. It is not a case that, according to his intention to keep separate psychology and philosophy, it will be expunged from the *Briefer Course* (1892). However, natural sciences have to abandon any idealistic perspective, and rather assume a point of view that is the least possibly influenced by metaphysical presuppositions. This is not to be confused with a trivial position in philosophy; James is well aware of the unavoidable connection between epistemology and metaphysics. His attempt to make science relies upon what he considers a less pregnant metaphysical view, which may be in a way very close to Peirce's contempt about the backward status of metaphysics. They both express the necessity for the bond between science and metaphysics to be remolded according to a new naturalistic paradigm. In this view, it is important for the new psychology to substitute mere verbal solutions with more careful understanding of physiological and intersubjective dispositions. The shift from *a priori* foundation to more uncertain and multiple hypothetical reasons is pivotal.

The distinction of the notion of realities and its proper collocation in the world come as a consequence of the confrontation with the experiences of others. For James, we all believe in the existence of realities outside our thought because of actual perceptive judgments of *sameness*. The fact that one judges several thoughts as having the same object, and no one produces or possesses that object, reveals the cognitive function of our mind. Such a reflective awareness is not primitive since the mere vague consciousness of objects comes first. However, according to James, many philosophers influenced by Kant supposed the cognitive function of thought to depend upon the reflective consciousness of the *self*.

Many philosophers, however, hold that the reflective consciousness of the self is essential to the cognitive function of thought. They hold that a thought, in order to know a thing at all, must expressly distinguish between the thing and its own self. This is a perfectly wanton assumption, and not the faintest shadow of reason exists for suppos-

ing it true. As well might I contend that I cannot dream without dreaming that I dream, swear without swearing that I swear, deny without denying that I deny, as maintain that I cannot know without knowing that I know. I may have either acquaintance-with, or knowledge-about, an object O without thinking about my self at all.

James 1981 a, 264–5

In other words, these authors seem to maintain that, whereas we are not able to distinguish between the thing and the *self*, our thought does not know a thing at all. The affirmation that one cannot know without knowing that one knows is to James perfectly absurd. Rather, he asserts that it is not necessary that our thought be able to discriminate between its objects and itself. In psychology, the natural acquisition of knowledge is a gradual process which is characterized also by knowledge of acquaintance with other objects. Accordingly, one can have either acquaintance with or knowledge about an object without thinking about his/her self at all. The only requirements for the function of knowing are that some Self is thinking an object, and that that object exists. Additional thoughts, such as the existence of the “I” and the proved knowledge of the object are welcomed as broader levels of knowledge but are not necessary to know. Therefore, these philosophers—following Kant—seem to be guilty of the peculiar psychologist’s fallacy mentioned above.

At this point, James makes clear which shall be the proper use of the term “object” in psychology. This is a very important clarification; for James the object of our thought is exactly “all that the thought thinks” and “as the thought thinks it” (James 1981 a, 266). This means that it may correspond also to very complex and symbolic thinking that are, however, thought as a unique object. As evident, the object is closely connected to the act of knowledge and the relational context in which it is thought. This position is in evident contrast with Kant’s conception of “manifold” and with ordinary associationist psychology, as James’s consequent description of Self-consciousness shall also be. He disagrees with the contention that the thought is made up of the same parts of which its object is made so that the thought would keep together separate ideas. This empiricist view is open to easy attacks, in particular from those who contend that, without a unifying agency such as the Ego, no one thought comes out from a “bundle” of separate ideas. On that basis, the Kantian monitum is not under discussion; there is no doubt that if things “are not thought with each other, things are not thought in relation at all”. But the point that James makes here, and again with particular care in chapters x and xx,

is the mistaken starting point of both empiricists and transcendentalists. They move from the same starting hypothesis that our stream of subjective life is made of discrete elements, that is the Kantian “manifold”, but, in the end, they respectively draw different conclusions. The associationists claim that there can be single knowledge from a manifold of discrete elements, whereas the rationalists do not accept such a conclusion and are obliged to introduce a further hypothesis, that of the necessary synthesizing activity of an Ego. However, James seems here to be claiming a more radically empirical premise: the coexistence of a manifold of ideas is a myth, and we can only think of things related in unique pulses of subjective life.

James focuses on the issue of personal identity and on pure Ego. There is a distinction to make here between the definition that James has given of the Spiritual Self, concretely taken as part of the empirical self, and his discussion on the Ego as the principle of personal unity (Leary 1990, 110). He turns first to the *feeling of self identity*, that is the experience that I recognize myself as the same through time. The sense of our personal identity is just a perceptual judgment based upon a certain continuity experienced among phenomena.

The consciousness of personal sameness thus corresponds to the feeling of continuity between thoughts that are suffused with warmth and intimacy. This consciousness can be considered either as a *feeling or subjective phenomenon* or as a *truth or objective deliverance*. In the first case, it is a *judgment of sameness* which should not be taken in the sense of a *subjective synthesis*, which is the Kantian synthetic apperception, as distinguished from the *objective synthesis* or analytic apperception. The sense of personal identity is not the Kantian essential form of thought, according to which thought should be able to think all his thinking together as a prerequisite to any analytic apperception; rather, for James, perception plays a fundamental role. The sense of sameness of my successive selves is perceived and predicated by my thought of them. The distance from Kant here is that “[t]hought not only thinks them both, but thinks that they are identical” (James 1981 a, 215). It is not a logical necessity, but an actual perception, and that is the reason why even if the psychologist might prove the judgment of sameness to be wrong and contests that *real identity* between thoughts is a *fact*, still the *personal identity* would exist as a *feeling*.

As a matter of fact, James’s unity of the Self is *generic* and far from any metaphysical or absolute unity. The coexistence of unity and plural-

ity from the different points of view is another recurrent argument by James, an aspect of his dynamic attempt to avoid absolutistic or monolithic outcomes. So, the different selves are pervaded by a distinct feeling of warmth. Their *generic* unity thus coexists with generic differences which are just as real as the unity. Such a dynamic, uncertain, and pluralistic description of personal identity is verified by the cases of mental pathology that James has investigated with particular care in chapter VIII, and definitely contrasted with substantial and strong views of the *self* (cf. Bordogna 2010). Moreover, it seems to be in the line of Hume and Herbart's description of the self as an aggregate of separate facts. The classic empirical psychology, however, has overlooked *more subtle aspects* of consciousness which if taken into account would allow James to give a phenomenal description of the unity of consciousness, or the fact of the belonging-together of thoughts, avoiding the idealistic-absolutistic outcomes of both spiritualism and empiricism, and at the same time meeting common-sense main demands of the unity of the self. James agrees that the unity of the selves remains a mere potentiality until a real center or owner comes and acts. The lack of a *medium* is, indeed, the greatest difficulty of the associationism description of self-identity. As James has shown in chapter VI about the autonomous compounding of consciousness, in fact, it is not clear the reason why and how successive individual thoughts and feelings should "integrate" themselves together on their own account.

Actually, common-sense seems to press in the direction of the *substantial identity* of Thought, and both the Metaphysical Soul and Transcendental Ego would be but attempts to satisfy this need of common-sense. Nonetheless, James proposes a different hypothesis, respect to any ever self-same and changeless principle, to explain the very same appearance that a certain possession of our thoughts never lacks. The union of our present and past selves would be a matter of *inheritance* but without implying any substantial or transcendental identity. In this view, the title of self-identity would be inherited by successive passing Thoughts as his legal representatives, and such description seems also to reflect the transmission which actually occurs in consciousness.

The mechanism of adoption of the last self by the immediately following one is the basis of the appropriation of most of the remoter constituents of the self, and this process does not necessarily indicate the identity of the possessors. To corroborate his position, James refers to the analogy that Kant makes between mental states and elastic balls as an

argument to respond to the third paralogism (Kant 1998, A 363–4). For James, it was important that Kant conceived the possibility of a process in which one mental substance communicates all its states to another with this second doing so to a third in such a way that all memories are being transferred. Thus, the last such substance would have a sense that it had been aware of all the previous states and memories as its own even though there would have been no constant identical thing given.

At this point, James's description of self-identity in terms of phenomenal relations which clearly develop in the process of thinking seems to leave no room for the activity of transcendent agencies of any sort. The only point that remains quite open to objection is the *act of appropriation*, for things just are themselves, they neither appropriate nor disown themselves. So if the present judging Thought is the agent which chooses which appropriations are its own, it is never an object to itself. Now, since the present moment of consciousness does not know anything *about* itself until it is gone, but it may feel its own immediate existence, James accurately claims that it appropriates its acquisitions to *that* it feels as the core of "the most intimately felt *part of its present Object, the body, and the central adjustments, which accompany the act of thinking, in the head*" (James 1981 a, 324). The real nucleus of personal identity is these primary reactions in their concrete present existence.

The conclusion of this intense description is that the psychological facts of consciousness can be fully expressed by the functions of *cognition* and *appropriation* of feelings, and thus there is no need to suppose a non-phenomenal Thinker behind the passing Thought. As also more contemporary studies in psychology have shown, our life proceeds through continuous remands between experiencing and reflecting upon experiences' processes (cf. Juan Balbi 2004). The distinction between *I* and *Me* which James claims as the facts of personality are "names of *emphasis*" (James 1981 a, 323). And in this view, all contrasts and distinction resulting from the free and forceful activity of the human mind in the field of objective knowledge (here/there; now/then; this/that; I/thou) are to be referred as such to our body, or better to what is the perceptive sense of our corporeal existence. What James is claiming is that the matrix of our personal identity is sensorial and emotional. It does not stem abruptly from a reflective act of our thought, but depends upon some direct perceptions of our embodied life.

The sense of my bodily existence, however obscurely recognized as such, *may* then be the absolute original of my conscious selfhood, the

fundamental perception that *I am*. All appropriations *may* be made to it, *by* a Thought not at the moment immediately cognized by itself. Whether these are not only logical possibilities but actual facts is something not yet dogmatically decided in the text.

James 1981 a, 323

At last, James addresses some specific critiques to the three schools—substantialism, associationism, and transcendentalism—which have produced most of the literature on the consciousness of self. In the section on *The Transcendentalist Theory*, James actually considers more at length some aspects of Kant's conception of the transcendental Ego to verify if that theory can illuminate critical points of his description of personality as implying the empirical person (Me) and the judging Thought (I). And more importantly, the succession of judging Thoughts is continuously renewed and able to recognize them as continuous in time. In particular, he focuses upon the very famous §§16–17; §25 of the *Doctrine of Elements*, and *The Paralogisms of Pure Reason* almost repeating what he has sketchily conveyed so far.

## 5. Conclusions

As is evident, James is confronting not only Kant but also his successors. Being aware of the difference between Kant's transcendentalism and the various declensions of absolute idealism, James harshly criticizes the excessively conceptual-abstract approach to reality that was mostly performed by the so-called "successors of Kant" or "post-Kantian idealists". At the basis of their misconception, however, James recognizes an overemphasized reading of Kant's definition of sensation as blind, and their introduction of the Absolute Mind to exercise the synthetic logical function of knowledge. As we have shown, James's main critiques to transcendentalism address its epistemological structure. In the new psychology, there is no need to introduce non-explicative agents to secure its scientific settlement. The idealistic sin is to complicate reality in a way that turns out to not be useful to explain it. This is evident not only in James's critique of Kant's transcendental system, but also with respect to post-Kantian interpretations.

According to James, Kant also believes in a reality outside the mind, as an empirical realist. The point is that his distinction between phenomenon and noumenon is unnecessary. Moreover, on such account, he has to complexify the mind and makes of reality something that we cannot know,



what James calls “an empty locus”. In the function of knowing, Kant puts the “manifold” of phenomena to be connected within the mind, whereas James puts it in the reality outside to keep a simple image of our thought. According to James, upon where multiplicity is placed, if in thoughts or in objects of reality, depends the more or less difficult explanation of the activity of synthesis exercised by our thought and, therefore, more or less natural description of facts. James is trying to keep simple descriptive hypothesis, simplicity being a scientific quality, and to avoid useless, too elaborated, and rather non-scientific levels of complexity.

As mentioned, James firmly condemns Kant’s notion of our thought as “sort of an elaborate internal machine-shop” (James 1981 a, 344). Our thought is a stream, not a collection of parts. In a dualistic framework, chaotic multiplicity is to be lodged in reality, not in the mind.

The transcendental terminology is not helpful to explain *how* the many are simultaneously known by the one, that is the core of the cognitive capacity. Moreover, he detects a profound ambiguity in the meaning of the terms “transcendental Ego” and “experience” as intended by Kant. In brief, it is not clear if he meant by the Ego an *agent* and by experience an *operation*, or by experience an *event*, and by the Ego a *permanent element* that is part of the experience. In the first case, they would exist before their “collision” and this would mean to James that “Transcendentalism is only Substantialism grown shame-faced, and the Ego only a ‘cheap and nasty’ edition of the soul” (James 1981 a, 345).

Now, the point is psychological and not truly philosophical. James maintains that he can accept the speculative hypothesis of transcendentalism; again, what he is trying to do is to liberate psychology from philosophical infiltrations, to make it a natural science. Transcendentalism does not offer better or more profound insights than the descriptive hypothesis of the “passing Thoughts” that James has exposed. In this view, the Ego does not really explain the synthesizing activity of our thought; it is just the name of a psycho-logical process that psychology has better consider as mere data, not as a definite entity.

The passing Thought hypothesis leads to less strong certainties about the unity of ourselves. Certainty is mainly connected to sensibility. But there seem to be no grounds in transcendentalism to seriously contest such a description. “Thus the identity found by the I in its Me is only a loosely construed thing, an identity ‘on the whole,’ just like that which any outside observer might find in the same assemblage of facts” (James 1981 a, 352).

In modern monistic idealists, James foresees “the ubiquitousness of the ‘psychologist’s fallacy’”. Hegel, the Cairds, and particularly Green made finite Thought potentially the timeless, absolute Ego. But there is no doubt that such a metaphysical organic picture cannot be of any profit for psychological studies. Rather, it goes against James’s insistence on sensible continuity of Thought, and the deeply temporal and anti-essentialist vein of his psychology. Also, post-Kantians’ idealism “seems always lapsing into a regular old-fashioned spiritualistic dualism” (James 1981 a, 348). But, again, making the operation of connection be performed by an agent “whose essence is self-identity and who is out of time” is a very different way to consider the Thought. To James, it is “a cognitive phenomenal event in time”.

In conclusion, James’s *radical empiricism* is deeply connected to all his psychology, and particularly to James’s theory of relations as real in experience. And this makes easier to understand what he is still arguing, many years later in *Pragmatism*, about his anti-Kantianism or rather anti-transcendentalist idealism view. There, he was warning not to confound the humanist conviction that reality has a sensible nucleus, as elaborated by F. C. S. Schiller, with some Kantian conceptions about our relationship with reality.

Superficially this sounds like Kant’s view; but between categories fulminated before nature began, and categories gradually forming themselves in nature’s presence, the whole chasm between rationalism and empiricism yawns. To the genuine ‘Kantianer’ Schiller will always be to Kant as a satyr to Hyperion.

James 1975, 120

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# Jamesian Pragmatism, Rortyan Ironism, and Kantian Antitheodicy

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## 1. Introduction

According to John Dewey's famous words—toward the end of *Experience and Nature* (1929)—philosophy can be characterized as the “critical method for developing methods of criticism”. We should appreciate the way in which pragmatism is indebted to, or is even a species of, *critical philosophy*, presumably not exactly in Immanuel Kant's original sense of this term but in a developed sense that still retains something from the Kantian idea of criticism, especially the idea of the *reflexivity* essential to human reason-use and inquiry. It is through inquiry itself that we can (only) hope to shed light on what it means to inquire. Philosophy is an inquiry into inquiry, and this is a fundamentally Kantian critical point. “Der *kritische* Weg ist allein noch offen”, Kant wrote when concluding his first *Critique*.

The relationship between Kant and pragmatism can and should be critically considered not only in general terms but also through specific instances. In this essay, I will first make some broad remarks on the relevance of Kantian critical philosophy as a background of pragmatism, especially pragmatist philosophy of religion. I will then examine the ways in which Kantian issues are present in the distinctive way in which William James—at the very core of his development of the pragmatic method—takes seriously the reality of evil and suffering, developing a thoroughly *antitheodicy* philosophical outlook. However, I will also connect this theme with another development in more recent neopragmatism that might *prima facie* be taken to be far from any Kantian issues, namely,

Richard Rorty's *ironism*, as it emerges from his reading of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. I am not claiming Rorty to be a critical philosopher in a Kantian sense, but I am confident that even the context of pragmatist inquiry within which his liberal ironism is developed owes fundamental points of departure to Kantian transcendental philosophy. Finally, I will show how a worry regarding what might be considered a potential slippery slope from James to Rorty arises from the Kantian background of pragmatist antitheodicism.

I am in this essay to some extent helping myself to, and partly summarizing, some of my previous work on these topics.<sup>1</sup> We will begin from an overall view of the Kantian roots of what I am calling the "pragmatist protest" in the philosophy of religion and then move on to James's pragmatic method and antitheodicism, and finally to Rorty and Orwell—and, simultaneously, to what I take to be the inevitably Kantian dimensions of pragmatist inquiry into suffering. While defending a generally "Kantian" view of pragmatism, I of course acknowledge that many pragmatists have been, and continue to be, highly critical of Kant in various ways (as a number of other contributors to this volume rightly emphasize). Thus, we may regard my Kantian reading of pragmatism as a hypothesis to be critically and self-critically tested through a continuous conversation among pragmatists, Kantians, and their various opponents.

In this essay, I propose to examine this hypothesis by specifically applying my Kantian account of pragmatism to the philosophy of religion, and even more specifically to the theodicy vs. antitheodicy issue. Accordingly, the general remarks on the relations between Kant and pragmatism to be made here are only intended as attempts to sketch the context, or background, within which my defense of a pragmatist-cum-Kantian antitheodicism unfolds. Hopefully, this rather specific case study also demonstrates the wide-ranging relevance of Kantian explorations of pragmatism (or, conversely, pragmatist explorations of Kant), even though here I must leave many central issues undiscussed (see further, e.g., Kivistö and Pihlström 2016).

## 2. The pragmatist protest and its Kantian roots

It may be argued that it is, to a significant extent, the Kantian nature of pragmatism, as well as the ability of pragmatism to critically reinterpret,

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. e.g., Pihlström 2010, 2013, 2017, 2018; and Kivistö and Pihlström 2016, especially chapter 5.

transform, and further develop some key Kantian ideas, that makes pragmatism a highly relevant philosophical approach today—in, e. g., metaphysical and epistemological discussions of realism and idealism, ethics and axiology, the philosophy of religion, and many other fields. In earlier work, I have articulated some central aspects in which pragmatism, early and late, can be regarded as a Kantian philosophy, focusing on the nature of metaphysics, the relation between fact and value, and religion.<sup>2</sup>

James, to be sure, saw philosophical progress as going “around” Kant instead of going “through” him. Undeniably, pragmatists have defended non- or even anti-Kantian views regarding various philosophical problems: contrary to Kant’s universalism and apriorism, pragmatism tends to emphasize the contingent practice-embeddedness of knowledge, morality, and value. However, pragmatism—even James’s—also shares crucial assumptions with Kant’s critical philosophy, to the extent that Murray Murphey (1966) aptly called the classical Cambridge pragmatists “Kant’s children”. Recent scholarship has extensively covered the Kantian background of pragmatism and the affinities between pragmatism and transcendental philosophical methodology.<sup>3</sup> In this essay, we obviously cannot do justice to the richness of the question concerning the pragmatists’ relation to Kant—either historically or systematically. One may, however, shed light on this topic by exploring this relation through the case of *pragmatist philosophy of religion* and its relation to one of the fundamental ideas of Kant’s philosophy of religion, i. e., the *postulates of practical reason*, as well as the more specific case of the theodicy issue (on which the later sections of this essay will focus).

As is well known, Kant transformed and transcended various controversies and dichotomies of his times, critically synthesizing, e. g., rationalism and empiricism, realism and idealism, determinism and freedom, as well as nature and morality. Similarly, pragmatism has often been defended as a critical middle ground option. For James, famously, pragmatism mediates between extreme positions, in particular the conflicting temperaments of the “tough-minded” and the “tender-minded”. In the philosophy of religion, in particular, one may also find Kantian aspects of pragmatic approaches in, e. g., the problems of theism vs. atheism and

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<sup>2</sup> See the references in note 1. Note that, when speaking of “Kantian” philosophy, I primarily mean philosophy derived from and based on, albeit not necessarily identical to, Kant’s philosophy (rather than, more broadly, something corresponding to the entire (post-)Kantian tradition in philosophy).

<sup>3</sup> See several essays in Gava and Stern 2016.

evidentialism vs. fideism. For virtually no pragmatist can religious faith be said to be a strictly evidential issue on par with scientific hypotheses. Evidence plays only a relatively marginal role in religion, as religion has to do with the way in which one understands and relates to one's life as a whole. According to Kant as well as pragmatism, religion must be intimately connected with the ethical life. We can pursue moral theology, not theological ethics: religion cannot be the ground of ethics but must itself be grounded in the requirements of morality.

One may, then, employ both Kantian and pragmatist insights in order to argue that the theism vs. atheism issue is not exhausted by the narrowly intellectual (evidentialist) considerations one might advance in favor of either theism or atheism. This is because one needs the resources of Kantian *practical reason*—the kind of ethically driven use of reason that pragmatists have arguably seen as pervading human reason-use generally—in order to arrive at any humanly adequate reaction to this problem. Theism *might*, the Kantian pragmatist may argue, be rationally acceptable in terms of practical reason, or more generally from the standpoint of the vital human needs and interests embedded in practices of life; nevertheless, this is very different from the kind of justification standardly aimed at in evidentialist philosophy of religion. Moreover, justification in terms of practical reason might, as Kant insisted, be the *only* rational justification available for the religious believer. From a Kantian and pragmatist point of view, faith in God need not be made scientifically acceptable, or warranted in terms of religiously neutral criteria of reason (that is, either empirically verifiable or epistemically justified in a broader sense) because it is ultimately not a matter of science or theoretical reason; the crucial task is to make it *ethically* acceptable.

Pragmatist philosophy of religion (especially James's) can be seen as reinterpreting and further developing Kant's postulates of practical reason, i. e., the freedom of the will, the existence of God, and the immortality of the soul. It is, in particular, from the perspective of the pragmatist proposal to (re-)entangle ethics and metaphysics that this Kantian topic deserves scrutiny. One may ask whether the defense of the postulates in the *Dialectics* of Kant's second *Critique* leads to a metaphysical position according to which God exists. Here the pragmatist may suggest that Kant's postulates are, again, *both* metaphysical *and* ethical—with metaphysical and ethical aspects inextricably intertwined.

Although this is not Kant's own way of putting the matter, one may say that the postulates presuppose that the world is not absolutely inde-



pendent of human perspectives but is responsive to human ethical (or more generally valuational) needs and interests, or (in a Jamesian phrase) “in the making” through such needs and interests. Human beings structure reality, including religious reality, in terms of what their commitment to morality requires; there is no pre-structured, “ready-made” world that could be meaningfully engaged with. It remains an open question whether, or to what extent, this structuring is really metaphysical. Some interpreters prefer a purely ethical, “merely pragmatic”, account of the Kantian postulates. Is there “really” a God, or is one just entitled to act “as if” there were one? This question needs to be pursued by pragmatists as much as Kantians.

Kant (1990 [1781/1787], A 795/B 823 ff.; 1983a [1788], A 223 ff.) constructs his moral argument for the existence of God and the immortality of the soul in the “Canon of Pure Reason” and the Dialectics of the second *Critique*. As mere ideas of pure reason (“transcendental ideas”), the concepts of freedom, God, and the soul lack “objective reality”. At best, they can be employed *regulatively*, not *constitutively*. This, however, is only the point of view that theoretical, speculative reason offers to the matter. From the perspective of practical reason—which, famously, is ultimately “prior to” theoretical reason in Kant’s (1983a [1788], A 215 ff.) system—there is a kind of “reality” corresponding to these concepts. Their epistemic status, when transformed into postulates of practical reason, differs from the status of the constitutive, transcendental conditions of any humanly possible experience, i. e., the categories and the forms of pure intuition, explored in the “Transcendental Analytic” and the “Transcendental Aesthetic” of the first *Critique*. The latter kind of conditions necessarily structure, according to Kant, the (or any) humanly cognizable world, that is, any objects or events that may be conceivably encountered in experience. However, the postulates of practical reason also structure—in an analogical albeit not identical manner—the human world as a world of ethical concern, deliberation, and action. Yet, this “structuring” is not “merely ethical” but also metaphysical.

From a pragmatist point of view, as much as from the Kantian one, ethics and metaphysics are deeply entangled here. Religion, or theism, is pragmatically legitimated as a postulate needed for morality, for ethical life and practices. Yet, no theological ethics in the style of, say, divine command theory can be accepted. What is needed, according to both Kant and pragmatists like James, is *moral theology*. Any attempt to base ethics on theology, or religion, would (in Kantian terms) be an example of

heteronomy instead of autonomy, but the only critical and rational way to provide a basis for theology is the ethical way.

The Kantian pragmatist needs to consider a problem here, though. Is theism practically legitimated a priori, as in Kant, or does it receive its legitimation empirically or psychologically, as an attitude “energizing” moral life, because we are the kind of beings we are, as in James and perhaps other pragmatists? One possible suggestion is that, just as Kantian transcendental (critical) philosophy synthesizes the pre-critically opposed epistemological doctrines of empiricism and rationalism, and just as pragmatism (arguably) bridges the gap between facts and values (see Putnam 2002), one may try to reconcile Kantian (transcendental) and Jamesian (pragmatist, empirical, psychological) ways of justifying theism ethically. The Kantian perspective on theism needs pragmatic rearticulation, and the thus rearticulated pragmatic aspects of theism are not disconnected from the Kantian transcendental work of practical reason (cf. further Pihlström 2013).

It is part of such rearticulation to perceive that Kant’s criticism of *theodicies* as rationalizing attempts to provide reasons for God’s allowing the world to contain evil and suffering can also be reread from the standpoint of pragmatist (especially Jamesian) attacks on theodicies (to be soon explored in some more detail). It is precisely the Kantian perspective of practical reason that can be argued to be central to an adequate philosophical analysis of the problem of evil and suffering. For Kant as well as the pragmatists, there is something seriously wrong in approaching human suffering from the point of view of speculative metaphysical or theological theorizing. Hence, the controversy between theodicy and antitheodicy is at the core of the pragmatist protest—with its Kantian roots—we should develop further in the philosophy of religion. I will now move on to a more elaborated account of this issue.

It is not an accident that Kant is the starting point for both pragmatist criticisms of metaphysical realism and for pragmatist criticisms of theodicies, as both are crucial in the project of critical philosophy continued by pragmatism. From the pragmatist as well as Kantian perspective, theodicies commit the same mistake as metaphysical realism: they aim at a speculative, absolute account (from a “God’s-Eye-View”) of why an omnipotent, omniscient, and absolutely benevolent God allows, or might allow, the world to contain apparently unnecessary and meaningless evil and suffering. Kantian critical philosophy denies the possibility of such a transcendent account or such metaphysical, speculative truths—and this

denial is itself, again, both ethical and metaphysical, followed by James's firm rejection of any theodicies as insensitive to the irreducibility of other human beings' suffering.

Why, we may here pause to ask, am I speaking about the pragmatist "protest" in the title of this section? This is simply because we can see pragmatism as protesting against various received views of mainstream philosophy of religion today, such as metaphysical realism, evidentialism, and theodicism, all of which are typically maintained by leading analytic philosophers of religion—but also against various tendencies in contemporary "postmodern" or "Continental" philosophy of religion, such as radical anti-metaphysics, constructivism, and relativism. We will next study this protest in relation to a special case, the theodicy vs. antitheodicy controversy. It should be emphasized that *protest needs critique*: it is one thing to simply abandon some position or protest against it, and quite another to base one's protest on a careful critical analysis and argumentation. In the case of critical philosophy, this particularly means self-criticism and self-discipline.<sup>4</sup> The pragmatist version of this idea is the Deweyan view of philosophy as a critical method for developing methods of criticism. In this fundamental sense, even Deweyan pragmatists (despite Dewey's occasionally sharp attacks on Kant) continue the Kantian critical project—and this is even more clearly so with James, whose antitheodicy protest we will now examine.

### 3. James, the pragmatic method, and the reality of evil

To properly set the stage for the inquiry into the problem of evil and suffering, I will begin from James's views on the pragmatic method and metaphysics, elaborating on the kind of Kantian reading of James already hinted at in the previous section. I will then suggest that the problem of evil and suffering plays a crucial role in James's philosophy of religion, metaphysics, and the pragmatic method—and it is this problem, in particular, that needs to be examined in relation to its Kantian background.

James famously argued that in *every* genuine metaphysical dispute, some practical issue is, however remotely, involved. If there is no such issue involved, then the dispute is empty. Jamesian pragmatism is thus here both influenced by and in contrast with the Kantian (somewhat proto-pragmatist) idea of the "primacy of practical reason" in relation to theo-

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<sup>4</sup> Compare this to Kant's (1990 [1781/1788]) articulation of the idea of the "discipline of reason" in the "Doctrine of Method" (*Methodenlehre*).

retical reason. As we just saw, for Kant, the metaphysical ideas of God, freedom, and immortality are only vindicated by the practical, instead of theoretical, use of reason. The Jamesian pragmatist, however, goes beyond Kant in emphasizing not simply the “primacy” of ethics to metaphysics but their profound inseparability and entanglement. Pragmatist inquiries into metaphysical topics, such as James’s, lead to the radical claim that metaphysics might not, in the last analysis, even be *possible* without a relation to ethics: pragmatically analyzed, we cannot arrive at *any* understanding of reality as we humans, being ourselves part of that reality, experience it, without paying due attention to the way in which moral valuations and ethical commitments are constitutive of that reality by being ineliminably involved in any engagement with reality possible for us. Ethics, then, plays a “transcendental” role constitutive of any metaphysical inquiry we may engage in.

More specifically, ethics seems to function as a ground for evaluating rival metaphysical hypotheses and for determining their pragmatic core meaning. The (conceivable) practical results the pragmatist metaphysician should look for are, primarily, ethical. Examples of such ethical evaluation of metaphysical matters can be found in the Jamesian pragmatic search for a critical middle path between implausible metaphysical extremes, as discussed in the third lecture of *Pragmatism*, “Some Metaphysical Problems Pragmatically Considered” (James 1975–88 [1907]). The topics James there (and in the fourth lecture in which the analysis continues) considers include debates over substance, determinism vs. freedom, materialism vs. theism, monism vs. pluralism, and (somewhat indirectly) realism vs. nominalism. Some of these metaphysical examples are quite explicitly ethical. Such are, for instance, the dispute between determinism and free will, as well as the one between materialism and theism, which the philosopher employing James’s pragmatic method examines from the point of view of what the rival metaphysical theories of the world “promise”: how does, for instance, the conceivable future of the world change if theism, instead of materialism (atheism), is true, or vice versa? In Lecture III of *Pragmatism*, James argues, among other things, that theism, unlike materialism, is a philosophy of “hope”, because it promises us a world in which morality could make a difference.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> It might be suggested that there are many less grandiose metaphysical issues that do not seem to manifest the kind of Jamesian entanglement of ethics and metaphysics that I am here emphasizing. For instance, is there some specifically ethical dimension involved in the metaphysical question concerning the existence of tables and the “grounding” of their exist-

In this context, I want to draw attention to a very important special way in which ethics is prior to, or contextualizes, any humanly possible metaphysical (and, arguably, theological) inquiry in Jamesian pragmatism. Recognizing the reality of evil is a key element of James's pluralistic pragmatism and its conceptions of religion and morality. The critique of monism, especially the attack on monistic Hegelian absolute idealism, is a recurring theme in James's philosophy. An investigation of the problem of evil can show how he argues against monism and defends pluralism on an ethical basis and how, therefore, his pragmatic metaphysics is grounded in ethics in a Kantian manner.

James was troubled by the problem of evil already at an early stage of his intellectual career, during the time of his spiritual crisis in 1870. He felt that the existence of evil might be a threat to a "moralist" attitude to the world, leading the would-be moralist to despair. "Can one with full knowledge and sincerely ever bring one's self so to sympathize with the total process of the universe as heartily to assent to the evil that seems inherent in its details?" he wondered, replying that, if so, then optimism is possible, but that, for some, pessimism is the only choice.<sup>6</sup> Already at this stage, he saw a problem with the idea of a "total process" optimistically taken to be well in order. According to Ralph Barton Perry (1964, 122), both optimism and pessimism were impossible for James, because he was "too sensitive to ignore evil, too moral to tolerate it, and too ardent to accept it as inevitable". It is already here that we can find the seeds of his *melioristic* pragmatism, which he later developed in more detail. This view says, in short, that we should *try* to make the world better, fighting against evil, without having any guarantee that the good cause will win, but having the right, or perhaps even the duty, to hope that it might and to invest our best efforts to make sure it will.

James worked on these issues throughout his life. In his last book, *Some Problems of Philosophy* (1911), he offered several arguments against

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tence? (I am indebted to an anonymous referee's comment here.) Certainly there is no need to force such a question into any explicitly ethical shape, but in principle any metaphysical issue, even the most banal or everyday one, could turn out to be ethically highly significant, according to Jamesian pragmatism. I try to develop this idea in Pihlström 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Notebook sheets from 1870, quoted in Perry 1964, 120–1. Here James saw that fighting evil—holding that "though evil slay me, she can't subdue me, or make me worship her" (ibid., 121)—presupposes the freedom of the will, and was thus connected with the key problem of his spiritual crisis. (Freedom, of course, is necessary, according to James, for any serious ethical philosophy. Perry notes that "moralism" is just one name for what might be described as James's "fundamental seriousness"; see ibid., 388.)

monism, among them the argument that monism creates, and will not be able to solve, the problem of evil:

Evil, for pluralism, presents only the practical problem of how to get rid of it.

For monism the puzzle is theoretical: How—if Perfection be the source, should there be Imperfection? If the world as known to the Absolute be perfect, why should it be known otherwise, in myriads of inferior finite editions also? The perfect edition surely was enough. How do the breakage and dispersion and ignorance get in?

James 1911, 138.<sup>7</sup>

That pragmatists, unlike monists, must take evil and imperfection seriously, refusing to “be deaf to the cries of the wounded” (as James put it elsewhere), is presented as one of the ethical motivations grounding the entire pragmatist method in the first lecture of *Pragmatism*. Referring to the actual fate of some suffering people, such as (drawing from a publication by Morrison I. Swift, an anarchist writer) an unemployed and in various ways disappointed and discouraged sick man who found his family lacking food and eventually committed suicide, James argued, against “the airy and shallow optimism of current religious philosophy” (James 1975–88 [1907], 20), that what such desperate human beings experience “is Reality”: “But while Professors Royce and Bradley and a whole host of guileless thoroughfeds are unveiling Reality and the Absolute and explaining away evil and pain, this is the condition of the only beings known to us anywhere in the universe with a developed consciousness of what the universe is” (ibid., 21).

Thus, idealist, optimistic philosophers “are dealing in shades, while those who live and feel know truth” (ibid., 22); a Leibnizian theodicy postulating a harmony of the universe is “a cold literary exercise, whose cheerful substance even hell-fire does not warm” (ibid., 20). What I am calling theodicism is, for James, part of the “unreality in all rationalistic systems” of “religious” philosophy that remain “out of touch with concrete facts and joys and sorrows” (ibid., 17). James here even quotes at length from Leibniz’s *Théodicée* (ibid., 19–20), concluding that “no realistic image of the experience of a damned soul had ever approached the portals of his mind” (ibid., 20). In order to overcome the ethically unbearable

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<sup>7</sup> I am here quoting from the Bison Books Edition of James’s *Some Problems of Philosophy* (1911), ed. Ellen Kappy Suckiel (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1996). Generally, I am referring to James’s works in the standard way, citing the critical edition (James 1975–88).

condition of the philosophical (and theological) tradition of theodicism, James offers pragmatism as a philosophy that can, pluralistically, respond to a *variety* of experiences, including genuine loss and evil, without simply tolerating such experiences, and without entirely losing the consolation of religion with the abandonment of theodicies (cf. *ibid.*, 23). It is from this antitheodistic challenge that *Pragmatism*, like pragmatism, unfolds.

We should take seriously the fact that James uses the notion of *truth* in this context, as well as terms such as “fact”, “reality”, “unreality”, and “realistic”. His invoking the concept of truth in particular is not just a non-technical loose way of speaking but, I submit, an instance of his pragmatist account of truth in action. We must, in particular, take James’s concern with the truth of pluralism (and the falsity of monism and absolute idealism) in his own pragmatic sense, the same sense in which he speaks about “living” and “feeling” people knowing “the truth” (*ibid.*, 20, cited above). This is truth not in the sense of metaphysical realism postulating a correspondence relation holding (or failing to hold) independently of human beings and their needs and interests, but a pragmatic truth dynamically emerging from human valuational practices of engaging with reality and their experiences of it.

Nevertheless, it would be highly misleading to claim that James would not be interested in the question about the “real” (genuine, objective) truth of (say) pluralism (vs. monism), or other metaphysical views he considers in *Pragmatism* and elsewhere—just as it would be misleading to claim that Kant would not be interested in the truth of theism, for instance. Certainly truth plays a role here, and neither James nor Kant subscribes to an easy antirealism or relativism according to which the truth (vs. falsity) about evil and suffering (or about God) would simply be a human perspectival construction, yet our human practice-embedded perspectives can never be eliminated from our serious consideration of these truths, and this is where the Kantian and the Jamesian approaches to the philosophy of religion join forces. Indeed, it can be suggested that the special moral significance of the pragmatist conception of truth (and reality), as articulated by James in *Pragmatism* (and elsewhere), arises from the fundamental link between antitheodicism and the acknowledgment of truth and reality along the phrases just quoted. We (pragmatically) need the pragmatist conception of truth in order to make sense of this demand of acknowledgment of the reality of pain and suffering. A non-pragmatic (e. g., metaphysically realistic correspondence) notion of truth just cannot do the job. Moreover, it is, from the Jamesian perspective, a kind of “fake news” based on an

unconcern with truth to claim, with theodicians, that there “really” is no unnecessary or meaningless evil, or that suffering has some “real” sense or purpose.

Well, why couldn't a realist correspondence-theoretician “acknowledge” the reality of (meaningless) suffering in the antitheodistic sense? I am not claiming that a non-pragmatic realist correspondence-theorist cannot be an antitheodistic. I am, rather, only suggesting that the full force of pragmatist antitheodicism can be brought into view by realizing the way in which something like a pragmatic notion of truth functions in the Jamesian pronouncements on the concrete reality of suffering that needs to be acknowledged if we do not wish to “live in shades” and be out of touch with human experience. Such valuational truths about suffering are among the pragmatically relevant truths that we, according to James, seem to need a rich pragmatic notion of truth to account for.

James's pragmatist and pluralist position might now be summarized as an outcome of a transcendental argument in a quasi-Kantian fashion. Our taking seriously the reality of evil—i. e., its psychological, social, as well as metaphysical reality—is understood by James to be a necessary condition for the possibility of ethically meaningful or valuable life (in a pluralistic metaphysical setting), including any true religious meaning one may find in one's life. Evil itself is not intrinsically, metaphysically, necessary to the universe itself, as the absolute idealist would be forced to hold, but it is necessary in a *presuppositional* sense: *if* there is any legitimate role for religious (theistic) beliefs to play in our lives, such a system of beliefs must acknowledge the reality of evil while resisting the “corrupt”, immoral idea that an ultimately moral creator “planned” it and is prepared to pay the price in order to secure some greater good. There is, admittedly, an air of circularity in this argument, because the ethical duty not to overlook others' suffering can hardly itself be grounded in any deeper ethical demand. Ultimately, then, this quasi-transcendental argument is about what makes morality meaningful and serious for us, and how it is possible for us to adopt the moral point of view on the world and on our lives. The circularity, I think, is unavoidable in the sense that to be concerned with this meaningfulness of the moral perspective is already to adopt that perspective and to be seriously committed to viewing our lives, including our philosophizing, from a moral standpoint. The problem of evil and suffering is, if my argument is on the right track, at the center of this commitment.



Furthermore, it may be suggested that the metaphysical acceptance of the reality of evil and the fight against it constitute a pragmatic criterion of adequacy for pragmatism itself. Pragmatism proves to be a philosophy which takes evil seriously, without hiding it or trying to explain it away (as monistic idealism does, according to James), yet encouraging us to join in a struggle against it, melioristically trying to make our world a better one. This is a reflexive pragmatic argument in favor of pragmatism and pluralism themselves. By enabling us to make a difference, pragmatism offers a more satisfactory picture of the nature and role of evil in human lives than monistic idealism (or, *mutatis mutandis*, some contemporary analytic philosophers' evidentialist theism typically postulating a theodicy). The price to be paid here, however, is an irresolvable metaphysical and theological insecurity: there is no final solution to the problem of evil, as new experiences of ever more horrendous evils may eventually even make it impossible for us to go on actively fighting against evil. Insofar as a pragmatic defense of pragmatism is available, such a defense will have to remain fallible. We may be unable to react pragmatically to the problem of evil, after all, and for many thinkers this may be a ground for rejecting religious beliefs altogether.

According to this Jamesian antitheodicy, the recognition of genuine evil is required as a background, or as I prefer to say, a transcendental condition, of the possibility of making a difference, a positive contribution, in favor of goodness. It should be relatively clear on the basis of these discussions that the problem of evil can be seen as a *frame* that puts the other philosophical explorations of James's *Pragmatism* into a certain context. It shows that reacting to the problem of evil—and the highly individual experiences of being a victim to evil that we may hear in the "cries of the wounded"—is essential in our ethical orientation to the world we live in, which in turn is essential in the use of the pragmatic method as a method of making our ideas clear, both metaphysically and conceptually (and even religiously or theologically). *Pragmatism*, as we saw, opens the project of advancing a melioristic philosophy with a discussion of the concrete reality of evil, and in the final pages James returns to evil, suffering, loss, and tragedy:

In particular *this* query has always come home to me: May not the claims of tender-mindedness go too far? May not the notion of a world already saved *in toto* anyhow, be too saccharine to stand? May not religious optimism be too idyllic? Must *all* be saved? Is *no* price to be paid in the work of salvation? Is the last word sweet? Is all 'yes,

yes' in the universe? Doesn't the fact of 'no' stand at the very core of life? Doesn't the very 'seriousness' that we attribute to life mean that ineluctable noes and losses form a part of it, that there are genuine sacrifices somewhere, and that something permanently drastic and bitter always remains at the bottom of its cup?

I cannot speak officially as a pragmatist here; all I can say is that my own pragmatism offers no objection to my taking sides with this more moralistic view, and giving up the claim of total reconciliation. [...] It is then perfectly possible to accept sincerely a drastic kind of a universe from which the element of 'seriousness' is not to be expelled. Whoso does so is, it seems to me, a genuine pragmatist.

James 1975–88 [1907], 141–2

It is this very same moral seriousness that I find essential to emphasize in the contemporary discourse on evil. There is a sense in which our moral life with other human beings in a world full of suffering is tragic: given our finitude, we will never be able to fully overcome evil and suffering, yet we must constantly try. James's pragmatism is not only generally relevant as a critical middle path solution to several controversies in contemporary philosophy of religion, but also a promising move toward the kind of antitheodicism I think we vitally need in any serious moral philosophy. It may also keep our eyes open to the reality of the tragic dimension of human life. Yet, even the notion of tragedy might lead us astray here in something like a theodacist manner. Tragedies, though not themselves theodicies, are meaningful and "deep" in a sense in which human real-world evils and sufferings such as the Holocaust often are not. It is presumably better to speak about Jamesian *melancholy*—about the sick soul's fundamentally melancholic way of approaching ethics, and the world in general.

Moreover, it must be kept in mind that James's antitheodicy (and the understanding of the problem of evil as a "frame") emerges in the context of developing pragmatism in general as a *philosophy*—not only as an ethical approach but as a philosophical orientation in general. In this context, as is well known, James offers pragmatism as a critical middle ground between "tough-minded" and "tender-minded" philosophies. Antitheodicy and melancholy are, thus, conditions for the adequacy of (pragmatist) philosophizing as such.

#### 4. Rortyan ironism and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

Having briefly defended a resolutely antitheodist reading of James and an antitheodist way of developing pragmatism generally—as a philosophical contribution to the discourse on evil, but also more comprehensively as a contribution to the examination of the relations between ethics and metaphysics—we should consider the way in which this antitheodism is both rooted in Kantian antitheodism and threatened by a certain kind of problematization of the notions of truth and reality that James's own pragmatism takes some crucial steps toward. In this context, we will have to expand our horizon from James and Kant to Rorty's neopragmatism and especially to Rorty's treatment of George Orwell.

According to Rorty, famously, *cruelty* is the worst thing we do. This is, one might suggest, another pragmatist version of the Jamesian principle according to which we should always listen to the “cries of the wounded”. There is a kind of *holism* involved in Rorty's position, just like in James's: “don't be cruel” could be regarded as a meta-principle governing all other moral principles (and, to put it in a Kantian way, governing the choice of all moral principles), yet itself (like all more specific principles, and unlike the Kantian meta-principle, the categorical imperative) fallible and revisable, even though it may be difficult or even impossible to imagine how exactly it could fail—just like it is impossible to imagine, in the context of Quinean holism, what it would really be like to falsify a logical or mathematical principle.<sup>8</sup> There are, *pace* Kant, no *unconditional* ideals or principles, either for James or for Rorty, while both pragmatist philosophers do operate with broader and more inclusive (as well as narrower and less inclusive) moral views and principles. Whereas for James the broadest imaginable principle seems to be the requirement to realize the largest possible universe of good while carefully listening to the cries of the wounded, for Rorty an analogous role is played by the liberal principle of avoiding cruelty and realizing individual freedom as fully as possible. All ethical requirements, including these, are contingent and in principle fallible, as everything is contained in a holistic, revisable totality of our on-going ethical thought and conversation. (Analogously, we may say, the transcendental is contained in the empirical, and vice versa.)

In his essay on Orwell, Rorty—whose “protest” against mainstream analytic philosophy is, we may say, much stronger than most other pragma-

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<sup>8</sup> According to Quine's (1953) famous holism, logical and mathematical beliefs (or sentences) are in principle on a par with empirical scientific beliefs (or sentences).

tists'—rejects the realistic reading of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, according to which the book defends an objective notion of truth in the context of a penetrating moral critique of the horrible and humiliating way in which Winston is made to believe that two plus two equals five.<sup>9</sup> Consistently with his well-known position (if it can be regarded as a “position” at all), Rorty (1989, 173) denies that “there are any plain moral facts out there in the world, [...] any truths independent of language, [or] any neutral ground on which to stand and argue that either torture or kindness are preferable to the other”. Orwell’s significance lies in a novel re-description of what is possible: he convinced us that “nothing in the nature of truth, or man, or history” will block the conceivable scenario that “the same developments which had made human equality technically possible might make endless slavery possible” (ibid., 175). Hence, O’Brien, the torturer and “Party intellectual”, is Orwell’s key invention, and he, crucially, offers *no answer* to O’Brien’s position: “He does not view O’Brien as crazy, misguided, seduced by a mistaken theory, or blind to the moral facts. He simply views him as *dangerous* and as *possible*” (ibid., 176).

The key idea here, according to Rorty, is that truth as such does not matter: “[...] what matters is your ability to talk to other people about what seems to you true, not what is in fact true” (ibid.).<sup>10</sup> Famously, in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Winston’s self is in a way destroyed as he is made to believe that two plus two equals five and to utter “Do it to Julia!” when faced with his worst fear, the rats. Rorty points out that this is something he “could not utter sincerely and still be able to put himself back together” (ibid., 179).

The notion of *sincerity* is central here, as it leads us to the way in which Kant critically discusses theodicies in his 1791 essay, “Über das Misslingen aller philosophischen Versuche in der Theodicee” (“On the Miscarriage of all Philosophical Trials in Theodicy”), a largely neglected short piece that usually does not get the kind of attention that Kant’s more famous doctrine of “radical evil” does (not to speak of the main works of his critical philosophy).<sup>11</sup> I believe we should follow Kant in rejecting theodicies not

<sup>9</sup> For the realistic reading, also directed against Rorty’s pragmatism, cf. e. g., van Inwagen 1993, 69; Mounce 1997, 211–8.

<sup>10</sup> This is followed by the well-known Rortyan one-liner, “If we take care of freedom, truth can take care of itself”.

<sup>11</sup> The essay was first published in *Berlinische Monatsschrift*, September 1791, 194–225; cf. Kant 1983b [1791]. For an English translation, cf. Immanuel Kant, *Religion and Rational Theology*, trans. and ed. Allen W. Wood and George Di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 20–37 (with the translator’s introduction at 21–3). In referencing,

only for intellectual but also for ethical (and, therefore, religious) reasons; indeed, James (as I have interpreted him above) is, in this sense, a Kantian. As Richard Bernstein (2002, 3–4) points out in his introduction to what is one of the most important contributions to the problem of evil in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Kant’s rejection of theodicies is a crucial part of his critical philosophy: insofar as theodicies aim at theoretical knowledge about God, they are not merely contingent failures but, much more strongly, impossible and *must* fail, given the limitations of human reason; on the other hand, it is precisely by limiting the sphere of knowledge that Kant, famously, makes room for faith. Kant, therefore, is “the modern philosopher who initiates the inquiry into evil without explicit recourse to philosophical theodicy” and hence also leads the way in our attempt to rethink the meaning of evil and responsibility “after Auschwitz” (ibid., 4).<sup>12</sup> Kant writes about evil in a conceptual world entirely different from the one occupied by his most important predecessors, such as Leibniz. This Kantian conceptual world is, if my argument in the earlier sections of this paper is on the right track, shared by James. We may say that Kant’s antitheodicism was transformed into a pragmatist antitheodicism by James.<sup>13</sup>

The details of Kant’s analysis of the failures of theodicies need not concern us here. As I want to focus on the issue of truth, I must emphasize the way in which Kant invokes the Book of Job as an example of the only “honest” way of formulating a theodicy—which, for him, actually seems to be an antitheodicy. Job’s key virtue, according to Kant, is his *sincerity* (*Aufrichtigkeit*), which establishes “the preeminence of the honest man over the religious flatterer in the divine verdict” (Kant 1983 b [1791], 8:267):

Job speaks as he thinks, and with the courage with which he, as well as every human being in his position, can well afford; his friends, on the contrary, speak as if they were being secretly listened to by the mighty one, over whose cause they are passing judgment, and as if gaining his favor through their judgment were closer to their heart than the truth. Their malice in pretending to assert things into

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even though I am citing the English translation, the standard *Akademie-Ausgabe* numbering will be used. For secondary literature focusing on the theodicy essay, cf. e. g., Brachtendorff 2002; Galbraith 2006.

<sup>12</sup> For Bernstein’s insightful reading of Kant’s theory of radical evil, cf. Bernstein 2002, chapter 1.

<sup>13</sup> The reason I am making a short excursus to Kant’s antitheodicism in this section is that we need to examine the Kantian notion of sincerity in order to critically evaluate the Rortyan neopragmatist developments regarding truth and objectivity. For the significance of Kant for the project of antitheodicism, see the much more comprehensive discussion in Kivistö and Pihlström 2016.

which they yet must admit they have no insight, and in simulating a conviction which they in fact do not have, contrasts with Job's frankness [...].  
Ibid., 8:265–6.

For Kant, the leading feature in Job's virtuous character is not, then, his patience in suffering (as many traditional, particularly Christian, interpreters of the Book of Job might suggest), but his inner sincerity, integrity, and honesty. Indeed, Job protests against his suffering in the poetic dialogues of the book; he does not simply endure his fate or quietly suffer, but complains and insists on the injustice of his adversities. Thus, Job's honesty of heart, rather than his alleged patience, is his greatest virtue.

Toward the end of the essay, Kant discusses the moral evil of insincerity—of our tendency “to distort even inner declarations before [our] own conscience”—as “*in itself evil* even if it harms no one” (ibid., 8:270). Thus, he seems to be saying in so many words that speculative, rationalizing theodicies—the kind of theodicies manifested by Job's friends—are themselves exemplifications of evil. They are also evil in a very specific sense: they do not acknowledge the Kantian—and more generally Enlightenment—ideal of free, autonomous, and responsible thinking based on the idea of inner truthfulness (which is something that we should see pragmatist philosophers like James and Rorty highly appreciating as well). They are therefore revolts (not primarily against God but) against humanity itself, conceived in a Kantian way. We might even say that the insincerity of theodocist thinking does not recognize the essential human capacity for freedom and responsibility, for the kind of autonomous thinking that is the very foundation of morality. It is not implausible, it seems to me, to suggest that James could have sympathized with, or even implicitly shared, this Kantian line of thought in his criticism of theodicies analyzed above. For James, too, there is something ethically, fundamentally insincere in theodicies. Theodicies, as we saw through some illustrative quotations from *Pragmatism*, do not live up to the ideal of knowing the truth instead of living in shades. Moreover, reflecting on what goes wrong in *our own* tendencies to succumb to the temptations of theodicy (as Bernstein calls them in his discussion of Levinas) is a prime example of critical yet pragmatic reflexivity at work.

A fundamental distinction between truth and falsity is, however, necessary for the concepts of sincerity and truthfulness (Kantian *Aufrichtigkeit*), and given the role these concepts play in Kantian antitheodicism, such a distinction is necessary for the antitheodocist project generally as well, also in its Jamesian pragmatist reincarnation. Now, insofar as Rorty's pragma-

tism carries Jamesian pragmatism into a certain kind of extreme, one is left wondering whether there is any way to stop on the slippery slope arguably leading from James to Rorty (and eventually bringing in, with horror, Orwell's O'Brien). Reality, shocking as it often is, must still be contrasted with something like unreality, while truth and truthfulness must be contrasted not only with falsity but also with lying and self-deception, and possibly other kinds of loss of sincerity and truthfulness that may follow from the collapse of the truth vs. falsity distinction itself. What we find here is *the problem of realism in its existential dimensions*. This is, arguably, the core pragmatic meaning of the problem of realism—or even, echoing the reading of *Pragmatism* presented above, an approach to the problem of realism framed by the problem of evil.

Insofar as the distinction between truth and falsity collapses, as it does in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the very project of antitheodicy, which (I believe we may argue) depends on the Kantian notion of *Aufrichtigkeit* (sincerity),<sup>14</sup> becomes threatened. Truthfulness or sincerity itself collapses here. Hence, this is another special message and problem of Orwell, an implicit warning of his great novel: there is no theodicy available even in this negative sense, no happy end or moral harmony available, *even by going through antitheodicism*. Taking evil and suffering seriously entails acknowledging that we constantly run the risk of losing whatever truthfulness we might be capable of possessing, and of thereby losing the sincere attitude to evil and suffering that antitheodacists like Kant and James have found crucially important for an adequately (or even minimally) ethical attitude to suffering. Thus, the Orwellian challenge (or warning) lies right here: is there, or can there be, or can we at least imagine, *such evil that makes antitheodicy itself impossible* by destroying the very possibility of Kantian *Aufrichtigkeit* (by destroying the truth vs. falsity distinction that is necessary for truthfulness or sincerity)? This *fragility of antitheodicy*, the fragility of sincerity necessary for antitheodicy, is a dimension of the more general fragility of the moral point of view; we can consider it a *meta-antitheodicy*. By destroying Winston's capacity for sincerely uttering something and still being able to "put himself back together", O'Brien not only engages in evil that lies (almost) beyond description and imagination, but also leads us to imagine the possibility of evil that renders (Kantian) antitheodicy itself impossible. This will then collapse the Jamesian antitheodacist approach

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<sup>14</sup> This is argued in some detail in Kivistö and Pihlström 2016, chapter 5. In this context, I cannot develop this argument at any more length, as important as it is for our overall assessment of the prospects of pragmatist-cum-Kantian antitheodicism.

as well, given that it starts from a kind of pragmatic softening of the notion of objective truth culminating in the “truth happens to an idea” view characteristic of James’s ethically grounded metaphysics.

## 5. Conclusion

Let me try to offer some ways of pulling the threads together on the basis of our discussions of Kant, James, and Rorty. These concluding reflections will remain inconclusive, but the job of the pragmatist-cum-Kantian antitheodist will in any event continue.

It is important to realize that while James in my reading only resisted certain metaphysically realistic forms of metaphysics, especially Hegelian monistic absolute idealism (and corresponding metaphysical realisms), without thereby abandoning metaphysics altogether (cf. Pihlström 2009), Rorty’s reading of Orwell is deeply based on his rejection of *all* forms of metaphysics. In his view, Orwell tells us that “whether our future rulers are more like O’Brien or more like J.S. Mill does not depend [...] on deep facts about human nature” or on any “large necessary truths about human nature and its relation to truth and justice” but on “a lot of small contingent facts” (Rorty 1989, 187–8). Now, this is hard to deny, at least in a sense; various minor contingent facts have enormous influence on how our world and societies develop. This is also a very important message of Rortyan *ironism* in general: our firmest moral commitments, our “final vocabularies”, are all historically contingent. But the worry is that, if we give up (even pragmatically rearticulated) objective truth entirely, we will end up giving up the very possibility of sincerity, too, and that is something we need for resisting the future of all possible O’Briens’ (paradoxically) theodist newspeak seeking to justify evil, suffering, and torture. It is one thing to accept, reasonably, historical contingency and to reject overblown metaphysics of “deep facts about human nature”; it is quite another matter to give up even a minimal pragmatic sense of objective truth required not only for sincerity but for the very possibility of sincerity (and, hence, for the possibility of insincerity as well, because insincerity is possible only insofar as sincerity is possible, and vice versa). This worry ought to be constantly kept in mind by anyone sympathizing with the Jamesian antitheodist suggestion to apply the notion of pragmatic truth to the acknowledgment of the reality of suffering. Therefore, I have spoken about the problem of realism in its existential meaning.



I am not saying that Rorty (or James) is wrong, or has a mistaken conception of truth (or facts, or history, or anything). What I am saying is that *if* Rorty is right (whatever it means to say this, given the disappearance, in Rorty's neopragmatism, of the distinction between being right and being regarded as being right by one's cultural peers), then we are in a bigger trouble than we may have believed.<sup>15</sup> Jamesian pragmatism seems to take the correct, indeed vital, antitheodist step in refusing to philosophically justify evil and suffering. This step was initially made possible by Kant's antitheodism and critical philosophy more generally. However, insofar as Jamesian pragmatism develops into something like Rorty's neopragmatism, which lets the notion of truth drop out as unimportant, the end result is not only an insightful emphasis on historical contingency (and on the role of literature in showing us fascinating, and dangerous, contingent possibilities) but also the possible fragmentation of sincerity itself, which seems to depend on a relatively robust distinction between truth and falsity. Antitheodicy thus becomes fragmented through that fragmentation.

What this shows is, perhaps, a quasi-Rortyan point: Orwell is more important, and O'Brien more dangerous, than we may have thought. But it also shows that Rorty deprives us of certain linguistic, literary, and philosophical resources that we might see Orwell as having equipped us with. Pragmatism can maintain those resources only by being *critical*—that is, Kantian. Only the critical path is open: this Kantian message should be taken home by all pragmatists, and not only by pragmatists.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> This criticism of Rorty (which is also, implicitly, a criticism of Jamesian pragmatism, though not a proposal to give up that pragmatism but, rather, to carefully rethink its current value, being aware of its potential problems) comes close to James Conant's (2000) highly detailed—and devastating—attack on Rorty's reading of Orwell. See also Rorty 2000.

<sup>16</sup> Versions of this paper were presented at the Nordic Philosophy of Religion Conference in Oslo (June, 2017) and the "Pragmatist Kant" conference in Berlin (July, 2017). I should like to thank the organizers and participants of those events for stimulating discussions and helpful comments. Chris Skowroński's and an anonymous reviewer's detailed comments were particularly valuable. My greatest debt is, of course, to Sari Kivistö, as my views in this paper have been largely developed in collaboration with her (and in our joint book cited above).

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PART IV

ETHICS AND  
AESTHETICS

# Kant, James, and the Practice of Ethics

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## 1. The heterodox side of ethics

Both Kant and James's moral philosophies challenged generations of scholars, proving to be much more complicated and multi-faced than even an attentive look might betray. Kant is in fact *not* the hard-nosed deontologist pictured by modern and contemporary commentators alike, as James is *not* a flamboyant consequentialist. Or, at least, *not only*. And this is not because in both authors we can detect references to, and endorsements of, different—sometimes opposite—moral views and conceptions, but rather because in selected portions of their respective works they pointed to a heterodox picture of what moral philosophy is about in the first place. One in which the nature and point of philosophical ethics are not best caught by *moral theorizing* (or not at all), but rather by a peculiar kind of *moral practice*: a cultivation and care of the self which in Kant takes the shape of self-constitution while in James takes the shape of self-experimentation.<sup>1</sup>

In what follows, rather than attempting a comprehensive reading of their moral thoughts, I intend to investigate selective aspects of this heterodox philosophical line. In particular, I shall focus on Kant and James's rather original inquiries into the vexing issue of the relationship between ethics and anthropology/psychology,<sup>2</sup> which, as I shall argue, they con-

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. respectively, Foucault 2008, Loudon 2000, Donatelli 2015, Franzese 2008, and Marchetti 2015, although the literature is growing voluminous.

<sup>2</sup> The intricate and much debated topic of the relationship between anthropology and psychology, even if central to the understanding of Kant and James's work, falls well beyond the scope of the paper, and hence I shall pass over it in silence. What interests me is in fact what is common between Kant and James in their characterization of anthropological

tributed to unraveling with some compelling insights yet to be fully appreciated. It will in fact be my contention that both Kant and James, in key moments of their intellectual biographies, addressed the issue of a *pragmatic* anthropology and psychology, offering a fruitful path along with rethinking the nature and shape of moral reflection altogether. By surveying some central lines of Kant's *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* and James's *Principles of Psychology*, I argue for a picture of the entanglement of ethics and anthropology/psychology along pragmatist lines standing in opposition—and hence representing an alternative—to the foundational account of the entanglement offered by the orthodoxy of ethical theory. According to the picture offered by ethical theory, the clash between the purely descriptive register of anthropology/psychology and the utterly prescriptive one of ethics necessarily brings the former to yield to the demands of the latter. Pragmatism staunchly resists such foundational dynamics: by eyeing a conception of *pragmatic* anthropology and psychology which illuminates an important dimension and register of the moral life that moral philosophy should account for—that is, self-cultivation and experimentation—Kant and James envisioned a novel path along which thinking of the relationship between ethics and anthropology/psychology as one of convergence and mutual reinforcement over the inquiry of what human beings might make of themselves by entering in a certain *critical* relationship with themselves.

Notwithstanding the detail and relatively narrow scope of the inquiry over this particular theme, if compared with their wider moral productions, I take this to be a key theme running deep in Kant and James's respective—and, in more than one respect, rather distant—philosophical agendas, despite the theme seeming to create more than a friction with the rest of their work—especially so in the case of Kant. Before outlining the contours of Kant and James's pragmatic moves as well as of their synergies, let me spell out in some more detail the philosophical problem with which they were—and we contemporary readers of ethics *after* them still are—wresting with.

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and psychological investigations as *pragmatic*—as against metaphysical and/or physiological. For a reference to Kant's and James's distinctive understandings of anthropology, psychology, and their respective features and domains, see the introductions to the critical editions of *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* by Louden (Kant 2006 [1798]) and of *The Principles of Psychology* by Evans and Myers (James 1981 [1890]).

## 2. Normative descriptions and the self

The problem of placing anthropology and psychology in ethics is an entrenched and nagging one in the history of moral philosophy—a problem which we encounter in different shapes and guises in moments as diverse as Greek philosophy, the long season of pre-modernism, and the so-called secular age. To narrow down, if only slightly, the timeframe to the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment—but a similar discourse, although dressed in rather different theoretical clothes, can be located in selected earlier moments of Western intellectual history—the problem of how to best square the normative demands of ethical reflection with the empirical evidence about human nature crossed the moral thought of virtually all great thinkers in such tradition from Hobbes to Hegel, and still informs our contemporary echoes of such debates. Despite the most diverse answers to the issue, a common assumption underlying most approaches, with only a few exceptions, can still be appreciated. What is in fact usually assumed is that what anthropology and psychology give us are factual descriptions of human beings as beings of a certain kind (natural, rational, or divine), while ethics deals with such normative notions as those of duties, imperatives, and laws. The first tells us what there (empirically) is, while the second—very roughly—what there should (morally) be. According to the widely accepted view defended by ethical theories understood as prescriptive endeavors articulated in a second-order, meta-ethical component and a first-order, normative one,<sup>3</sup> by merely describing how human beings are, we cannot derive any information that is relevant for ethics, if not by pointing out those very features of human beings whose implementation would count as the *realization* or *promotion* of a certain moral principle. In this picture, ethics can profit from anthropological and psychological considerations, but only in an external way: namely, by picking from them some raw materials and arranging them according to *its own* normative criteria. The one counter-move sometimes envisioned to contrast such an approach—which however represents nothing but its sheer reverse, sharing the assumption about the sharp division of roles and goals between ethics and anthropology/psychology—has been a return to a burdensome metaphysical account of human nature in which there would be inscribed those very ethical qualities that moral theory prescribes us to *respect* or

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<sup>3</sup> For a classical statement of what moral theories are, of their goals and limits, see Jamieson 1991. For a thorough, and by now classical, criticism of moral theorizing so understood, see Williams 1985.

*honor*. The only way anthropology and psychology can deliver from a moral point of view is by turning themselves into sites for ethical principles and rules, and hence the way in which we can morally learn from human nature is by investigating its inbuilt ethical constitution.

The vast majority of accounts thus resolved the alleged clash between ethics and anthropology/psychology by reducing the one to the other. Pragmatism, as it is exemplified by Kant and James in the texts under consideration, refutes the terms of the debate suggesting the possibility of a *description* of human beings that is *ethically relevant* not because it makes reference (even if only an implicit one) to a moral rule, law, or principle inbuilt in our human makeup, but rather because it presents what human beings *practically* make of themselves as self-governing accountable beings—thus envisioning an internal and non-foundational connection between anthropology/psychology and ethics.

Read this way, pragmatism works towards bridging the is-ought gap informing a great portion of modern and contemporary moral philosophy. In order to retain normativity in the practical realm, and shaping it after the normativity as found in the theoretical one, moral philosophers envisioned rather different ways in which the prescriptive character of morality could be accounted for in terms of a reference to the natural traits of human beings, or at least it can be reconciled with them, without falling prey to a version of Hume's law or G. E. Moore's open question argument (and hence to the naturalistic fallacy). The problem faced is that one cannot derive ethical conclusions from merely factual premises because in no factual description of a certain situation (worldly or psychological) could figure those very normative features relevant for ethics. In fact, any naturalistic description of a certain situation or psychological profile would not satisfy the normative demands of ethics understood as a prescriptive intellectual activity. What is presupposed by this picture, however, can be—and has been—challenged: namely, the ideas that moral features cannot dress in natural clothes (or, alternatively, that nature does not wear moral considerations on its sleeves), and conversely that all that is factual is as such normatively idle are under attack from a number of corners.<sup>4</sup> Among the many strategies to account for a picture of moral normativity along different lines, pragmatism as reworked by Kant and James in the texts under examination, traces a distinctive and promising path.

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<sup>4</sup> For a recent survey and showcase of these strategies, see Marchetti and Marchetti 2016.



Pragmatism resists the dichotomic picture of moral thought according to which anthropology/psychology and ethics pursue independent inquiries into different aspects of reality—the natural/descriptive and the non-natural/normative respectively. Given their heterogeneous character, the two tasks need to be somewhat artificially coordinated. The challenge facing pragmatist thinkers is that of showing the contiguity of such inquiries and the consequent harmony of their respective tasks. This move is certainly not without conceptual consequences for the way in which we picture both tasks, their very strategies and goals. Pragmatism questions in fact both the broadly reductionist view of anthropology and psychology according to which they would give us neutral descriptions of human beings as they simply—that is culturally or biologically—are (thus stressing its normative idleness and grounding in brute facts), and the broadly intuitionistic understanding of ethics as the prescriptive discipline of what should be independently from any particular perspective (as a way to secure the objectivity of the principles and values it advocates). As against the former, pragmatism offers a picture of anthropology and psychology as revolving around what human beings as *agents* engaged in a certain worldly practice might make of themselves, while as against the latter it suggests a picture of moral thought as the survey of such practices as practices involving a critical evaluation of the self in its practical, worldly constitution and transformation. What gets dropped altogether is both a notion of the self as a given and a conception of moral normativity as dependent on moral principles built in splendid isolation from human activities and contingency.

In acknowledging such a closeness between ethics and anthropology/psychology, this conception of moral thought silences at the same time the temptation of reducing the former to the latter: that is, reducing moral thought to a mere defense of a specific metaphysical image of human beings, jeopardizing in this way the autonomy of ethics as a sphere of discourse and argumentation that aspires to a certain degree of detachment from what is merely given. In fact, by depicting subjects as self-shaping and transformative beings, the peculiar version of pragmatism I am reviewing looks suspiciously at those ethical projects interested in imposing a particular moral agenda by defending a fixed picture of human beings allegedly fulfilling its specifics. By contesting such foundational and prescriptive approaches, pragmatism aims at earning a picture of moral thought as a field of *practical* inquiry that is neither impermeable to the contingencies of human life nor committed to imposing any

given arrangement of them. Instead of conceiving morality as kept pure from any human involvements or shaping it after a fixed picture of human beings, a pragmatist approach to moral reflection envisions the radical option of putting at the center of its investigation the subject's practices of self-fashioning and transformation. The *normative descriptions* we find in Kant and James, in fact, depict human beings as engaged in the realization of an ideal or responding to an experience they pose to themselves, rather than obeying to a moral rule or principle externally imposed on them or mirroring their metaphysical essence. A selective use of Kant and James, to which I now pass, will help me to articulate these ideas as well as the larger philosophical picture animating them.

### 3. Kant on pragmatic self-constitution

When engaging the *Anthropology*, Kant's readers face the formidable problem of placing this particular text (as well as the numerous impressions of the lectures representing its corollaries) in the broader context of his ethical thought and writings.<sup>5</sup> What is usually expected from it is a picture of morality as a system of imperatives, only depicted from the part of the subject. In this picture, suggested by Kant himself in some passages from the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* as well as from the *Lectures on Logic*, anthropology would be a mere application of a self-contained, a priori, and already established system of moral imperatives to human beings, or at best the necessary knowledge of the empirical conditions on which a moral system can be built. However, by drawing a distinction between physiological and pragmatic anthropology, in the *Anthropology* Kant envisions a radically different scenario for such a relationship. Such a distinction plays a seminal role for the articulation of a heterodox picture of the relationship between ethics and anthropology.

According to Kant, the principles of pure ethics, precisely because of their purity, have no special connection with the human life. Such a connection can only be established by bringing empirical knowledge of human nature into the picture. However, we can conceive such integration in two different, parting ways: either externally or internally. In the former case, according to the story narrated in the major ethical writings, anthropology is relevant for ethics as long as it gives the materials and indicates

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Jacobs and Kain 2003 (in particular, Wood, Loudon, and Jacobs's essays), Frierson 2003, Wilson 2006, Heidemann 2011 (in particular, Sturm, Vanhaute, and Whyrwich's essays) and Cohen 2011 (in particular, Makkrell, Guyer, Wood, and Wilson's essays).

the way in which an already formed moral theory can apply to human beings, given their peculiar constitution. According to such a narration, a good representation of morality is in need of a good description of how human beings are, but only because anthropology gives us information about the empirical way in which freedom can be empirically achieved by human beings. In this scenario, moral freedom is pictured as a property of pure practical reason with no connection with the contingencies of the human life, if not in its *ruling* their possibilities from the above of its formal dimension. In the latter case, instead, ethical normative elements emerge from a pragmatic description of human beings: pragmatic anthropology, differently from physiological anthropology, deals with the knowledge of human beings' engagement in their practices of freedom. As Kant writes at the very outset of his *Anthropology*,

A doctrine of knowledge of the human being, systematically formulated (anthropology), can exist either in a physiological or in a pragmatic point of view —Physiological knowledge of the human being concerns the investigations of what *nature* makes of the human being; pragmatic, the investigation of what *he* as a free-acting being makes of himself, or can and should make of himself. Kant 2006 [1798], 3

According to a pragmatic description of their life of the mind, human beings are *makers* of themselves and not mere spectators of a nature that in a second step has to be moralized with reference to an ethical principle. The cultivation of our faculties aims at a perfection that is not dictated by any morally abstract rule, but rather emerges from the use we make of them. Rather than a metaphysical constituent, moral freedom is a possibility of our subjectivity when we experiment with its practical uses.

Such a change of emphasis throws new light on the whole Kantian characterization of human beings as torn between reason and nature. Kant's later work on anthropology is deeply intertwined with his critique period not only biographically—his "Anthropology" classes were held by Kant for some 25 years from 1772 to his retirement in 1797—but also because what is at stake in Kant's pragmatic anthropology is a redefinition of the boundaries of the human that stands as an interesting alternative to the one offered in the first two *Critiques*. In the lectures Kant refuses to picture human beings as mere observers of what nature makes of themselves, suggesting a way in which their liberty is achieved through the employment of their faculties when engaged in experiencing and experimentations. According to this heterodox picture, to live morally one must make something of oneself according to some ideal of good life, in the same

manner as to live healthily one must make something of oneself according to ideals of a healthy life. However, unlike the dietetic example, such ideals are not inscribed in advance in some physiological constitution: a good life does not consist in an activity of mere heuristic rule-following of an independently fixed order, but is instead an inventive practice in which we shape and take care of our life in accordance to some ideas of perfection we posit for ourselves. If what guides our practices of self-constitution is an activity according to reason, in the *Anthropology* such reason is portrayed not as an a priori feature of our metaphysical constitution, but rather as one of the possibilities of human life itself when approached from the point of view of what one might do of oneself. The moral *ought* (*sollen*) depends on an anthropological *can* (*können*), which is articulated as a daily exercise (*künstlicher Spiel/Ausübung*) of our capacities for the sake of action. Our normative *praxes* are derived from a description of one among the possible reflective postures we can take in respect to a certain situation.

In Kant, but a similar point can be made for James as well, the adjective pragmatic characterizes anthropology not as a scholastic knowledge of little or no use in our experiencing of the world, but rather as practical knowledge of the ways human beings establish a certain relation with themselves when engaged in worldly affairs. Pragmatic anthropology describes human beings in their practices of cultivation and refinement of their own faculties: by organizing and presenting relevant aspects of human experience to agents, anthropology allows them to reflect about what is in their power to achieve and hence about what kind of persons they shall be by so engaging the world and themselves through it. In the *Anthropology* Kant reinterprets the sharp dualism he elaborated in the *Critiques* between world-knowledge and moral-knowledge. He is still interested in defending the dualism, but now he presents it as deriving from the two mobile standpoints—the theoretical and the practical—we can take toward the world, rather than as the consequence of our metaphysical constitution. From such a perspective, not all world-knowledge will count as empirical moral knowledge, but many instances of world-knowledge that at a first glance appear to be non-moral can suddenly acquire moral significance when placed in the right (that is practical) perspective. According to this pragmatic account, it is impossible to tell, before conduct takes place, which human aspect is resistant to moral assessment, because as agents human beings are capable of determining *which* aspect of the world might turn out to be morally relevant by engaging in the relevant practice.

Let me showcase this seminal idea by briefly sketching two recurring topics discussed at length in Kant's *Anthropology*—that is the notions of character and that of experience as engagement.

The *Pragmatic Anthropology* is divided into two parts: the “Anthropological Didactic”, or “Doctrine of Elements” (*Elementarlehre*), and the “Anthropological Characteristic”, or “Doctrine of Method” (*Methodenlehre*). The former, subtitled “On the Way of Cognizing the Interior as Well as the Exterior of the Human Being”, is concerned with the analysis of the three faculties—theoretical, aesthetical and moral—of human beings from the part of their formation and use; while the latter subtitled “On the Way of Cognizing the Interior of the Human Being from the Exterior,” articulates the ways in which these are shaped as to form a character. Kant describes character as “what the human being *makes of himself*” (Kant 2006 [1798], 192): it indicates the way we conduct ourselves and thus represents the way we articulate our agency. Anthropology, pragmatically understood, refutes the existence of a standpoint external to our human practices from which to assess the good exercise of our faculties. He writes that:

in order to assign the human being his class in the system of animate nature, nothing remains for us than to say that he has a character, which he himself creates, in so far as he is capable of perfecting himself according to ends that he himself adopts.

Kant 2006 [1798], 226

By conceiving the normativity of agency as always embedded in the practices through which human beings conduct themselves, pragmatic anthropology pictures human beings as always in the making of their moral identities. Kant writes that a human being is (or, rather, becomes) moral in the measure in which she fully expresses her character through the good exercise of her rational capacities. Such an exercise, however, stems from a pragmatic description of human beings as capable of *forming* their character. In order to have a character, and hence to be moral, human beings must *do* something, and thus they must *become* a certain kind of persons. Character is portrayed by Kant as the conduct of thought: achieving a character means cultivating one's faculties according to a system of values that is always embedded in one's ordinary practices of freedom. Morality is thus always exercised and never founded:

The human being must therefore be *educated* to the good; but he who is to educate him is on the other hand a human who still lies in the crudity of nature and who is supposed to bring about what he himself

needs. Hence the continuous deviation from his vocation with the always-repeated returns to it. Kant 2006 [1798], 230

To this image of character as something in the making, Kant juxtaposes one of experiencing on the same lines. The *Anthropology* follows the division of the faculties as portrayed in the *Critiques*; however, the domain that it privileges is not that of where the faculties positively manifest what they are, but rather it is the domain where they manifest their weakness and danger of perishing. With the words of Foucault, the privileged domain of the *Anthropology*

is not where the faculties and powers show off their positive attributes but where they show their failings—or at least where they face danger, where they risk to be obliterated. Rather than their nature or the full form of their activity, anthropology is concerned with pointing up the movement by which the faculties, distancing themselves from their center and their justification, become other than themselves, illegitimate. Foucault 2006, 69

This meaningful change of emphasis depicts human beings in the middle of their struggles for formation and self-education, and their faculties as not merely given but rather as always and yet to be achieved.

The good exercise of our faculties is reflected in the notion of engaged experience. Kant struggles to present a great variety of ways in which our faculties (theoretical, aesthetical and moral) can fail to achieve their proper perfection, that is fail to provide us with the kind of knowledge they aim at. Both theoretical and practical judgment require the subjects being experienced in the appropriate way with the relevant particulars, and thus they can be impaired in a variety of ways because of our failure in grasping the proper experience. Such incapability, whose casuistry is not determined in advance but only in the very assessment by an act of judgment, is not a non-moral empirical (psychological) deficiency that can be eradicated by means of some external moral warrants, but rather an already morally relevant aspect of what we make of ourselves. From such a standpoint, every empirical *can* implies a pragmatic *ought*, provided that the content of such normative notions can be specified only with reference to the practices undergone by agents. What counts as a sound experience is one that increases the possibility for its grasping and enjoyment, and thus, if it is in the reach of human capacities, its pursuit

counts as a morally normative activity, one that should be promoted or blamed.<sup>6</sup>

As an example, Kant discusses courage (§ 77)<sup>7</sup> not as a feature of disembodied or minded-less actions, but rather as a certain description of what we might do of ourselves. He is not interested in giving an abstract definition of courage by making reference to moral principles, but rather in describing the variety of ways in which a courageous conduct can be exhibited. In fact, it is only through such a description of human beings as engaged in certain activities of courage that a moral criterion for their assessment can come into view. The treatment of the morality of suicide nicely depicts this dialectics at play. Judging if suicide driven by considerations of courage is morally permissible requires investigating the soundness of the experience provided by those considerations: acknowledging the point of view of the agent with respect to the relevant experience—if, for example, it expresses a respect for the autonomy of one's life threatened by an evil tyrant or rather a consuming grief for one's mortal frailty—tells us everything there is to know to judge such occurrence as morally regrettable or not. Here as elsewhere, what is given prominence and value is the contrast between activity and passivity: the perfection of our better selves goes through the training of oneself in experience and the sedimentation of such practices of self-fashioning in modes of acculturation.

This way of presenting anthropology as an activity of self-scrutiny and formation brings to light an image of ethics revolving on what the self makes of herself through pondering certain thoughts and engaging in certain conducts. This idea, articulated at length by a cluster of authors belonging to rather disparate philosophical traditions<sup>8</sup> as a theoretical instrument to re-read large portions of the history of ethics, can be presented as a central feature of pragmatism intended as a moment in such an history. I will now briefly sketch the way James elaborates these ideas in his 1890 masterpiece *The Principles of Psychology*, where a powerful picture of human beings as transformative beings is given flesh.

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. §§ 63–69 for an articulation of such a reading.

<sup>7</sup> A similar point could be made in respect to other features as well; Kant discusses the passions (§§ 80–6), imagination (§§ 34–6), and taste (§§ 67–71) by employing a similar dialectic.

<sup>8</sup> To name but a few names, think of Michel Foucault, Pierre Hadot, Charles Taylor, Bernard Williams, and Richard Rorty

#### 4. Jamesian self-transformations

James read Kant's *Anthropology* in 1868, and described it as a "marvelous, biting little work" (Perry 1935, 512-3). Such nice words, it has to be noticed, will not be extended to the rest of Kant's work. Notwithstanding the small evidence in James's published as well as unpublished writings, and despite his overall critical stance towards Kant's major works, there has been an intensification of studies regarding James's Kantian legacy.<sup>9</sup> The *Anthropology* was very likely the one single work by Kant whose contents James genuinely endorsed, although it is debatable how much he effectively engaged it after their early encounter. Accounting for the detail of such a historical connection, although extremely interesting, is a complex task exceeding the scope of the present paper. Rather, I'm interested in the more humble venture of investigating the way in which James, in the *Principles*, envisioned a pragmatic picture of the entanglement between ethics and anthropology along lines closely resembling Kant's, despite their differences in emphasis and scope.

Despite its well-known self-proclaimed seemingly positivistic intents, according to which he "[has] kept close to the point of view of natural science throughout the book" (James 1981 [1890], v), the *Principles of Psychology* represents James's most elaborate attempt to weave together an impressive number of psychological, anthropological, philosophical and personal "descriptive details" (James 1981 [1890], vii) about what could be broadly characterized as "our mental life" (James 1981 [1890], 1). In it, we can find together the seeds and the use of that pragmatic method that James kept elaborating in the course of his entire intellectual biography. In the *Principles*, James looks at the various aspects of our life of the mind from the point of view of their *use*, and urges us to notice the variety of moral considerations at play when we look at them in this way.

According to James, if one gives up a detached, third-personal *physiological* description of the various aspects of our subjectivity in favor of an engaged, first-personal *pragmatic* one, one can make room for a different picture of the kind of our psychological considerations that are relevant for ethics. In fact, from this perspective, the various aspects of our subjectivity are presented from the point of view of what we might do of them, and not as mere data on which an ethical theory should build a system

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<sup>9</sup> On this topic, cf. Murphy 1968, DeArmev 1987, Carlson 1997 and Franzese (2008, 51-8). Dewey has been the first to remark James's—and pragmatism's—debt to Kant for the very naming of *pragmatische*. Cf. Dewey 1976.



of morality. Ethics would thus be intertwined with psychology because it deals with the way in which we perceive and describe ourselves, and with the postures and conducts that we can assume with respect to our very subjectivity. James, echoing Kant in this respect, sets up to explore the “inner” from the point of view of the “outer”: one’s interiority really is the appropriation of reality through practice, that is through what we do of ourselves *in* the world. And this, James adds, is not discovered as a piece of theoretical information or physiological evidence—even though James also goes some way towards showing how the latest physical and chemical discoveries of his day seemed to prove this very point as well—but rather taught and suggested to the reader as part of a live, engaged practice of the self with the self. The *Principles*, then, similarly to Kant’s *Anthropology*, is no schoolbook to be employed in the laboratory but rather a practical manual to be lived on the streets.

The cornerstone of James’s pragmatic anthropology would then be a conception of human beings as makers and not mere spectators of their lives of the mind. For James a good account of our life of the mind is one from the point of the use we make of it. We can in fact read the *Principles* as an exhibition of the varieties of ways in which we encounter the world in a process of experiencing which is always and at the same time a process of self-experimenting. In the *Principles* James would not present the single elementary constituents of the moral life (e. g., certain sentiments, sensations, or beliefs) as many readers argued, but rather explore the personal work necessary for their full development. James thus presents the moral dimension of some aspects of our subjectivity in relationship with the kind of attitude and disposition that we might assume toward them. According to James, the dynamic character of the relationship between such aspects of our interiority and the *use* we make of them has been too often ignored, picturing them as given and not as accomplishments. This picture, besides mortifying the richness of attitudes we might have in respect to the various aspects of our subjectivity, tends to distort their very nature by representing them as brute data rather than as the result of a certain work on ourselves. According to James, there would be a dynamic tension internal to our subjectivity between its various aspects and the kind of use we make of them that is relevant for ethics, a tension overlooked by the kind of descriptions of the mental life offered by either classical empiricism (mind as mirror of nature) or rationalism (mind as insight into nature).

The discussion of habit in the fourth chapter of the *Principles* can be read as a chief instance of such pragmatic anthropology. James presents

habit as one of the most powerful laws and pervasive phenomenon of our mindedness and worldliness: our lives could hardly be lived without it, and yet its excesses might be equally lethal for their flourishing, since they would suffocate their constitutive and most important venues of expression and growth. In particular, an excess of habit, says James, would hinder and alienate us from ourselves, thus depriving us from those very energies and resources constituting the best part of our selfhood: the higher or further selves we might have been or become if only we would have dared to think and conduct ourselves differently from how we habitually do.<sup>10</sup>

James presents in the first place what he calls the physiological bases of habit, writing that “the *phenomena of habit in living beings are due to the plasticity of the organic materials of which their bodies are composed*” (James 1981 [1890], 110). Habit, in fact, refers to the capacity for *movement* of our central nervous system. However, even at this basic physical level of analysis, James refutes a mechanistic characterization of the very nature and working of habit. He in fact subscribes the anti-reductionist perspective of the reflex arch and of the electro-chemical discharge, which portrays habit as the fixation of the nervous discharge trajectories in our nervous system in perennial tension. At this level of explanation, habit is still described as a somewhat passive device, since it merely indicates those privileged paths of inertia. However, this passivity is in its turn characterized as a condition for activity, since it suggests and facilitates the nervous discharge (hence, at the practical level, the performance of actions). Furthermore, and most importantly, for James “our nervous system grows to the modes in which it has been exercised” (James 1981 [1890], 117): once such paths of inertia and discharge are chosen and reinforced *in conduct*, they grow thicker and acquire strength and influence, thus shaping our very dispositions and reactions.

James is particularly interested in presenting two psychological features of habits that would have great relevance from the point of view of their philosophical description and ethical consequences. He writes that “The first result of it is that *habit simplifies the movements required to achieve a given result, makes them more accurate and diminishes the fatigue* [...] The

<sup>10</sup> An in-depth comparative study of the Jamesian and the Deweyan conceptions of habit is still lacking, and unfortunately so. Dewey (most notably in Dewey 1922) in fact borrowed, reworked, and expanded the Jamesian philosophy of habit along promising lines, adding some historical edge to James’s conceptual analyses and reconstruction. Differences between their respective accounts still mattering, I read in both authors a congenial insistence on the “good of activity” as the chief theme at the heart of the (pragmatist) ethical project.

next result is that *habit diminishes the conscious attention with which our acts are performed* (James 1981 [1890], 117, 119). For James, thus, a subject endowed with the appropriate habits is likely to be more accurate in the achievement of her ends, and her conscious attention less solicited in the exercise of her actions. These two features of habit are of the utmost importance from an ethical point of view. In fact, if on the one hand habits make us more accurate and effective, on the other hand their blind and uncritical deployment has the opposite effect of rendering us inattentive and passive. If thus for James it is essential to nurture one's habits, even more is to challenge them by asking oneself *which* habits to cultivate, and especially *how* to cultivate them.

James presents habit as our "second nature", since it crafts human beings in every aspect of their mental life, hence their thoughts and deeds. Rather than the mechanical repetition of our responses through the comparison and association with past experiences, James depicts habit as the distinctive feature of our active attitude towards our interiority and engaged stance toward reality. Habit becomes thus the chief device to store, organize and control our mental energy, releasing in this way our conscious attention continuously solicited by the great amount of information involved in experiencing. Once we internalize some aspects of reality to which we pay selective attention, our consciousness of them and the effort to entertain them in our mind is alleviated, so that we are free to focus on other aspects of reality catching our interest.

For James, our very ability to have meaningful experiences and invest them with value, as opposed to the recording of their sheer factual happening, requires us to develop all kinds of habits. In the essay "Reflex Action and Theism" James writes

We have to break [the perceptual order] altogether, and by picking out from it the items that concern us [...] we are able to [...] enjoy simplicity and harmony in the place of what was chaos [...] It is an order with which we have nothing to do but to get away from it as fast as possible. As I said, we break it: we break it into histories, and we break it into the arts, and we break it into sciences; and then we begin to feel at home.

James 1979, 96

Through our inclusions and omissions, we trace the path of habit, and hence build the river-bed of our experience and agency altogether. The aim of habit is to make us "feel at home" in the world by breaking down our experiences and connecting the elements that interest us with others that we find similarly appropriate and worthwhile. Habit thus contributes

to our very activity of making sense of the world and of our place in it: through habit we craft the world, giving it a human shape in which to inscribe our conducts and their meaning.

The ethical stakes of such a characterization are of the utmost importance. James claims, in fact, that habit is the “engine of society” and its “precious preserver”. However, James adds, the primary object of habit is the *character* of human beings, representing its “invisible law” in a similar manner as “universal gravitation” represents the law of celestial bodies. Habit has to do with the education of one’s character as it represents the mark of one’s personal point of view that we shape through a discipline of the self. Habits are thus morally relevant because they pervade our lives and guide our encounters with the world, thus making the latter a place hospitable for the expression of our interiority in conduct. In the chapter on “The Laws of Habit” of *Talks to Teachers on Psychology and to Students on Some of Life’s Ideas* James writes that

Our virtues are habits as much as our vices. All our life, so far as it has definite form, is but a mass of habits,—practical, emotional, and intellectual,—systematically organized for our weal or woe, and bearing us irresistibly toward our destiny, whatever the latter may be.

James 1983, 47

A similar formulation can be found in the *Principles*, where James concludes that

The great thing, then, in all education, is to *make our nervous system our ally instead of our enemy*. It is to fund and capitalize our acquisitions, and live at ease upon the interest of the fund. *For this we must make automatic and habitual, as early as possible, as many useful actions as we can*, and guard against the growing into ways that are likely to be disadvantageous to us, as we should guard against the plague.

James 1981 [1890], 126

For James, habits should be our closest allies, and yet we should also remain vigilant in their handling as they could reveal to be our most dangerous enemies. According to this view, in fact, habits are not virtuous or evil *per se*, but rather it is *what we make of them* and *how we nurture them* that makes them advantageous or rather harmful, and thus relevant from a moral point of view. If, on the one hand, habits give voice to our deepest needs, cravings, and interests, on the other hand, their misuse might cause the very deadening of our subjectivity.

James lists five practical maxims involving the exercise of habit in which what is at stake is our very attitude we might assume in their respect. These maxims have a clear and pronounced moral salience in their dealing with the ways in which our habits might be expressive of our subjectivity or rather contribute to its capitulation. The last practical maxim, relative to the “habits of the will”, best catches the spirit of the exhortative moral register informing James’s dialectics of habits and wider moral agenda. He writes

*Keep the faculty of effort alive in you by a little gratuitous exercise every day. That is, be systematically ascetic or heroic in little unnecessary points, do every day or two something for no other reason than that you would rather not do it, so that when the hour of dire need draws nigh, it may find you not unnerved and untrained to stand the test [...] So with the man who has daily inured himself to habits of concentrated attention, energetic volition, and self-denial in unnecessary things. He will stand like a tower when everything rocks around him, and when his softer fellow-mortals are winnowed like chaff in the blast.*

James 1981 [1890], 130

This practical maxim thematizes the dynamic relationship that runs between the habits we live *by* and the life we might have *with* them. James is here interested in marking an internal connection between ethics and psychology by showing how our posture toward those habits, that we might welcome or rather challenge, is the mark of our moral destiny. So depicted, human beings are the makers of themselves and responsible for their own fates rather than beings in need of being educated and moralized from without. The price we have to pay for the practical comfort of habit, representing the shield we use in order to be successful in our dealings with the world, is the constant thread of an impoverishment of such commerce. That is to say, the price to be thriving inhabitants of the world is that of being daunting strangers to ourselves. Only by acknowledging the habits we live by as *our* habits, we might keep in place their significance without either subjugating our subjectivity or making knowledge an impossible task to accomplish.

Quoting Mill’s definition of character as a “completed fashioned will”, James stresses the relationship between the sensation of effort and activity necessary to manage a certain habit and its moral character: by representing a habit as a yoke imposed from the outside, as for example from evidences and associations which we merely inherited, we distort both the way in which we arrive at forming a habit in the first place as well as jeop-

ardize its very significance. We develop habits in response to our more genuine practical need so to cope in more effective ways with the world; however, when we represent habit as a given with which to deal, we shall find ourselves incapable of satisfying those very practical needs which gave life to them in the first place. What was crafted to facilitate the successfulness of our practices suddenly becomes an impediment to the full flourishing of our interiority, a golden cage for its expression. James writes

The physiological study of mental conditions is thus the most powerful ally of hortatory ethics. The hell to be endured hereafter, of which theology tells, is no worse than the hell we make for ourselves in this world by habitually fashioning our characters in the wrong way. Could the young but realize how soon they will become mere walking bundles of habits, they would give more heed to their conduct while in the plastic state. We are spinning our own fates, good or evil, and never to be undone. Every smallest stroke of virtue or of vice leaves its never so little scar. James 1981 [1890], 130–1

Moral reflection, in its hortatory dimension, aims at showing the practical advantages of the nurture and of the development of certain habits, and the dangerousness we incur when we alienate our subjectivity to their blind dictates. According to this characterization, the subject matter of ethics would thus consist in a certain kind of work on the self, while its method in the descriptions of the strategies that such formative activity might take. James claims that this work on the self involves in the first place the experimentation with our habitual responses and their ability to express our subjectivity or rather mortifying it. James invites us to take a vigilant attitude on ourselves so to prevent those contractions of the self typical of our taking ourselves for granted.

## 5. Towards heterodox ethics

As a concluding remark, I would like to go back to the question of the relationship between ethics and anthropology/psychology. The pragmatic anthropology and psychology depicted by Kant and James represent an antidote to the picture of human beings as mere moral spectators that are moved to act morally because they are compelled by the observation of some ethical principle which justification does not involve the exercise of their faculties and sensibility. This way of characterizing the practical nature of human beings, as makers rather than mere spectators of their own selves, suggests a heterodox conception of the scopes and strategies

of moral philosophy. From this perspective, ethics *emerges* from a certain pragmatic description of human beings without being *derived* from the analysis of their sheer factual constitution or their partaking to a moral dimension from without our moral practices. Their pragmatic anthropologies are imbued with ethical considerations, for they conceived the analysis of mind as the clarification and assessment of our cognitive and affective life for their improvement. Pragmatic anthropology and psychology depict human beings as agents constantly engaged in improving their subjectivities with some goal of excellence in view that however is not externally fixed by a principle, but rather negotiated in practice. The pragmatic descriptions of the various aspects of our life of the mind in terms of what they allow us to do enable us to deepen our comprehension and use of our mindedness and worldliness, where what is at stake is the establishment of a certain meaningful relationship with ourselves and the world. There is thus a sense in which such activities are themselves of ethical importance, since they have to do with the working and improvement of our very subjectivity.

According to this picture, the object of moral reflection becomes what human beings make of themselves by engaging in a certain relationship with their life of the mind. This characterization stands at the heart of the project of Kant's *Anthropology* and James's *Psychology*, where mental excellence is depicted as the capacity to explore and deepen our interiority by pursuing those interests defining most roundly our worldly subjectivity. In order to evaluate if a certain mental activity is sound or adequate, and thus if the experiences and concepts to which it leads us are appropriate, we should look at the kind of relationship we entertain with such activity: the resulting experiences and concepts would in fact express our subjective point of view in the problematic situation we find ourselves in.

What I have been suggesting through my selective reading of Kant and James is that the notion of human being, and the notion of a human perspective embedded in it, can be relevant for ethics if we renounce concentrating on what human beings are or should be, and investigate what human beings might make of themselves. From such a perspective, we can uncover a space for subjectivity that results as the outcome of a work on the self in terms of a crafting and transformation of a life of the mind attentive to the richness of experience and concepts toward which we could be morally blind and unreflective. In different but convergent ways, Kant and James have shown a way in which this option can be articulated: by giving a pragmatic description of the stance we might take in the investi-

gation of our cognitive as well as affective life, both authors have stressed the importance of philosophical anthropology and psychology for the understanding of our moral life—a connection often overlooked by moral theories which portray such an entanglement in foundational terms.

This shift marks a transition—or rather one possible beginning of one—from an age of representation to one of engagement: in different yet converging ways, Kant and James posited *practice* at the very heart of philosophical analysis. Ethical normativity, in this picture, takes the shape of a contrast between passivity and spontaneity in which what becomes central is the use we make of ourselves midst experiencing and conceptual reflection. For both Kant and James, if there is anything like a “science” of human beings and their behavior, it stands sensibly closer to biology than to physics: the teleological principle of activity rather than the mechanical one of passivity measures and rules moral understanding and growth. An art of living, then, rather than a set of principles is what we are in most need of, when we move away from transcendental or naturalistic foundations of the kind prescribed by moral theorizing and refocus on agential formation and transformation suggested by pragmatic exhortations.

This way of presenting anthropology and psychology as inquiries that are descriptive and yet morally relevant brings to light an image of ethics focused on what the self makes of herself through engaging in *a certain relation* to herself. This means renouncing to ground ethics on a once-for-all given conception of human nature without renouncing the idea according to which ethics has a certain shape in virtue of its being a certain *human practice*. In different but convergent ways, Kant and James pointed toward a way in which this heterodox option can be articulated: by giving a pragmatic account of the stance we might take in the investigation of our cognitive as well as affective lives, these authors have offered a compelling picture of ethics *as a practice*.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> This essay had a rather long gestation. It originated in my reactions to Piergiorgio Donatelli’s lectures on moral philosophy I attended for several years as an undergraduate, graduate, and now colleague at Sapienza Università di Roma, and has been deeply influenced by his rendering of an alternative modern and contemporary moral canon. I thank him deeply for years of conversations and instructions.



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# Rorty on Kant's Ethics

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## 1. Introduction

In this text, I will explain Richard Rorty's criticism of Immanuel Kant's ethics. I show first of all the main characteristics of Kant's ethics in contrast with the Natural Law ethics of Thomas of Aquinas since I am persuaded that Kant wrote his ethics in the rational spirit of Enlightenment. Secondly, I summarize the essence of Rorty's neopragmatism, which will serve as a basis for the interpretation of Rorty's ethics and his obvious criticism of Kant's moral philosophy. Rorty recognized clearly the unsolvable inner contradictions of Kant's ethics, which come from his special philosophical anthropology, and replaced it with a new pragmatist, evolutionary view of the human being, and this view forms the basis of his criticism.

It is beyond question that every ethics rests on particular presumptions, which we always can find in the general philosophy of the given author. On the one hand, this is the reason, why particular ethics is always a part of the author's philosophy, even in the case if it is not worked out in a special book. (This is the situation when somebody is "only" an ethicist.) On the other hand, that is, why I had to write seemingly long introductions to both Kant and Rorty. I am persuaded that it is necessary even in the case if a paper is written to professionals. Everybody knows, namely, that the same philosophies have very different interpretations, and this is the situation in Kant's and especially in Rorty's case. I need my particular interpretation of Kant's and Rorty's philosophy in general since these are my presumptions regarding the interpretation of their ethics, which are parts of these philosophies.

## 2. On Kant's ethics

As it is well-known, the German philosopher, Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) wanted to reconcile Rationalism and Empiricism in the period of his critical philosophy. In his three main critical works<sup>1</sup> and other books after 1781, Kant criticizes the three main human capacities: the pure reason (which commits the theoretical recognition within the a priori structure of the mind), the practical reason (which directs our will and creates a priori the norms of our moral action), and the power of judgment (which contains the aesthetic and the theological power of judgment). Kant's main aim is to set up the limits of these human capacities because he wants to direct philosophy to "the secure path of science" (Kant 1998 [1781], 110).

Within his moral philosophy, he aimed at the reconciliation of causality and freedom. Modern science explored more and more causal relationships in the phenomenal world, and Kant recognized the danger which threatened the territory of freedom. However, freedom is the inevitable basis of morals and religion, and that is why Kant relocated freedom into the noumenal world (*Ding an sich*). In his opinion, there is only recognition in the phenomenal world without action, and vice versa, in the noumenal world there is only action without recognition. On the other hand, he wanted to expand the territory of human autonomy as much as it is possible, and that is why he rejected every form of the *heteronomous moral philosophies* and had created an *autonomous, formal, and intentional ethics*. He regarded every moral philosophy as heteronomous, where the highest moral good or the highest moral command or law originated from outside and not from the moral agent. In this sense, every religious ethics is heteronomous in Kant's opinion, since God is not only directing the main happenings in the human world (as is the case in Greek mythology) or creating permanently the world (as St. Augustine believed), but God is also the highest moral value. It is the case in every form of the Christian moral philosophies, but Kant refused utilitarianism as well. Christian moral philosophies and utilitarianism need a little bit longer explanation because these moral philosophies belonged to Kant's knowledge and formed his presumptions when he wrote his ethical works. If we give a summary of Kant's ethics, we have to know, why he refused these moral philosophies, when he wanted to write not a heteronomous but autonomous ethics.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781, 1787), the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), and the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790).

In the so-called *Divine Command Theory*, which is obviously a heteronomous ethics for Kant, human beings can become moral beings only if they follow God's command, which is written in the Bible and other religious scriptures or is conveyed to people by the priests. (I do not want to touch here the logical problems of this Divine Command Theory, but it is worth mentioning that already Plato's (427–347 BC) *Euthyphro* clarifies the essence of these problems.)

Although St. Thomas of Aquinas (1225–1274) did not follow the Divine Command Theory because he saw its problematic train of thought, he created such a moral philosophy which was also a heteronomous ethics for Kant. The general view that the rightness of actions is something determined by nature itself rather than by the laws and customs of societies or the preferences of individuals is called *Natural Law Theory*. Moral principles are thus regarded as objective truths that can be discovered like things by reason and reflection. The Natural Law Theory originated in classical Greek and Roman philosophy and had immensely influenced the development of moral and political theories. The Natural Law Theory of Roman Catholicism was given its most influential formulation in the 13<sup>th</sup> century by St. Thomas of Aquinas. Contemporary versions of the theory are mostly elaborations and interpretations of Thomas' basic statement. Thomas stresses that humans possess a trait that no other creature does—*Reason*. Thus, the full development of human potentialities—the fulfillment of human purpose—requires that we follow the direction of the law of reason, as well as being subjected to the laws of material human nature. The development of reason is one of our ends as human beings, but we also rely upon reason to determine what our ends are and how we can achieve them. It is this function of reason that leads Thomas to identify reason as the source of the moral law. Thus, through the subtle application of reason, it should be possible to establish a body of moral principles and rules. These are the *doctrines of natural law*. Because natural law is founded on human nature which is regarded as unchangeable, Thomas regards natural law itself as *unchangeable*. Moreover, *it is seen as the same for all people, at all times, and in all societies*. Even those without knowledge of God can, through the operation of reason, recognize their natural obligations. For Thomas and Roman Catholicism, this view of natural law is just one aspect of a broader theological framework. The teleological organization of the universe is attributed to the planning of a creator. It says that goals or purposes are ordained by God. Furthermore, although natural law is discoverable in the universe, its ultimate source is

divine wisdom and God's eternal law. Everyone who is rational is capable of grasping natural law. But because passions and irrational inclinations may corrupt human nature and because some people lack the abilities or time to work out the demands of natural law, God also chose to reveal our duties to us in explicit ways. The major source of revelation, of course, is taken to be the Biblical scriptures. Natural law, scriptural revelation, the interpretation of the scriptures by the Church, Church tradition, and the teachings of the Church are regarded in Roman Catholicism as the sources of moral ideals and principles. By guiding one's life by them, one can develop the rational and moral part of one's nature and move towards the goal of achieving the sort of perfection that is suitable for humans. Nevertheless, Kant regarded the Natural Law Theory as a heteronomous moral philosophy.

What is more, in Kant's view, utilitarianism is also a heteronomous ethics, and he could not accept the empirical basis of utilitarianism since he was persuaded that in ethics we need universal laws, and we cannot create universal moral laws on the basis of experience. Classical utilitarianism can be summarized in three propositions. First, actions are to be judged right or wrong exclusively by virtue of their consequences. Right actions are, simply, those that have the best consequences. Second, in assessing consequences, the only thing that matters is the amount of happiness or unhappiness that is caused. Thus, right actions are those that produce the greatest balance of happiness over unhappiness. This is the "principle of utility" or—as Bentham and Mill also called it—the "greatest happiness principle": "the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people". Third, in calculating the happiness or unhappiness that will be caused, no one's happiness is to be counted as more important than anyone else's. Each person's welfare is equally important. For utilitarianism, an action is right when it produces something intrinsically valuable (happiness). As we can see, for utilitarianism, the rightness of an action depends upon its consequences. That is why utilitarianism is a teleological (consequentialist) and heteronomous ethical theory. In stark contrast to this view is the ethical theory formulated by Kant in his books *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), and *The Metaphysics Morals* (1797). For Kant, utilitarianism is a heteronomous ethics because the consequences of an action are morally irrelevant. In Kant's opinion, an action is right when it is in accordance with a rule that satisfies a principle he calls the "categorical imperative". In his ethics, the important moments are the highest moral command (the "categorical im-

perative") and the intention of the moral agent. That is why his ethics can be regarded as a deontological and not a consequentialist ethics.

However, *Kant wanted to work out the maximum of the human autonomy*. In his opinion, if a woman decides to have an abortion and go through with it, it is possible to view the action as involving a rule. The woman can be thought of as endorsing a rule to the effect "Whenever I am in circumstances like these, then I shall have an abortion". Kant calls such a rule a "maxim". In his view, all reasoned and considered actions can be regarded as involving maxims. The maxims in such cases are personal or subjective, but they can be thought of as being candidates for moral rules. If they pass the test imposed by the categorical imperative, then we can say that such actions are right. Furthermore, in passing the test, the maxims cease to be merely personal and subjective. They gain the status of objective rules of morality that hold for everyone. Kant formulates the categorical imperative in this way: "Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law" (Kant 1993, 30; 4:421). Kant calls the principle "categorical" to distinguish it from "hypothetical" imperatives. These tell us what to do if we want to bring about certain consequences—such as happiness. A categorical imperative prescribes what we ought to do without reference to any consequences. The principle is an "imperative" because it is a command. *That is why it is the highest form of the human autonomy since the categorical imperative is created by ourselves, that is we are really autonomous beings since we create the highest moral law for ourselves.*

The test imposed on maxims by the categorical imperative is one of generalization or "universalizability". The central idea of the test is that a moral maxim is one that can be generalized to apply to all cases of the same kind. That is, you must be willing to see your rule adopted as a maxim by everyone who is in a situation similar to yours. You must be willing to see your maxim universalized, even though it may turn out on some other occasion to work to your disadvantage. For a maxim to satisfy the categorical imperative, it is not necessary that we be agreeable in some psychological sense to see it made into a universal law. Rather, the test is one that requires us to avoid inconsistency or conflict in what we will as a universal rule. Utilitarianism identifies the good with happiness or pleasure and makes the production of happiness the supreme principle of morality. But for Kant happiness is at best a conditional or qualified good. In his view, there is only one thing that can be said to be good in itself: a good will. Will is what directs our actions and guides

our conduct. But what makes a will a “good will”? Kant’s answer is that a will becomes good when it acts purely for the sake of duty. We act for the sake of duty (or from duty) when we act on maxims that satisfy the categorical imperative. This means, then, that it is the motive force behind our actions—the character of our will—that determines their moral character. Morality does not rest on results—such as the production of happiness—but neither does it rest on our feelings, impulses, or inclinations. An action is right in moral sense, for Kant, only when it is done for the sake of duty.

If we summarize Kant’s ethics, we can say that the most important thing is in his ethics, what is missing, and it is God.<sup>2</sup> It is a secularized version of the Christian moral philosophy. In Kant’s case, morality is essentially identical with rationality. As we have already seen it, according to the traditional Christian ethics, every moral norm and principle is deducted (directly or indirectly) from its ultimate basis, God. It is a deontological model of ethics since people believe that there is an Absolute, which is the highest moral good at the same time, and only this can lay the absolute foundation for morality. Although Kant says in the preface of the *Critique of Pure Reason* that “Thus I had to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith” (Kant 1998 [1781], 117), it signifies only the result of his method of criticism. In his ethics, which is also a deontological ethics, God is replaced by Reason, and God functions as a mere postulate.<sup>3</sup> Kant obviously wanted to reconcile the new results of the natural sciences in the 18<sup>th</sup> century with faith and moral freedom. The categorical imperative is (namely) a synthetic, a priori proposition since it is created exclusively for the practical reason by the pure reason:<sup>4</sup> “Act only according to that

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<sup>2</sup> God is basically a moral philosophical postulate in Kant’s ethics since human beings lost their intention to be moral at all if there was not any hope for the harmony of morality and happiness at least in the otherworld. Nevertheless, we have to recognize that God does not play any role in the practice of the moral agent, when (s)he tries to solve a moral problem. The moral agent has only to universalize his or her maxim and test it on the categorical imperative. It is a purely rational task, which does not need emotions, inclinations.

<sup>3</sup> One might say “Kant argues that one has to believe in God in order to act according to the moral law”. However, to believe in God, if we think logically, is only a premise of acceptance of God as a postulate, to create (at least) an otherworldly harmony, reconciliation between virtue and happiness. We can use the categorical imperative without faith in God as well since it is a rational command, which is universal (“für jedes vernünftige Wesen”) by its rationality and not by the faith.

<sup>4</sup> It would need a much longer explanation if I wanted to go into the details, but it is clear that the practical reason cannot be the “author” of the categorical imperative since in that case, Kant could not create autonomous ethics.



maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law” (Kant 1993, 30; 4:421). What is more, we can find the same importance of rationality in the case of moral situations. What should we do to become moral in moral situations? We have to test our subjective, individual maxims on the categorical imperative, which does not contain any particular moral value. (The fourth formulation of the categorical imperative is an exception in some sense.<sup>5</sup>) The categorical imperative determines only a relation between our maxims and a universal moral law, and we have to understand this relationship and act for the sake of duty, which means the respect of the categorical imperative. If our action fulfills the categorical imperative only accidentally, then our action will only be *legal* but not *moral*. It means that we have to act absolutely in a rational way if we would like to become moral persons. We may also not forget Kant’s imperative, that we cannot take into account any of our emotions, desires, or inclinations.<sup>6</sup>

### 3. Rorty’s philosophy

From the moment of arriving in Chicago in 1946, Richard Rorty (1930–2007), as a promising analytic philosopher, tried to accomplish a philosophical “single vision” for long decades. “Single vision” is the idea of giving the ultimate description of the world’s substantive structure, in which he strived to harmonize reality and justice, in other words, ontology, and ethics. But after spending forty years of thinking, writing, and immense lecturing within the boundaries of analytic philosophy, Rorty gave up this hope. However, he did not only give up the idea of the single vision but also, as a consequence, the whole idea of philosophical foundationalism, since he could not find a neutral, ultimate foundation for deciding which philosophical description of the world is better than the other.

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<sup>5</sup> The fourth formulation of the categorical imperative contains namely a value: the human being: “Act in such a manner as to treat humanity, whether in thine own person or in that of any other, in every case and at all times as an end as well, never as a means only” (Kant 1993 [1785], 36; 4:429).

<sup>6</sup> One might say that most Kant scholars seem to agree that a moral action may be based on an inclination (etc.), provided that it is in accordance with the categorical imperative. Yes, it is true, but it means that most of the emotions, inclinations, desires are excluded! Namely those, which are not in accordance with the categorical imperative. It means, generally speaking, that Kant did not take into account the moral agent’s emotional life in his ethics!

Giving up the idea of the single vision, Rorty formulated the standpoint of the *liberal ironist*. Seeing the downfall of socialist regimes, he acknowledged that of the currently functioning societies, from a political and economic point of view, Western liberal mass democracies can be considered the best. He broke off his family's Trotskyist influences and became a *liberal* (taking it in the American sense, which means *social democrat*).<sup>7</sup> In his 1989 book, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* he defines *liberal* with a phrase borrowed from Judith N. Shklar: "liberals are the people who think that cruelty is the worst thing we do" (Rorty 1989, xv). On the other hand, Rorty also became an *ironist*, because he had read not only the classic works of traditional pragmatism and Western philosophy but—among others—the works of Hegel, Nietzsche, Freud, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Derrida. Obviously not only did he learn from them that everything is radically temporal and historical, but—especially from Nietzsche, Freud, and Derrida—that contingency has a much bigger role in our world than we believe. It implies that an *ironist* is a person who: "faces up to the contingency of his or her own most central beliefs and desires—someone sufficiently historicist and nominalist to have abandoned the idea that those central beliefs and desires refer to something beyond the reach of time and chance" (Rorty 1989, xv). Consequently, after forty years of trying, Rorty gave up the Platonic experiment of unifying reality and justice in a single vision in this work. He abandoned his efforts to describe the world in a single, universal philosophical theory. He tried to demonstrate what intellectual life could be like if we could give up the dream of this single vision. "This book tries to show how things look if we drop the demand for a theory which unifies the public and private, and are content to treat the demands of self-creation and of human solidarity as equally valid, yet forever incommensurable" (Rorty

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<sup>7</sup> Therefore, according to his historical experiences and theoretical considerations, Rorty is an advocate of Western democracies: "People like me see nothing wrong with any of these—isms, nor with the political and moral heritage of the Enlightenment—with the least common denominator of Mill and Marx, Trotsky and Whitman, William James and Václav Havel. Typically, we Deweyans are sentimentally patriotic about America—willing to grant that it could slide into fascism at any time, but proud of its past and guardedly hopeful about its future. Most people on my side [...] have, in the light of the history of nationalized enterprises and central planning in central and eastern Europe, given up on socialism. *We are willing to grant that welfare state capitalism is the best we can hope for.* Most of us who were brought up Trotskyite now feel forced to admit that Lenin and Trotsky did more harm than good, and that Kerensky has gotten a bum rap for the past 70 years. But we see ourselves as still faithful to everything that was good in the socialist movement" (Rorty 1999, 17–8, emphasis added).

1989, xv). From all of this, Rorty also deduced the consequences for social theory. As we could see, in *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, Rorty brought forth the figure of the *liberal ironist*. Then, basically at the same time, in defense of the individual, Rorty constituted the prescriptive, rather than descriptive differentiation of *public-private*, laid out the historical goal of solidarity and stood up plainly for the modern liberal mass democracy.

Rorty not only casts off the existence of any metaphysical substance but, in connection with this, the correspondence-conception of truth, too. The truth is not found but made. He apprehends everything human as being socially constructed and sees all the significant interpretations of our world—with us within it—as a linguistic affair (cf. Rorty 1999, 48). We are unable to prove any ultimate, substantial reality; instead, only our own, radically temporal and historical, therefore constantly changing world can be described. All of the interpretations of our world are narratives, which can never be absolute and universal, only general. Our narratives, or in his words, our *vocabularies* are used by Rorty in a sense the late Wittgenstein meant under his language games, which implies at least three different levels of meaning, as it is widely known: a.) first, the language game literally; b.) second, the mode of life c.) third, culture. Rorty uses all three meanings and claims that we live in the age of narrative philosophy, where through the constant descriptions and redescriptions of our situations, plans, actions, etc. not only do we constitute ourselves, but our society, too. According to him, the main pillars of human life (language, self, community) are contingent, the constitution of vocabularies are even more dependent on our imagination, but this doesn't mean that the constitution of a new vocabulary is arbitrary. We must strive to secure the—at least relative—coherence of the coexistent *public* vocabularies (or at least try to prove their falsehoods, if it is possible), even if it sometimes does not lead to any achievement, because in another case they become dysfunctional, and our life cannot function. (This doesn't apply to *private* vocabularies, since *public* and *private* don't conform theoretically, only in practice; cf. Rorty 1989, xiv) Because of this, among others, Rorty is an advocate of a pragmatist coherence-conception of truth.

According to Rorty, the course of history is also contingent, and the change of vocabulary is neither an act of will nor the result of argumentation. The finite and radically temporal, historical human being rather loses certain vocabularies and acquires others.<sup>8</sup> The same thing happens

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<sup>8</sup> "Europe did not *decide* to accept the idiom of Romantic poetry, or of socialist politics, or of Galilean mechanics. That sort of shift was no more an act of will than it was a result

in politics, too, since the advocates, promoters, and backers of Western democracies see it clearly by this point that ideological and political vocabularies change from time to time. If we want, however, to maintain democracy, we must hold on to certain principles and the institutions built on them, at least for the time of a historical experiment. However, it is not lucky to choose these main principles from moral values and basic moral principles because of two reasons. On the one hand, in most cases, these values stop functioning in the first serious social crisis. On the other hand, due to the insuperable gap between the generality of these values or basic principles and actual, individual actions and situations, the application of the earlier is always awkward. (Aristotle has already tried to eliminate this problem with the help of *phronesis* in the case of morals.) So it seems to be useful to build democracy rather on such procedural rules and structures of power, which *have already proved to be good in practice*, which, at least in Western democracies, are accepted by the majority of people on an *empirical basis*. These procedures, structures, and institutions will always be filled up with special political, ideological content by actual participants of the political, ideological arena.

Naturally, modern political mass democracies are far from being perfect. Several drawbacks have already been enumerated from the decline of the Spenglerian culture into civilization through the revolt of the masses described by Ortega to the culture industry of Adorno and the critique of the existing social order by Foucault and so on. However, it would be difficult to deny some of their extremely important positive features. First, it decreased suffering caused by nature and society in such degree, which will compensate for the remaining old and new social constraints (cf. Rorty 1989, 63). Second, it is the best social formation, because there isn't any other functioning better nowadays, and finally, it carries the possibilities of its own development within, which means that it can be even better in the future.

Rorty defined his standpoint in the dimension of political philosophy as a sort of middle ground between the views of Habermas and Foucault. He refused to accept Habermas' belief that democratic institutions need philosophical foundations. At the same time, in contradiction with Foucault, he believed in the possibility of some forms of ideal, democratic, social systems of institutions (cf. Rorty 1988). This, at the same time, means

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of argument. Rather, Europe gradually lost the habit of using certain words and gradually acquired the habit of using others" (Rorty 1989, 6).

that not everything is contingent for Rorty! He applies irony to almost everything, except one thing: *democracy*.

#### 4. Rorty's ethics and his criticism on Kant's ethics

It can be suspected from Rorty's philosophical view of the world that his ethical theory stands in contradiction with traditional ethics, which demands metaphysical foundations and sets up universal obligations. Since these traditions determine not only our moral philosophical view of the world, but also our everyday thinking, I am undertaking an almost impossible mission, when I try to outline the ethics of Rorty, which is original, but not without predecessors.<sup>9</sup> I will emphasize some critical points, which are first and foremost based on his *Contingency* book and his paper "Ethics Without Principles" (cf. Rorty 1999, 72–90).

First of all, Rorty *refuses the foundationalist needs*: on the one hand, because he regards them rationally impossible, and on the other hand, morally unnecessary. Impossible, since the absolute, metaphysical foundation—and Rorty thought of this obviously—is rationally unprovable, or in other words, it is exclusively the result of the decision of faith, a choice based on one's worldview, which is not philosophy anymore. Besides this, it is unnecessary from a moral point of view because while it is true that the absolute necessity of moral laws and duties could only be provided by metaphysical foundations<sup>10</sup> they are not needed in the cases of specific moral actions. To fight against real suffering, cruelty, and other moral injustice, it is sufficient to have the moral tradition of our own social and intellectual community and *phronesis*. This tradition, of course, is itself permanently in development and change, as it is contingent and relative due to its historical nature, and thus the sense of moral obligation is not a question of learning, but rather conditioning. It means that Rorty has refused not only the traditional, religious foundationalist needs but also Kant's "Reason" as universal "Reason", which made Kant's ethics a de-

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<sup>9</sup> Rorty has mentioned his main predecessors in many of his writings: first of all Dewey, Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, Sartre, Heidegger, Gadamer and Derrida.

<sup>10</sup> Some philosophers might say that incremental inquiry or social debates can also function as bases of the absoluteness or the unconditionality. However, we can always raise the question that: "Is the so-called 'incremental inquiry or social debates' are not historical and social (as the second expression already says that)!" If something is social and historical, then it cannot be absolute in the sense of "unconditional". The social and historical phenomena (as their name says!) are always determined by the particular social and historical circumstances.

ontologist ethics. I have to remark here that Rorty naturally also uses a notion of reason, but a qualitatively different notion of reason! Kant uses “the Reason,” and Rorty uses “the reason.” Kant uses a universal notion of “Reason”, which is supra-historical, and Rorty’s notion of reason is always a particular, socially and historically determined reason. (See the quote from Rorty below!)

Rorty also *disregards*, unlike Kant, *universal, unconditional moral laws and obligations*. Rorty starts out from the differentiation between morality and prudence. Traditionally, this meant absolute, categorical obligations set against conditional, hypothetical obligations. However, pragmatists have reservations about the commitment to take anything as absolute, because they doubt that anything can be non-relational (cf. Rorty 1999, 73). Rorty reinterprets these differentiations to dispense with the notion of absolute, unconditional obligation. In Rorty’s opinion, we can say, everything is relational in the world. Rorty was namely a panrelationist, which means that in his “ontology” (he refused the necessity to work out a separate ontology, but every philosopher has some sort of latent ontology in general) everything is relational. It follows obviously from this standpoint that he cannot accept Kant’s unconditional moral laws. Moral laws are also conditional and relational since those laws are socially and historically determined. That is why he cannot accept Kant’s universal and absolute moral laws and obligations.

Rorty *refuses* not only the *foundationalist needs* (because—in his view—they are rationally impossible and morally unnecessary; cf. Krémer 2005, 291) but also *the Kantian priority of reason to emotions*. Rorty thinks of a real self with emotions and will as the agent of moral situations. According to his views, there is a self with a complex and changing personality, where “‘selfhood’ (except insofar as it has encased itself in a shell of routine) is in the process of making, and any self is capable of including within itself a number of inconsistent selves, of unharmonized dispositions”.<sup>11</sup> Rorty prefers this kind of self to the Kantian “myth of the self as non-relational, as capable of existing independently of any concern for others, as a cold psychopath needing to be constrained to take account of other people’s needs” (Rorty 1999, 77). (As I mentioned above, if Kant rejected the acceptance of those concerns and emotions that are not in accordance with the categorical imperative, it means that he rejected most of the normal human emotions. It means, generally speaking, that Kant did not take

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<sup>11</sup> Be aware that Rorty here quotes Dewey! (Rorty 1999, 77–78.)

into account the moral agent’s emotional life in his ethics!) In harmony with this idea, Rorty replaced the unconditional moral obligation of Kant by the concept of prudence. According to Rorty, “moral obligation does not have a nature, or a source, different from tradition, habit, and custom. *Morality is simply a new controversial custom*” (ibid., 76). In his opinion, the concept of “moral obligation” becomes “increasingly less appropriate to the degree to which we identify with those whom we help: the degree to which we mention them when telling ourselves stories about who we are, the degree to which their story is also our story” (ibid., 79). It is clear that Rorty has refused the priority of *Reason* to emotions, as Kant has thought of it.

Rorty’s view is the same on *justice*, which can be seen already in the title of an article in 1997: “Justice as Larger Loyalty”. If there is no absolute primacy of reason over emotion, and if the moral obligation itself is just a new social custom, then justice cannot be other than loyalty to a larger community. Rorty accepts the distinction of Michael Walzer who was influenced by, among others, Charles Taylor, between *thick* (i.e., based on traditions, habits, and community practice) and *thin* (i.e., based on theory) *morality*, and developed a new concept of “rationality” (that is absolutely not akin to Kant’s reason, as I mentioned it above) based on this interpretation:

If by rationality we mean simply the sort of activity that Walzer thinks of as a thinning-out process—the sort that, with luck, achieves the formulation and utilization of an overlapping consensus—then the idea that justice has a different source than loyalty no longer seems plausible. For, on this account of rationality, being rational and acquiring a larger loyalty are two descriptions of the same activity. This is because *any* unforced agreement between individuals and groups about what to do creates a form of community, and will, with luck, be the initial stage in expanding the circles of those whom each party to the agreement had previously taken to be ‘people like ourselves.’ The opposition between rational argument and fellow-feeling thus begins to dissolve.

Rorty 2007, 52–3

This new approach of Rorty—making use of Rawls’s overlapping consensus—apparently not only allows the possibility of interpreting justice as larger loyalty but also offers a solution to the paradox of justice. It happens in so far as—under the concrete circumstances which are accepted by concrete people of different communities after public political debates—it allows the judgment of the unequal with unequal standards.

## 5. Conclusion

What does Rorty propose instead of traditional ethics? Rorty sees it more appropriate to keep a constant reinterpretation of our moral situations that is to keep re-describing them again and again, continuously improving our moral sense in this way. This also leads to a new interpretation of *moral progress*: “Pragmatists think of moral progress as more like sewing together a very large, elaborate, polychrome quilt, than like getting a clearer vision of something true and deep”. Since “there is no subtle human essence”, they do not want “to rise above the particular in order to grasp the universal. Rather, they hope to minimize one difference at a time—the difference between Christians and Muslims in a particular village in Bosnia, the difference between blacks and whites in a particular town in Alabama”, and the like. “The hope is to sew such groups together with a thousand little stitches—to invoke a thousand little commonalities between their members, rather than specify one great big one, their common humanity” (Rorty 1999, 86-7). It means that in Rorty’s opinion moral progress does exist, but it is not an increased form of rationality, but rather an increased sensitivity to the other people’s suffering. In Rorty’s opinion, the moral progress means, in this type of definition, that “this progress is indeed in the direction of greater human solidarity” (Rorty 1989, 192). The modern intellectual’s main contribution to this moral progress was much more to create detailed descriptions of the variants of actual suffering and humiliation (in, e. g., novels and ethnographies) rather than to create philosophical or religious papers and books (cf. *ibid.*).

It is also worth mentioning here that the admittedly social-wide endeavor of Rorty’s ethics is to promote an—already mentioned—*realization of a liberal democracy*. “One of my aims in this book—he writes in *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*—is to suggest the possibility of a liberal utopia: one in which ironism, in the relevant sense, is universal. A postmetaphysical culture seems to me no more impossible than a postreligious one, and equally desirable” (*ibid.*, xv–xvi).

Therefore Rorty outlined in his book, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* the characteristics of the liberal ironist. She is liberal in the sense that “liberals are the people who think that cruelty is the worst thing we do”, and ironist, if she “faces up to the contingency of his or her own most central beliefs and desires” (*ibid.*, 1989, xv). Consequently, for the liberal ironist, there are no eternal, unchanging supra-historical substances; nothing possesses an eternal, metaphysical intrinsic core, an unchanging inner nature.



To the liberal ironist, the main columns of our life are also contingent: our language, our self, and our community. All these contingencies, however, are not followed by the nihilism of total relativism! Since Rorty emphasizes that “a belief can still regulate action, can still be thought worth *dying for*, among people who are quite aware that this belief is caused by nothing deeper than contingent historical circumstance” (ibid., 189, emphasis added).

However, from the denial of any eternal, supra-historical substances and intrinsic essences of nature, it follows that Rorty cannot accept the traditional form of *solidarity* either. But “hostility to a particular historically conditioned and possibly transient form of solidarity is not hostility to solidarity as such” (ibid., xv). He doesn't see the basis of solidarity and human compassion in previously hidden depths, nor in some eternal, unchanging, essential humanity, but he regards it rather as a goal to be achieved. “Solidarity is not discovered by reflection but created. It is created by increasing our sensitivity to the particular details of the pain and humiliation of other, unfamiliar sorts of people” (ibid., xvi).

Rorty, therefore, formulates solidarity as an ultimate goal, which can be found on the horizon of our world interpretation: “we have a moral obligation to feel a sense of solidarity with all other human beings” (ibid., 190). However, he knows at the same time that identification with mankind, with every rational being (Kant!), is impossible in our practical life. We are only able to urge the expansion of our “we-intention”: “we try to extend our sense of ‘we’ to people whom we have previously thought of as ‘they’” (ibid., 192). This claim, characteristic of liberals—people who are more afraid of being cruel than of anything else—rests on nothing else and deeper than the historical contingencies, which has led to the present, developed, and secularized Western democracies (cf. ibid., 192). The ethnocentrism of liberal ironists is such, “which is dedicated to enlarging itself, to creating an ever larger and more variegated *ethnos*” (ibid., 198), because this “we” is made up of people who were raised to doubt ethnocentrism (cf. ibid.).

It means that Rorty deliberately distinguishes solidarity defined as identification with mankind as such, and solidarity as skepticism towards ourselves. It is skepticism regarding that we, the people of democratic countries, have enough self-doubt (cf. ibid.). Rorty speaks about “the self-doubt which has gradually, over the last few centuries, been inculcated into inhabitants of the democratic states—doubt about their own sensitivity to the pain and humiliation of others, doubt that present institu-

tional arrangements are adequate to deal with this pain and humiliation, curiosity about possible alternatives” (ibid.). Solidarity as identification is impossible—it is the invention of philosophers, a clumsy attempt to secularize the idea of becoming one with God. The expansion of our “we-intention”, our solidarity, initiating from our skepticism is possible, a thing we only need to do. But, it is not a process of discursive learning! We can gradually lose the habit of using the old words connected to traditional solidarity and gradually acquire the habit of new solidarity created by our imagination.

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# Does the Pragmatist Reflection on the Ethical and Aesthetic Values Need the Kantian Axiology for its (Pragmatist) Future Developments?

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## 1. Introduction

The philosophy of values, or axiology, or value inquiry does not belong to the main fields of philosophical interest for American pragmatists. At least in comparison to Baden neo-Kantianism, Roman Ingarden's phenomenology, Henryk Elzenberg's axiology and others that once constituted my own philosophical background. Yet the terms "value", "e/valuation", "worth/y", and similar ones are important for many pragmatists—mostly perhaps for Nicolas Rescher, who equates the term "Homo sapiens" with "Homo valuens" (Rescher 1993, 246), for Hugh McDonald's "Radical Axiology" (McDonald 2004), and, to some extent, for John Dewey in *Theory of Valuation*, in which he writes that "all deliberate, all planned human conduct, personal and collective, seems to be influenced, if not controlled, by estimates of value or worth of ends to be attained" (Dewey 1939, 2). In addition to that, some pragmatists see values as more important when related to normativity; for Joseph Margolis, norms are exemplary values (cf. Margolis 1995, 265), and Alain Locke links values not only with norms of preference but also with imperatives of actions (cf. Locke 1968 [1935], 313-4).

For these and other reasons, it would be good to take a look at the term "value" as a keyword by means of which we can see the pragmatists' efforts to meet the practical, not merely theoretical, challenges that appear on the horizon. Let me explain at the beginning that I do not share with some other, both non-pragmatist and pragmatist authors, too much hope as to the role of axiology as such in the practice of the social life. For example, John Laird hoped that "Value *may* prove to be the key that will eventually release all the human sciences from their present position of pathetic, if not dignified, futility" (Laird 1929, xix). Locke has wished to make the philosophy of values American philosophy's strong point, "an American forte" (Locke 1968 [1935], 317). I do not, let me repeat, share with these authors such hopes, although I do not deny some justification for their (and others') expectations. Nevertheless, I think that this category (value) is so widely used, and sometimes in many important contexts of the public life, that I just want to employ it and see how much it is helpful in the recognition of new perspectives.

To be sure, one can hardly talk about one pragmatist axiology understood as a more or less coherent set of assumptions, methods, and theories. C.S. Peirce's idea of valuations in the normative sciences (aesthetics, ethics, and logic) is different than Dewey's theory of valuation, and Richard Shusterman's idea of "somaesthetics", although all three link, in different ways, the field of ethics (and ethical values) with the field of aesthetics (and aesthetic values). Thomas Alexander's idea of the "aesthetics of human existence" (*The Human Eros*) covers both ethics and aesthetics (and more) in the task of exploring meaning and value of our lives. C. I. Lewis (in *Values and Imperatives: Studies in Ethics*), J. Margolis ("Values, Norms, and Agents") and Rescher (*Value Matters*) devoted their attention to the normative and imperative dimension of moral values, which is in line with a more general tendency to see "value inquiry" predominantly in the area of ethics and ethical values, not aesthetics. Richard Rorty ("Solidarity or Objectivity") shares with William James, J. Dewey, and G.H. Mead many inspirations on the social dimension of the world of values, yet it would be more appropriate to talk about his reflections that are applicable to the discussion about values, rather than any theory that he has put forward. Also John Lachs ("Relativism and its Benefits") takes much from Dewey, although he predominantly develops George Santayana's views on the relativism of values, and, having "learned to write without footnotes" (Lachs 2012,191), he uses the language that is more colloquial or popular rather than theoretical and scientific, as if directed to wider audiences, not just to scholars.

But seeing the philosophical task as wider than a theoretical inquiry does not, by any means, have to be a failure or a mistake. Much depends upon the particular audience that the philosophical message is directed at. Actually, it is one of pragmatism's strengths to propose the criticism of culture along with the interpretations of various cultural phenomena that are interesting for more general audiences—including irrational audiences. I mean those that ignore many parts of rational argumentation in many areas of living in favour of emotional, symbolic, visual, and others—and touch more general and practical issues than strictly philosophical and theoretical.

## 2. New challenges and possible future developments

There are very many challenges ahead (of which I shall just mention without any intention to develop this plot in the present text) that pragmatism, understood predominantly as a social philosophy and the critique of culture, is going to face. The role of the mass-media that cover nearly all aspects of our life, including private and public, is one of them. Yet it is not the mass-media as such that I want to discuss at this time, but rather the growing role of the aesthetic in various spheres of public life, starting with communication (the pictorial dimension of the TV and Internet narratives), through the omnipresent images in omnipresent commercials, the promotion of different life-styles, ending with particular argumentations on vital issues that seem to dominate public discussions. For example: does not the anti-abortion discourse (frequently referring to "evil" and "negative value/s") gain much among many audiences when its proponents use X-ray images of the foetus as a part of their story? On the other hand, are not their pro-abortion opponents much more persuasive to many audiences when their narratives (frequently referring to "freedom", "non-suffering", and other "positive values") use the images of the deformed newborns with terrible-looking physical birth defects? Do not the TV scenes play a big role in the discussion about the refugees or immigrants, and do not these scenes (a dead baby boy on a beach for one party and, for the other, terrorist attacks by Muslim immigrants), rather than arguments, matter in the public life, the political elections included? Are not the discourses on nationalisms and anti-nationalisms strengthened by symbols and well-arranged visual images that appeal to the senses and the imagination rather than to reason? I mean, is it not the case that, even when the disputants themselves avoid using images, a growing majority

of the public have them already in their minds, and very often react to these images no less than to the argumentation which they hear, if they hear it at all?

The challenge for philosophers that emerges out of it, in my view, is the need to link *the message on ethical values* with *the aesthetic values of the narratives and within them*. If philosophers want to have a say on the important issues of the day, and this includes values, they should pay much more attention to the aesthetic dimension of their message that is directed to various audiences. I do not want to promote any psychological impact on the viewers or the superficial effects that can be acceptable for the massive audience. At stake is the rational means by which the debate concerning values should be conducted.

I can find strong support for my claim with both Kantians and the pragmatists. On the one hand, Wilhelm Windelband, one hundred years ago, put strong emphasis on what he “considered the truth”, namely, that “it is not so much the difficulty of philosophy as the poor literary standard of philosophical writers which perplexes the student” (Windelband 1921 [1914], 15). Hence, philosophers ought to, among other things, pay more attention to “the finer quality of the artistic expression” (ibid., 16) of their works and ideas to make these works and ideas more pronounced. Another thinker, originally coming from the Kantian tradition, Hugo Münsterberg (his *Eternal Values*, written in the spirit of neo-Kantian axiology, will be referred to frequently in this text), the author of one of the first books on what we call nowadays “cinematic philosophy” (*The Photoplay*, 1916), stressed the interconnection between the world of values and the aesthetic components of film that refer to these values and enhance the message in them. On the other hand, if we agree with Rescher that the cardinal rule of pragmatic rationality is to “Proceed in a manner that is optimally efficient and effective in realizing the purposes at hand” (Rescher 2004, 95), my question then becomes as follows: do not more *attractive* and *clearer* and more *inspirational* discourses make for more “efficient and effective” realization of “the purposes at hand”? Those contemporary pragmatists who want to use the legacy of the great classical pragmatists, while also looking for future challenges with the help of their ideas, should try to respond to this.

To be sure, for pragmatists (especially neopragmatists), there are some reasons why a complete separation of ethical values from aesthetic values may not work. First, it is through the imaginative origin of ethical ideals that Dewey could claim that “art is more moral than the moralities”

(Dewey 1934, 348); second, the inevitably narrative character of the articulation of ethical ideals (any narrative being at least partially aesthetic); third, the artificiality of the compartmentalization of ethics and aesthetics (and other spheres) as well as the conventionality of the borderlines between morality and the arts; fourth, the idea of the art of living, or “the ethical art of fashioning one’s life” (Shusterman 1992, 59); fifth, the criticism of the classic separation of body and mind, resulting in the approval of corporal sensitivity and bodily perception in shaping the mental and linguistic dimensions of such notions as: duty, obligation, and normativity.

On the other hand, the discussion about the aesthetic and visual aspects of the ethical and textual messages cannot avoid, at least for a brief moment, cinematic philosophy. It is strange, at least to me, that the greatest of American social pragmatists, Dewey and Rorty, living in the country in which cinematic culture has been so essential, have devoted to film almost no philosophical attention. In the case of Dewey, perhaps, it was caused by his distance to the commercial dimension of the films he saw in America on the one hand, and, on the other hand, his disdain of the propaganda films made by the Nazis and the Communists. In the case of Rorty, perhaps, his attention to “the great books” obscured the role of “the great films”, yet he admitted that “the novel, the movie, and the TV program have, gradually but steadily, replaced the sermon and the treatise as the principal vehicles of moral change and progress” (Rorty 1989, xvi). No less surprising (in the positive sense of this word) is Hugo Münsterberg’s fascination with the philosophical potential that movies possess, given the very early stage of the film industry he witnessed. As already mentioned, he wrote, as early as 1916, one of the first books on cinematic philosophy ever, having been impressed by early American films that he watched upon his arrival to the us. For him, film was a very efficient tool for the filmmaker to impress the audiences and evoke an aesthetic experience in them. He recognized the culturally and philosophically significant instruments that film specifically possesses and which other fine arts do not have, the “manipulation” of time and space as well as the stimulation of imagination. Film, seen as art, is not imitative; although it refers to reality, its main aim is to instigate aesthetic experience, and this can include, as in the case of most eminent works of film art, a reference to values: “a faith in ideals and eternal values must permeate the world of the screen” (Münsterberg 1916, 228). Whereas Dewey wanted to show the interconnection between valuations and the processes of art creation,

Münsterberg claimed that the condition of aesthetic experience is the separation, if not isolation, of the artwork so as to see the value of the objects as if from a distance. Film has unique possibilities to make this happen: “the greatest mission which the photoplay may have in our community is that of esthetic cultivation. No art reaches a larger audience daily, no esthetic influence finds spectators in a more receptive frame of mind” (ibid., 228–9). What a message, in my view, to the philosophers living in time when clips, videos, and films play a role in shaping the cultural policy!

Allow me to add, furthermore, that the present text does not examine Kant’s claim (cf. Kant 1911 [1790], 228) that the beautiful gives us no knowledge about the object (about the values, in the present context)—something that some neopragmatists would like to claim. Nor do I examine the ontological issues of the *kalokagathia*-type of approaches, that interpret values from the aesthetic and the ethical viewpoints at the same time, both in the Kantian tradition and the pragmatist traditions. Hence, on the one hand, H. R. Lotze states that if our minds’ attempts to explain the world of values correspond to creative imagination, “then *Practical Reason* stands on a line with the artistic production of beauty” (Lotze 1885 [1856–1864], 246). On the other hand, Dewey writes that great moral deeds may have the grace or nobility that strike us (cf. 1991 [1938], 358); for my part, I cannot prejudge, at least not here, whether the aesthetic components of the narratives, as such, *necessarily* modify the message on ethical values. Finally, Rescher talks about “aesthetic parameters” in scientific explanations, and to these he includes: “*simplicity, uniformity, symmetry, economy, elegance, and the like*” (Rescher 1990, 1). He adds: “The approach agrees with Kant in viewing all the parameters of scientific systematicity—simplicity, uniformity, coherence, and the rest—as methodological and procedural guidelines (“regulative principles”)” (ibid., 2). He also explains that “while our commitment to the ‘aesthetic’ parameters of inductive procedure should be viewed in the first instance as a matter of methodological convenience within the overall economy of rational inquiry, nevertheless, our reliance on them is not *totally* devoid of ontological commitments regarding the world’s nature” (ibid., 9). If we wanted to follow Rescher, it would mean that not only the aesthetic factors should be central in the narratives about ethical messages, but also that they should be seen as hardly separable from the scientific explanation of some ethical and axiological phenomena. Here, as Rescher suggests, the pragmatists and the Kantians would not necessarily be in disagreement.



### 3. The thesis of the present text: any ethical message needs aesthetic narratives

- In order to more effectively face the challenges of the pictorial turn and visual culture today, it is quite necessary to refer to aesthetic values (e.g., clarity, simplicity, attractiveness, excellence, style, uniqueness, originality, stimulation, inspiration, provocation/shock or elegance/gentleness, and many others) by means of the aesthetic modes of expression (textual, oral, pictorial, visual, cinematic, etc.) in the philosophical narratives that deal with ethical values, be they social or individual.

I am thinking here about ethical values and aesthetic values at the same time as, for example, in the case of the visual *attractiveness*, narrative *clearness*, and *inspirational* contents for a moral or ethical message in philosophy (if we agree that *attractiveness*, *clarity*, and *inspiration* belong predominantly to the aesthetic domain).

The auxiliary thesis of the present text, one saying that Kantian axiology can, at some points, be helpful, should be formulated in the following way:

- The pragmatist tradition is strong and rich enough to face new challenges; nevertheless, it would be interesting to see if it could use and profit from other philosophical traditions, and this includes the Kantian tradition, one that has, at some point, enormously helped to develop axiology as a philosophical discipline.

Let me add that this present text has been written in hope that, if the contemporary pragmatists would like, as they frequently do, to develop and update the philosophical and axiological message of their classical teachers and mentors, they might also think about the stimulations these authoritative figures experienced, or may have experienced from Kantians. In this way, the future developments of the pragmatist reflection on values could become more expansive.

### 4. Who is pragmatist and who is Kantian on values?

The usage of the terms “Kantian” and “pragmatist” needs clarification. To be sure, it is neither easy to indicate the most representative authors of the “pragmatist axiology” (Peirce? Dewey and Mead? Lewis? Rorty?) on

the one hand, and of the “Kantian axiology” on the other (Kant himself? Lotze? Münsterberg? Windelband and Rickert? Scheler and N. Hartmann?); nor is it easy to indicate the most representative assumptions of these two philosophical traditions. Nevertheless, I want to clarify what I mean by “pragmatist” and “Kantian” in this text. I assume, at least for the sake of the present project, that “pragmatist” and “Kantian” mean all of the following ten features taken together.

Firstly, pragmatism is predominantly a *social philosophy*, and Kantianism is predominantly a *metaphysical philosophy*. I do not want to claim that these two (i.e. social and metaphysical) are mutually exclusive. I want to say that the former means that pragmatism emphasizes the social relations as the most constituent factors that shape the realm of values, the processes of evaluation, of setting norms, and of generating discourses by means of which axiological issues can be articulated. The latter means that Kantianism studies predominantly the ontological status of values, assumes the absolute and objective character of some of them, and examines their possible normative character. This refers to Kant himself. Patrick Hutchings, in his book *Kant on Absolute Values*, notices that, in Kant, the understanding of the personal values needs the background and the context of the metaphysics of morals: “The particular metaphysics must at least be noticed before we appropriate the notion of personal value for our own contemporary uses” (Hutchings 1972, 62). And it is within this metaphysics, Hutchings continues, that the worth of man can be justified in Kant; “Whether or not we choose to fix our happiness in it, this ineluctable value, this immanent worth of a will willing, is the only sub-lunary ontological necessity, and the only thing that cannot fail us [...]”. Kant simply elevates immanent, indeprivable, ineluctable worth to the first place on this teleological scale, and to the first place on his axiological scale as well (*ibid.*, 70).

Most pragmatists reject the absolute and unconditioned values, and some of them even attempted to “convert” or “translate” Kantian thought into social terms, like G.H.Mead, who wrote openly that Kant’s categorical imperative can be “given its social equivalent” (Mead 1934, 379). I say “most pragmatists” because the positions held by Peirce, Royce, and Rescher are, to some degree and at some points, closer (yet, not identical!) to the representatives of the Kantian tradition.

Secondly, pragmatism, more often than not, *contextualizes* the assessments of valuable deeds, actions, and states of affairs. Pragmatism does not recognize, as Kantianism usually does, the “*unconditioned*” states of

affairs, “things in themselves”, “inner worth”, and absolute values that are, so to say, “valid” even despite having no reference to many people’s needs, preferences, interests, and hopes. The Kantian positions usually follow Kant’s own *Groundwork*’s claim that the full worth of good will is like a “jewel in itself” (Kant 2002 [1785], 10).

Thirdly, pragmatism is predominantly *consequentialist* in the sense of a practical application of values amidst the social life and the consequences to be derived thereby, while Kantianism is predominantly *deontological*, which means that “The moral worth of the action thus lies not in the effect to be expected from it” (Kant 2002 [1785], 16). The consequentialist character of the pragmatist position can include preferences, not merely the effects of the action: “Value reactions guided by emotional preferences and affinities are as potent in the determination of attitudes as pragmatic consequences are in the determination of actions. In the generic and best sense of the term ‘pragmatic’, it is important to take stock of the one as the other” (Locke 1968 [1935], 318). Kantianism includes the deontological dimension (the very intention to obey the duty) and the teleological one (the very intention to realize a given value or a valuable state of affairs), though the teleological approach may assume a consequentialist colouring when the result (i.e. realization) is seen as the main or most important aim of the project.

Fourthly, pragmatism is basically *naturalistic* and Kantianism is basically *idealistic*; pragmatists assume that the knowledge about the world of values can be had by such disciplines as physics, chemistry, biology, anthropology, ethics, and social sciences. The Kantians assume, to use Münsterberg’s words, that “the pragmatists [are] wrong” and that Kantians “may stand firmly with both feet on the rock of facts, and may yet hold to the absolute values as eternally belonging to the structure of the world” (Münsterberg 1909, 2).

Fifthly, although ontologically monistic (all values have a naturalistic character), pragmatism has a tendency towards axiological *pluralism* by stressing the important social role of the variety of values (e. g., activity, tolerance, freedom, etc). Kantianism is ontologically *dualistic* (absolute and objective values are different in status and character than the relative and subjective values) and typologically dualistic in the sense of cultivating the classic division into basic values: good vs. evil; the beautiful vs. ugly, etc. in the first place.

Sixthly, pragmatism is more *evolutionary* in its understanding of values and the amelioration of the social world by working on still better relations

amongst people, and Kantianism has a rather *static*, eternal, and fixed idea of the absolute and of objective values as the main groundwork for dignity and justice. It does not mean that the Kantians reject an evolutionary or incremental approach toward values in general. Heinrich Rickert, one of the leading Baden neo-Kantians, was a follower of the idea of the progress in culture and social sciences. However, he and other Kantians seem to rely on the eternally fixed and, in this way, non-evolutionary standards of values: "Only when such timelessly valid formal values are found will it be possible to relate them to the plenitude of empirically detectable values actually developed in history" (Rickert 1924, 118).

Seventhly, pragmatism does not necessarily link values with duties and obligations to realize given values. This link is clearly visible and the idea of *Seinsollen* that was strong in the Kantian tradition (and later on in the phenomenology of Scheler, N. Hartmann, and others). For the Baden Kantians, the idea of obligation was axial in their struggle against the axiological relativism, and in at least in this service "the conception of obligation is excellent" (Münsterberg 1909, 57).

Eighthly, pragmatism is *anthropocentric* whereas Kantianism, especially Baden neo-Kantianism (and some part of phenomenology later on) is *axiocentric*. The difference was tersely articulated by Josiah Royce, one of the founding fathers of pragmatism yet himself claiming to belong to "the wide realm of Post-Kantian Idealism" (Royce 1885, ix). He wrote that the cause "does not get its value merely from your being pleased with it. You believe, on the contrary, that you love it just because of its own value, which it has by itself, even if you die. That is just why one may be ready to die for his cause" (Royce 1995, 11). At this very point, Royce's message is close (yet not identical!) to the neo-Kantians' (cf. Münsterberg 1909, 64).

Ninthly, pragmatism's primary explanatory powers lie in the *empirical* methodologies of the social sciences that are experimentally verifiable rather than in *aprioristic* groundwork for knowledge. Windelband tersely articulated the Kantian methodology in the following way: "No knowledge of duty can be put into action without a knowledge of being" (Windelband 1921 [1914], 30).

Tenthly, pragmatism, especially neopragmatism is aware of the contingency of *discourses* about values and valuations. Rorty's descriptive relativism is the view according to which "the truth (or falsity) of a belief (or set of beliefs) is dependent on the relation of the belief(s) to some discourse (whatever else it is dependent on). Truth (or falsity) of belief(s) holds only with respect to, or in relation to some discourse, and need not

hold with respect to other discourses” (Cahoone 1991, 239). Kantianism does not seem to stress that our understanding of the realm of values is very much dependent upon the discourses of, or rather about this realm; rather, it stresses the need to get to the *right* and *reliable* discourse out of many false and unreliable discourses at hand. So, whereas a Kantian might say that the progress in the explanation of the world (of values) “is therefore at the same time a progress in the description” (Münsterberg 1909, 131), by no means does it mean that the plurality of alternative descriptions is taken legitimately from various, more or less, equally valid standpoints.

## 5. Why should the pragmatists look to the Kantians at all?

Despite the sometimes harsh criticism of pragmatists directed at Kant (and the Kantians), for example, for ignoring the social dimension of their ideas, and the no less harsh criticism of the Kantians against pragmatism, for example, for promoting relativism, studying these relationships in the context of the idea of value can be interesting and fruitful. Below, I propose a few issues that could be taken into consideration—if not already having been taken into consideration—in the pragmatists’ reflections on values. All these points can, I claim, be instrumental in answering the question that was put in the title of this text.

### 5.1 The Kantians can help the pragmatists better define their philosophy of values

I have the impression that the Kantians have already given service to at least some pragmatists in their (pragmatists’) better setting of their own philosophical and axiological identity. Directly or indirectly rejecting some Kantian views and fortifying others, a more or less definite character of pragmatist axiology has been proposed sometimes as if against the Kantian background. What background? Münsterberg presented tersely the dilemma that has faced a major part of the Kantian axiology. Namely, “we have a world with over-personal unconditional values or we have no real world at all, but merely a worthless chance dream, in which to strive for truth and morality can have no meaning whatsoever” (Münsterberg 1909, 46). As if in response to that, Dewey’s *Theory of Valuation*, one of the most representative texts for pragmatist axiology, clearly states that the problem of values and valuation refers to exclusively “human activities

and human relations”, to “the behavioral relations of persons to one another”, and that values have a “social or interpersonal” character (Dewey 1939; 3, 11, 12). This can be seen as an obvious statement that situates pragmatism within the realm of social relations as opposed to a relation to some over-human reality. Exactly the same statement was put forward by Rorty in “Solidarity or Objectivity”; as if, again, responding to the Kantian divide, he juxtaposed those who “describe themselves as standing in immediate relation to a non-human reality” vs. those “telling the story of their contribution to a community” (Rorty 1991, 21). Of course, I am not claiming that these authors replied directly to the Kantians; I just claim that their replies can be used in the pragmatists’ replies to the Kantian divide and more clearly establish the pragmatist axiological position.

How can it be helpful in answering the question that is put forward in the title of the present text? In confronting the Kantian axiology with respect to most of the vital points (ontological, epistemological, and others), the pragmatists can better articulate their views on the social origin and the communal character of the world of values. As a consequence, they should be able to better understand the undercurrents of social changes and more adequately react to particular needs, including the communicative needs, of the members of the public. At least since James’s works (such as, for example, “The Social Value of the College-Bred”, 1907), the pragmatist reflection on values and axiological themes has already been much more sensitive and responsive to the problems of particular communities and their members’ developments. In my view, it should continue to be such.

## 5.2 The Kantians can, by *via negativa*, help the pragmatists better define target audiences

In response to the philosophical and ethical question: “What should be done?”, some Kantians have followed the idea that “We are not forced to act in accordance with a value, but we ought to act in accordance with it. The value is thus an obligation” (Münsterberg 1909, 51). Contrary to this, pragmatists have proposed, among other things, meliorism as a way towards the improvement of the quality of social life, of the cooperation of the members of the public, and of the self-creation of these members. To use Dewey’s definition from *Reconstruction in Philosophy*: “Meliorism is the belief that the specific conditions which exist at one moment, be they comparatively bad or comparatively good, in any event may be bettered”

(Dewey 1988 [1920], 181–2). This means, among other things, the recognition of these specific conditions and the possible ways of amendment according to the particular potentialities to be evoked in a given place and context.

Without going into much detail about the differences between these two ways, we can say that, here, the Kantians can be helpful and inspirational in a negative way, as a sort of warning for the pragmatists not to ignore the social dimension of talking about values as well as about norms and obligations. According to the pragmatist interpretation, both Kant and the Kantians failed to adequately refer to the social reality and the changeable communal challenges. To use Shusterman's strong words, "the social and class-hierarchical foundation of aesthetic judgment" (Shusterman 1989, 211) has been "scandalously" neglected in Kant, and it seems that this scandalous neglect has been transmitted to the major part of the Kantian tradition. However, this neglect can be seen as a kind of potential inspiration for the pragmatists in various ways nowadays. In the first instance, in their dealing with the social aspects of values, valuations, and the narratives that are used in social communication, my claim is that the pragmatists, in their melioristic efforts, should be aware of something that Kant himself and the Kantians in general were not aware of, and that is of the different social, political, cultural, and economic statuses of the audiences as well as the philosophical and communicative consequences. One of these consequences is the contextualization of the messages *and* the contextualization of the modes of transmitting these messages. In order to be able persuasively to talk to many audiences, not just the academic one (as is usually the case when philosophers address their texts and lectures)—or, to use Kant's language (in *Critique of the Power of Judgment*), "the more cultured section of the community"—the recognition of these modes with the values (including aesthetic values that are present in the narratives) should be one of the priorities. Pragmatist pluralism and tolerance make it possible also to reach and persuade various segments of (to use Kant's language again) "the ruder section of the community", whatever this may mean in our contemporary context.

So the answer to the title question of the present text, at this point, should go in the direction of the recognition of various modes of communication, modes that include, for example, the different sensitivities of audiences to the ways in which given communication is transmitted. The pragmatists' recognition of the language and values of mass-culture (e.g. Shusterman's studies of the culture of rap and hip-hop) may serve as an encouraging example.

### 5.3 Kantians' meaningful life vs. pragmatists' satisfying life in the context of the values-norms relationship

The Baden neo-Kantian Windelband was among the first and most influential scholars who saw values also in the context of the objective norms that should be realized. The basic idea was that the norms indicate that the particular valuable state of affairs ought to be realized when possible. In this way, the phrase that is uttered before the act of the realization, namely: "something should take place", corresponds to the phrase that is uttered after the act of the realization, namely: "it is good/valuable that something has taken place". With or without any direct reference to the Kantian ideas, at least some pragmatists wrestled with the problem of whether a valuable state of affairs should be seen as a standard or a norm that ought to be materialized if/when possible. Some of these efforts resemble, if not correspond to, the Kantians' struggle. For example, Dewey states that "Value in the sense of *good* is inherently connected with that which promotes, furthers, assists, a course of activity, and value in the sense of *right* is inherently connected with that which is needed, required, in the maintenance of a course of activity" (Dewey 1939, 57). Margolis also links values with norms: "*norms* are exemplary values in a hierarchy of values, or principles or rules or regulative procedures for 'grading' and 'ranking' things—preeminently, choices, judgments, commitments, actions—pertinent to realizing such values" (Margolis 1995, 265). Lachs, intending to apply philosophy into practice in a direct manner, sees philosophers as those who have obligations to live exemplary lives (cf. Lachs 2014, 394); this means, among other things, that philosophers ought to give their students as well as the other members of the public living pictures of a good life in practice. Philosophers should be able to experience in practice the ideas of the good life, and be ready to share them with the people around them: "Philosophers ought to know better, speak better, and act better" (Lachs 2015, 7).

I cannot here discuss the consequences of the ambiguity of the term "norm", or whether it should be understood as "a social standard" and, if so, the social standard of which particular society and/or community. Perhaps, it should mean the "ideal" to be realized in certain circumstances, or, rather, a recommended way of performing an action according to certain criteria. However, it may seem that, if the pragmatists narrow down the world of values to the social sphere, then human exemplars, with their successful realizations of a good life, can serve us as models of the good life



to be discussed and promoted by means of attractive narratives. After all, we need some models, real exemplars, of the good and meaningful life to be transmitted—attractively, clearly, and inspirationally—to members of the public. Can Lachs' view fortify our discussion on the meaningful life? Rescher elaborates on the relationship between pragmatism and the Kantian type of idealism in terms of "satisfaction" and "meaning". In the chapter "The Pragmatic Aspect of Values and the Idealistic Dimensions of Values", he says that "The pragmatic aspect of values lies in the fact that they provide a thought tool that we require in order to achieve a *satisfying life*. By contrast, the idealistic aspect of values lies in the fact that they alone enable us to achieve a *meaningful life*" (Rescher 1993, 248), and adds that "It is our dedication to values that ultimately gives meaning to our lives" (ibid., 249). But what is a meaningful life? Aren't the pragmatists able to provide it with their social philosophy? And aren't the pragmatists able to provide it with reference to the realization of values, both social and individual? I am looking for the answer to this question in Münsterberg, who, one hundred years ago, accused the pragmatists he knew from Harvard of being unable to articulate a meaningful life in their philosophical message. He wrote that, although the efficiency of settling life problems has grown thanks to, among other things, the pragmatist approach towards life and philosophy, the meaning of life is in danger (cf. Münsterberg 1909, 4–5, 77). Surprisingly (to me), Münsterberg has said exactly the same as what Rescher wrote about a century later. He (Münsterberg) expressed his hope that, if a new philosophy should appear and give "meaning to life and reality, and liberate us from the pseudo-philosophic doubt of our ideals [...] the problem of values must stand in the centre of the inquiry" (Münsterberg 1909, 4–5), and Kantian philosophy can provide us with it much more than the pragmatist. What they both wanted to say, I think, is the following: pay attention to the difficulty of having a good life with reference to merely individual preferences, and even to the dedication to the communal affairs, and this because both lead to axiological subjectivism and relativism. In the Kantian tradition (as in the Platonic, Scholastic, and others) subjectivism and relativism are definitely not enough to make life meaningful.

Without getting into much detail about the possible rhetorical effects of the Kantians' one-sided criticism of the social pragmatism, one can say that, perhaps, the pragmatists need Kantians at least to rethink the formulations of the good life within pragmatism. Rescher claims that "Being human involves a commitment to ideality—a striving toward something

larger and better than life. *Homo sapiens* is a creature that yearns for transcendence, for achieving value and meaning above and beyond the buzzing confusion of the world's realities" (Rescher 1993, 249).

I think that the pragmatists should evoke this theme in their philosophical message much more, especially for those who, as Rescher says, yearn for some form of transcendence and some kind of getting over the relativity of values. It seems to me that Lachs's strong reference to a Santayanan-type of spirituality, while seeing it as central for human conscious existence, can meet such expectations. To be sure, Lachs looked to Santayana rather than to Kant to "strengthen" the meaningfulness of the pragmatist understanding of the good life. To some extent, Lachs responds to Rescher's demand, yet he objects to Rescher's positing the mind-independent reality as a precondition of making life meaningful and true (cf. Lachs 2012, 61–72). Instead, he tries to evoke Santayana's idea of aesthetic spirituality which seems to have the potential to meet Rescher's expectations; although it does not refer to the transcendence in the Kantian meaning of this term, it still evokes the "transcendence of everyday life" in the sense of stressing the role of disinterested gazes upon all possible objects and states of affairs within our ordinary experience in order to detect the beauty that can be found there. However, this disinterestedness is not complete; one of the basic profits we can get from this aesthetic spirituality is to make our lives more pregnant with meaning, and it is not so much due to a shallow aestheticism, but rather, as I explain elsewhere (cf. Skowroński 2009, 172–83), due to the complexity of the objects and events we happen to face.

#### 5.4 Kant, Putnam, and Rorty on stimulating an "interminable discussion"

One of the primary aims of contemporary aesthetics is to evoke discussion, provoking interpretations and showing, sometimes shockingly, new angles of view and new ways of seeing things. Aesthetics and aesthetic values are needed in a philosophical narrative because they can be more instrumental in evoking reflection in various audiences, not to mention evoking discussion amongst philosophers themselves. In this context, it would be interesting to take a closer look at H. Putnam's reading of a fragment of Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* in the following way: "it is part of the *value* of art that it provokes interminable discussion" (Putnam 2015, 679). The fragment to which Putnam refers and, as he claims, is "remarkably little discussed by Kant scholars!" (ibid.) reads:

we add to a concept a representation of the imagination that belongs to its presentation, but which by itself stimulates so much thinking that it can never be grasped in a determinate concept, hence which aesthetically enlarges the concept itself in an unbounded way [...] in this case the imagination is creative, and sets the faculty of intellectual ideas (reason) into motion. Kant 2001 (1790) 5:315

Although without a clear reference to Kant, as in Putnam, I detect a similar tone in Rorty's "The Inspirational Value of Great Works of Literature" (*Achieving Our Country*). Apart from the "recontextualization", "self-transformation", and "evoking social hope", he sees the "stimulating inspiration" as the values that constitute a "great work of literature" (we should not forget that in Rortyan vocabulary this might also refer to what commonly is called "great philosophical books"). This "stimulating inspiration" refers to the audience and to other authors. A great work, or a great text in general, loses its capacity to be "great" when it does not have any impact upon the receivers (and commentators) and leaves them unmoved in their view of the depicted life, as if they had no will to see things from a new and different angle of view. A great work ought to be able to inspire people to various types of pro-social actions, be it in the further development of the idea of the work (promoting it as important), or doing something more for the sake of the message of the great work, among others.

This takes us back to the aesthetic dimension of the ethical messages in the philosophical discourses. If we agree that the term "inspirational", also in the sense of "stimulating an interminable discussion", has most frequently been associated with the aesthetic domain, we have another factor that should, in my view, be, so to say, persuasively visible in the narratives that deal with ethical values.

## 6. Conclusion

It is difficult for me to present any hierarchy of importance concerning the points enumerated above. Though I start this short summing up with the *via negativa* stimulation, it does not mean that I think it should be given any priority over cinematic philosophy or anything else. Nor do I think by any means that the list of possible points is complete.

Coming back to the *via negativa* stimulation, I suggest that pragmatists, especially the social pragmatists, be attentive to the Kantian philosophy of values. The main point, in my view, is to think why the Kantians

ignore the social dimension of the axiological problem and, even more importantly, at which contexts this type of ignorance has, or can have, the most significant consequences in terms of communication, modes of transmitting axiological message, the target audiences, and many others. The social pragmatists recognize the importance of the relations within particular groups of people for shaping the processes of evaluation, for setting norms, and for generating discourses by means of which the axiological issues can be articulated. If so, I mean if various social groups construct the hierarchies of values and the processes of evaluations in various ways, the social pragmatists should be sensitive not only to these processes but also to the ways of communication about them. Hence, various modes of transmitting the axiological messages should be preceded by the adequate recognition of the communicative practices of the given target audiences. For example, within such communicative practices, given types of images evoke imagination of the members of the given audience in a more persuasive way which means, among other things, that the given message should be communicated in accordance with this practice.

This leads me to another aspect, one indicated in 5.4., which, I think, deserves special attention. Invitation to the “interminable discussion” requires, among other things, breaking through various frontlines and trespassing on other fields of philosophy and culture. Not only does it require discussion with the representatives of different styles of practicing philosophy, but also an interdisciplinary approach and, perhaps the most difficult, reaching audiences that use very different modes of communication. This leads me to cinematic philosophy that I mentioned before (2.) and film (this should include such newest modes as Vlogs, Youtube clips, and similar) as one of the most popular ways of transmitting ideas to large masses of people. I am not thinking exclusively about cinematic philosophy and the role that cinema can play in promoting philosophical thinking. This also includes many forms of the newest technologies within social media.

I would like to conclude my remarks by quoting from Lachs’s *Stoic Pragmatism*. I quote him in the hope that “There is a large public waiting anxiously for what philosophy can offer—for careful thinking, clear vision, and the intelligent examination of our values. That is where the future of philosophy lies” (Lachs 2012, 193).

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PART V

SOCIAL AND  
POLITICAL ISSUES



# Kant as Public Intellectual and Political Theorist

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## 1. Introduction

Claiming Immanuel Kant as a public intellectual seems to be a claim about a Kant different from the Kant revealed in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Yet, the Kant as public intellectual is a Kant revealed in his public essays, and his letters on political issues. It is the views of this Kant that I believe provide grounds for finding similarities between Kantianism and pragmatism. In these public essays, Kant argues for the public use of reason, the freedom of the pen, the principle of publicity, and the necessity to make one's philosophical work public. He believes philosophy should initiate and promote enlightenment. He shares these beliefs with American pragmatists, such as Dewey and Royce, who argued that philosophers should actively address and speak about issues related to the lives of people and about public and political issues. Kant also argues for the role of public reason and actual deliberation among citizens. Deliberation among citizens and the public use of reason was another major concern of both Dewey and Royce.

Kant is not well-known for his political philosophy, but some contemporary scholars have pursued this aspect of his thought (Williams 1983, Arendt 1992, Foucault 1997, Clarke Weinstock 1996, Taylor 2006, Davis 2009, Riley 1979). Williams, Foucault, Clarke, and Arendt all focus, though in different ways, on Kant's notion of "enlightenment", on philosophy's role in this process, and on the role of the public use of reason. Thus, Williams argues that Kant believed the philosopher's role was to initiate the process of "enlightenment" in society and to seek to educate the pub-

lic (Williams 1983, 153). Foucault argues that, for Kant, the enlightenment is both a process, the process that releases mankind from immaturity, and an *ethos* or “*act of personal courage*”. Hence, Kant’s motto for the Enlightenment, says Foucault, is “*aude sapere* (dare to know)” (Foucault 1984, 34). Political scientist Michael Clarke argues that Kant’s central concern is to address the question: “How can reason take a leading role in morals and politics in face of political authority” (Clarke 1997, 56). Kant is concerned, says Clarke, with countering the charge made by priests and rulers that thinking for oneself is dangerous. Kant believes this leaves humanity in a state of immaturity; further, those in authority can exploit the fear, laziness, and ignorance of people. Kant recognizes that humans would rather be led, and he claims they lack resolve and courage. Thus, it is the duty of the philosopher to promote enlightenment and provide criticism of leaders (*ibid.*, 58-60). Arendt connects enlightenment with liberation from prejudices, from authorities, and with critical thinking. Critical thinking, she argues, has political implications because it is, in principle, “anti-authoritarian” (Arendt 1992, 32).

All these scholars stress the “principle of publicity”, described in *Perpetual Peace* as a “transcendental concept of public right” (Kant 1970 [1795], 125). Arendt argues that “publicity” is one of the key concepts of Kant’s political thinking. Foucault stresses the public use of reason, and Williams argues that the principle is a transcendental concept because “it is self-evident that for any rational person that any political objective which cannot be made *public* cannot also be made compatible with the principle of justice” (Williams 1983, 151). Arendt claims evil thoughts are, by definition, secret (Arendt 1992, 18). Kevin Davis argues that “The principle of publicity is formulated to answer the question of how politics may be pursued justly, i. e., in accord with the moral law” (David 1991, 406). Davis explicated Kant’s notion of “public law” as that which is “capable of being willed by all individuals of a public” (*ibid.*, 410). Kant, argues Davis, made Rousseau’s general will the public and its united will “a rational construct, an idea of reason” (*ibid.*).

Daniel Weinstock argues that Kant promotes a form of social contract theory that argues that the state emerges as a conceptual condition for “the possibility of a this-worldly realization of freedom” (Weinstock 1996, 392). According to Weinstock, Kant is concerned with stressing the need for institutional conditions for the realization of agents’ right to autonomy. His argument is that the *kind of state reason requires is one that insists upon the actual consent of citizens for laws* (*ibid.*). Thus, for Weinstock, Kant gives prime emphasis to public reason and deliberation among citizens.

This concern for public reason and public deliberation is also noted by scholars in philosophy of communication and rhetoric who have turned to Kant for a new understanding of the role of communication and rhetoric in the public forum. They are drawn to Kant's emphasis on the public use of reason. Thus, G. L. Ercolini writes: "Kant equates enlightenment with the public use of reason, underwritten by an underlying persistence, vigilance, and even insistence in demanding its use *at every point*" (Ercolini 2016, 3). Communication theorists argue that Kant provides us a basis for a philosophy of communication where reason is submitted to others in a public realm towards the goals of mutual interrogation and examination. Enlightenment, for these scholars, is an ethos of perpetual examination and inquiry (Stroud 2014). These themes have affinities with the ideas of Dewey and Royce of "deliberative democracy", especially with the emphasis of Dewey (1957) and Royce (1908) on the importance of communication and critical interaction to democracy. This does not mean, however, that Kant advocated specifically for a democratic government.

In what follows, I pursue the following themes. First, I will discuss the role of philosophy and the role of the philosopher as a public intellectual as well as one obligated to expose and criticize underlying assumptions, beliefs, and prejudices of one's time and society. As noted, above, a central theme for Kant was the notion of "free public reason". He gave extensive treatment to the concept of "popularity", and argued that philosophers were obligated to render technically meticulous philosophical work accessible and engaging to the broader reading public. One theme of pragmatist thinkers, especially Dewey and Royce, was the critique of philosophy as an "ivory tower" and esoteric affair. And like Royce and Dewey, Kant also emphasized "community", and in two senses: the human being as necessarily a social being and community as essential to the development of human enlightenment and maturity. Finally, there is the theme of "world community" and "universal hospitality". Sociability and communicability play a key role for Kant. He argues in his "Speculative Beginning of Human History" that the highest end intended for man is "sociability" (*Geselligkeit*) (Kant 1983 [1786], 50). Further, in *The Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant discusses a "*sensus communis*" and argues that one must admit that the impulse to society is natural to man and that *sociability* is "necessary for human beings as creatures destined for society, and thus as a property belonging to *humanity* [...]" (Kant 2000, 176). This leads Kant to his arguments in *Perpetual Peace* that the right of temporary sojourn, a right to associate, is one of the inalienable human rights and

that “*cosmopolitan right* should be limited to universal hospitality” (Kant 1983 [1795], 118). Kant’s ideas about perpetual peace and a federalism of nations are related to the ideas of Josiah Royce in his two works, *War, and Insurance* (Royce 1914) and *The Hope of the Great Community* (Royce 1916). These themes are also very relevant to current concerns about immigration and refugee status.

### The philosopher and enlightenment

Enlightenment, Kant tells us, is “*man’s release from his self-incurred immaturity*. *Immaturity* is the inability to use one’s own understanding without the guidance of another [...]” The motto of the enlightenment is therefore: *Sapere aude!* Have courage to use your *own* understanding (Kant 1970 a, 54). Crucial to the possibility of enlightenment, claims Kant, is freedom. And the freedom necessary is “freedom to make *public use* of one’s reason in all matters” (ibid., 55). Enlightenment for Kant is the point at which the human being departs from his self-incurred immaturity; it is the point at which a human being recognizes his or her autonomy. Kant believes that human beings are always responsible for their own affairs whether they acknowledge this or not. He fully recognizes that most humans prefer to be led by others and thus lack the courage to resolve to think on their own. However, the real concern for Kant is that this allows others, persons of authority such as priest and rulers, to exploit the ignorance and laziness and even the fear of these people. As indicated earlier, Kant is raising a central question, namely, “how can reason take a leading role in morals and politics in the face of opposition from political and religious authority?” He is criticizing the argument that thinking for oneself is dangerous. In fact, he believes that this ability is essential to humans in the actualization of their freedom. And it is the role of philosophers, argues Kant, to disseminate the message of the personal worth of all human beings and their vocation to think for themselves. Such an action must be a deliberate undertaking and in opposition to those who would prevent human beings from thinking for themselves. The educational project of enlightenment must be carried out in opposition to authority (Clarke 1997, 59). Although, Kant also believes that the ruler must play a strong role in facilitating the growth to maturity.

In arguing for the philosopher’s role as a public intellectual, Kant makes a distinction between the “public use” and “private use” of reason. For Kant, the public use of reason is “that use which anyone may

make use of *as a man of learning* addressing the entire *reading public*" (Kant 1970 a, 55). This distinction is made clearer in his essay, "The Contest of Faculties" (Kant 1970 d). This piece was written after his own experience with censorship of his *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (1793) under Frederick William I. The censorship occurred because of the outcry among biblical theologians who regarded any philosophical interpretation of the scriptures as illegitimate. The *Contest of Faculties* essay is his attempt to promote the university as the institutional location for the public use of reason. The universities in Germany in Kant's day were funded, much as public universities today in the United States, by territorial and municipal governments and thus university teachers were public employees. Because this was the case, governments assumed they had the right to censor curriculum and texts. Kant is addressing this situation in his essay, "The Contest of Faculties". Crucial to his argument are distinctions to be made between the four "faculties" of the academy: theology, law, medicine, and philosophy. He argues that the government has a right to take an interest in the activities of the first three areas because they have a much clearer and more direct influence on the lives of the citizens. Indeed, their recognized purpose was to provide ecclesiastical and secular officials for the government. Philosophy, however, was thought to be preparatory for these higher faculties. Given this mission, Kant argued that philosophy's only concern should be to speak the truth freely, to pursue scholarship, and to judge the teachings of the other faculties without the interference of the government.

In pursuing his argument, Kant's concern is for the enlightenment of the public, and the state. He writes: "*Popular enlightenment* is the public instruction of the people upon their duties and rights [...] the obvious exponents and interpreters [of these duties and rights] will not be officials appointed by the state, but free teachers of right, i.e. the philosophers" (Kant *ibid.*, 186). Philosophy should maintain a freedom of inquiry, characterized by public reason, examination, and critical engagement, since it does not produce candidates for civil positions (theology, law, and medicine) who engage in *private reason*, under the purview of obedience. The higher faculties, in his view, were more concerned with areas of life that the government could use to influence its people, namely, their civil well-being (law), their physical well-being (medicine) and their spiritual or eternal well-being (theology). Their primary goal is to teach obedience, without allowing subjects to take notice of the fact that their practices are founded on external sources: the Bible, the law of the land,

and regulations governing medical practice. Philosophy is not an instrument of rule. Philosophers speak as scholars, as public intellectuals, and as educators without strict adherence to the dictates of authority required in civil positions. The philosopher must engage in public reason and enlightenment to facilitate the people's discovery of their freedom and their own abilities to be thinking people.

Further, philosophy's role is discipline of the other faculties. Kant argues that the other faculties engage in conflict about who has the best interests of the people in their hands; they seek to influence the people by promises to guarantee happiness and they are often seen as "miracle workers or soothsayers or magicians" with privileged knowledge (Kant 1902, 7:30; Quoted in Clarke 1997, 69). Philosophy must challenge the other disciplines in public, not to "overthrow their teachings but only to deny the magic power that the public, superstitiously attributes to them" (ibid., 7:31). Philosophy needs to undertake this role today, especially as the public seems overly awed by science and technology and claims about persons being "only their genes" or only their "brains". The complexities of science and of studies of genes and neuroscience are overlooked or not understood.

Another crucial role for philosophy, in Kant's judgment, is to enlighten government regarding their own interests. He believes that the freedom to employ reason publicly in political matters would allow "for a better composition" of law through "candid criticism of the current legislation" (Kant 1902, 8:41). Further, the process of enlightenment is compatible and even dependent upon strong government. Philosophy needs the cooperation of political authority to achieve enlightenment for the people; public enlightenment requires enforceable civil authority; human beings can make free and open use of their reason within the context of humanly instituted and enforced laws. In presenting his argument, Kant appeals to the vanity of rulers as well as their desire to achieve effective government and good rule. Thus, he posits that rulers will get praise from the world today as well as in the future for getting rid of immaturity (Clarke 1997, 62). Wise rulers will realize that dogmatism, religious or otherwise, demeans his/her authority. In a bold statement, Kant asserts that a ruler must learn that his standing as a ruler is founded on the fact that he unites the people's will with his own (Clarke 1997, 62).

In his extensive discussion of Kant's political philosophy, Daniel Weinstock highlights the central role of public reason in Kant's arguments for the necessity of the state and Kant's concern for the autonomy and

freedom of persons. He claims that Kant has a type of social contract theory about the origins of the state, a type of civil association required by reason involving a kind of hypothetical deliberative process which allows assessment of the justification of laws and policies and which recognizes the limitations of individual human agents. It requires a context of free public debate. Weinstock writes:

Thus, the type of civil association required in order to protect each individual agent's pre-legal right to freedom is one that is underpinned by the idea of a general legislative will, a decision procedure characterized by reciprocity and equality, which assures that no one's right is left unprotected in legislation. Weinstock 1996, 399

This idea of a social contract serves for Kant mainly as a heuristic device which can be used by legislators. Kant writes:

It can oblige every legislator to frame his laws in such a way that they could have been produced by a united will of a whole nation and to regard each subject, in so far, as he can claim citizenship as if he consented within the general will. This is the test of the rightfulness of every public law. Kant 1970 [1792] c 79; 8:297

Weinstock points out that this is a *formal and not a substantive constraint on legislators*. It counsels them to follow a procedure of judgment in policy making that abstracts from the actual or ideal interests of citizens, putting forth legislation that *could* be assented to by all agents as autonomous persons concerned to protect their innate right to freedom and not as holders of such-and-such a conception of the good. Unlike other social contract advocates, Kant does not believe laws should be based on a supposedly substantive conception of human welfare or happiness and, in fact, he argues against legislation on eudemonistic grounds. Citing again the limitations of human agents and especially the fickleness and variability of people's own conceptions of their welfare, Kant holds that such legislation would be ad hoc and unprincipled. He writes:

No generally valid principles of legislation can be based on happiness. For both the current circumstances and the highly conflicting and variable illusions as to what happiness is make all fixed principles impossible, so that happiness alone can never be reconciled under one over-arching conception. Ibid., 73-4; 8:290

Kant believes that imposing a single conception of the good upon people by the state constitutes illegitimate paternalism. Our freedom as human

beings, functioning as a principle for constituting a state, can be expressed, says Kant, in the following formula:

No one can compel me to be happy in accordance with his conception of the welfare of others, for each may be happy in accordance with his conception of the welfare of others, for each may seek happiness in whatever way he sees fit, as long as he does not infringe upon the freedom of others to pursue a similar end which can be reconciled with the freedom of everyone else within a workable general law.

Ibid., 74; 8:290

This formula gives a significant role to free public reason and the ideal of deliberation among citizens. "If the law is such that a whole people could not possibly agree to it [...] it is unjust, but if it is at least *possible* that a people could agree to it, it is our duty to consider the law as just [...]" (ibid., 79; 8:297).

In his essay on Kant's notion of "publicity" and its relation to political justice, Kevin R. Davis argues that "publicity" is a test of the moral rightness of a law. He cites the following Kantian formula: "All actions relating to the right of other men are unjust if their maxim is not consistent with publicity" (Kant 1963, 120; 8:381). Publicity constitutes an *a priori* test, like the categorical imperative, of a maxim's conformity with the moral law, and hence of its justice. As with the categorical imperative, it concerns self-destructiveness. Kant is contending that an unjust action *could* not be announced in public and still be permitted to take place. The fact that a law cannot be announced in public without creating conditions under which the actions could not take place shows that they are incapable of universality and hence not just. Kant writes:

A maxim which I cannot divulge without defeating my own purpose must be kept secret if it is to succeed; and, if I cannot publicly avow it without inevitably exciting universal opposition to my project, this necessary and universal opposition which can be foreseen a priori is due only to the injustice with which the maxim threatens everyone.

Ibid., 130; 8:381

As with the categorical imperative, one can apply an *a priori* thought experiment which Kant does with the idea of rebellion as a legitimate political act. He writes: "The illegitimacy of rebellion is thus clear from the fact that its maxim, if openly acknowledged, would make its own purpose impossible" (ibid., 123; 8:383-4). It would have to be kept secret.

Davis argues, against other interpreters of Kant, that this is an *a priori* test and not about seeking the actual demands of a public. Kant is



too convinced of the limitations of finite humans and knows that there is no guarantee that an actual public is a good judge of the morality of its leaders. However, philosophers as public intellectuals can be effective in informing rulers and the people of the consequences of their actions. Stressing always the limitations of finite human judges whose moral and political imaginations are limited by their socially and historically conditioned vantage points, Kant highlights and stresses procedures of public deliberation and the freedom for philosophers and others to express their viewpoints. He writes:

The freedom of the pen is the only safeguard of the rights of the people. To try to deny the citizen this freedom... means withholding from the ruler all knowledge of those matters which, if he knew about them, he would himself rectify, so that he is thereby put into a self-stultifying position. For his will issues commands to his subject (as citizens) only so far as he represents the general will of the people.

Ibid., 85; 8:305

Kant emphasizes in several texts the epistemic importance of free public debate. Using the example of religious legislation, he argues that no contract committing future generations to specific doctrines can be valid. "One age cannot enter into an alliance or oath to put the next generation in a position where it would be impossible to extend and correct it knowledge [...]" (ibid.). The implications of Kant's claim are far-reaching as Weinstock observes.

The implications of this claim for public law would be quite radical. Indeed, it would mean that, since any given set of legislation is wedded to a historically and limited perspective and set of terms and concepts, it must be ratified anew or challenged by every successive generation of citizens, engaging in public deliberation so as to gradually 'enlighten' themselves through the gradually more complete elimination of morally arbitrary concepts and beliefs.

Weinstock 1996, 406

All of this, as Weinstock argues, stresses the epistemic importance of free public reason as well as, I believe, of the significant role of the philosopher in exercising freedom of the pen and thought. Recall that enlightenment is about immaturity and immaturity is a kind of heteronomy in thinking, relying on others to do our thinking for us. The remedy for immaturity in thinking is free public reason, where one speaks not from the contingent perspective of one's social position, but "as a man of learning

addressing the entire reading public" (Kant 1970 a, 54; 8:37). Errors of judgment in political and other matters requires intersubjective deliberation for their rectification so that agents can be freed of their taken-for-granted conceptualizations which they hold in a state of immaturity and which prevents them from exercising their full autonomy as self-legislating beings. It is the philosopher as a public intellectual who can bring about the enlightenment needed for our full freedom as human beings.

Thus, Kant's writings on perpetual peace, the context of faculties, and the enlightenment were works intended as a demonstration of the use of public reason by a philosopher and scholar. Kant also did not exempt his more theoretical writings from this demand. Kant, in fact, devised a plan to popularize the First Critique. In a letter to Christian Garve, August 7, 1783, Kant wrote: "every philosophical work must be susceptible of popularity; if not, it probably conceals nonsense beneath a fog of seeming sophistication" (Jaspers 1962, 124). For Kant, as already argued, the most important political freedom is the freedom to speak and publish. Arendt argues that this freedom is crucial for politics as well as philosophy. Thinking itself, for Kant, is dependent on the test of open and free examination. He argues that reason is not made "to isolate itself but to get into community with others" (Kant 1882). Philosophy, unlike science, which has a general validity because it can be repeated by others, must have validity in "general communicability". In his "Theory and Practice", he writes: "For it is a natural vocation of mankind to communicate and speak one's mind, especially in all matters that concern man" (Kant 1970 c, 85–6). Further, asserts Kant: "[...] the external power which deprives man of the freedom to communicate his thought also *publicly* takes away his freedom to *think*, the only treasure left to us in our civic life and through which alone there may be a remedy against all evils of the present state of affairs" (Kant, "Was heißt: Sic im Denken orientieren ", quoted in Arendt 1992, 40).

This brings us directly back to Kant's insistence on the principle of publicity. In *Perpetual Peace*, he asserts "the *transcendental formula of public right*: 'All actions that affect the right of men are wrong if their maxim is not consistent with publicity'" (Kant 1970 d, 135). Kant considers this principle both ethical and juridical. This principle, as many have asserted, is central to Kant's political philosophy. It concerns the freedom of expression and the freedom of the scholar, particularly the philosopher, to speak and write publicly. Both the essence and context of this principle are contained in the following assertion by Kant: "The freedom of the pen is the only safeguard of the rights of the people, although it must

not transcend the bounds of respect and devotion to the existing constitution [...]” (Kant 1978, 219). Again, the obligation of the philosopher, unlike other scholars in theology, law, or medicine, is to be defender and interpreter of human rights and the pursuit of truth.

Yet, we must see this in the context of Kant’s belief in loyalty to the state. Kant believed in obligation to the state and he wrote against the right to revolution. However, he also believed that a political leader would want to have good guidance to rule wisely. A good political leader would want to operate on truth and good information rather than ignorance. In Kant’s view, the greatest error a sovereign or political leader could make would be to deny the citizen the right to express his opinions freely, since this easily leads politicians to deny themselves access to information which help him/her to rule more prudently. For Kant, the only possible guarantee that the ruler will avoid unnecessary errors of judgment is that freedom of expression is fostered. This view of freedom of expression coincides somewhat with that of Mill who stressed that healthy competition in the expressions of opinions is the only guarantee that important views are not neglected and that better ones are considered. Thus, in Kant’s view, to be an effective leader, one must rule in the spirit of freedom.

It is not only about overcoming ignorance but also about persuasion and not coercion, consent and not dictatorship. Kant argues that “in all matters of human duties, each individual requires to be convinced by reason that the coercion that prevails is lawful [...] for every citizen, though he knows that obedience to law is essential for the maintenance of a peaceful, sable society, will be more content if that obedience is won and not forced upon him” (Kant 1975, 85). Through discussion and argument, citizen consent can be obtained for measures rulers decide to enact. A head of state, argues Kant, cannot expect people to merely accept assurances that he/she is acting in their best interests. Citizens must be able to assess for themselves if their leaders are ruling wisely. This is the reason there must be the principle of publicity: all maxims, laws, and policies *require* publicity so people can determine if they are in accordance with human rights and the ruler is acting in good faith and in their best interests. In Kant’s view, as already argued, the ruler only holds authority over the people because he/she represents the general will of the community. “Whatever a people cannot impose upon itself cannot be imposed upon it by the lawmaker either” (Kant 1970 c, 85). Knowing the intent of the law or policy, the people can inform the ruler where he has erred, and this is particularly the role of the philosopher.

Kant believes that freedom of expression is more likely to make a government successful. He writes: "And how else can the government itself acquire the knowledge it needs to further its own basic intentions, if not by allowing the spirit of freedom, so admirable in its origins and effects, to make itself heard" (ibid., 86). Thus, Kant defends the freedom of expression and the public use of the pen as a right of the loyal citizen to criticize the government. He assumes this is the right path to good government and an enlightened harmonious society. Such a view is much related to arguments by Dewey and Royce and others to defend deliberative democracy. Kant may be in error in assuming that the attitude of a ruler is one of good will toward citizens, but proponents of deliberative democracy may err in presupposing a settled, mature society which encourages argument and debate and which by a rational process will come to a consensus. All may err in presuming that legislators will be bound by Kant's hypothetical imperative to frame laws as if they are the general will of the people. What is needed seems to be a philosopher to enlighten and inform, to criticize and clarify, one who is impartial and represents a common understanding.

### 3. Sociability, judgment, imagination, impartiality, and the world citizen

Kant, as we have seen, asserts that our reasoning faculties and the path to enlightenment and maturity can only occur in a communal, dialogic context. For Kant, this belief is partly based on his notion of a common understanding, a '*sensus communis*', which is

A faculty for judging, that in its reflection takes account (*a priori*) of everyone's else's way of representing in thought, in order *as it were* to hold its judgment up to human reason and thereby avoid the illusion which, from subjective private conditions that could easily be held to be objective. (Kant 2000, 173-4) [...] The following maxims of the common human understanding are [...] 1. To think for oneself; 2. To think in the position of everyone else; 3. Always to think in accord with oneself. The first is the maxim of the *unprejudiced* way of thinking, the second of the *broad-minded* way. The third is that of the *consistent* way. Ibid.,174

Key to the unprejudiced way of thinking is imagination which is linked by Kant to "taste". Arendt argues that, in "taste", egoism is overcome; involved is intersubjectivity; the most important condition for judgment

is “intersubjectivity”. Judgments of taste, she says, “always reflects on others and their taste, takes their possible tastes into account” (Arendt 1967, 68). Kant speaks of beautiful art in terms of humanity’s universal feeling of participation and the capacity for being able to “communicate one’s inmost self universally” (Kant 2000, 229). Royce spoke often of the illusion of selfishness and developed a concept of “insight” that reveals my experience and that of my neighbor to be equally real and equally worthy of moral consideration (Royce 1880). Likewise, in his philosophy of loyalty, Royce argued that one must not devalue others’ loyalties although one may disagree with them and eventually find them wanting (Royce 1908).

The *sensus communis*, the idea of mankind, present in every human, leads Kant to assert that one is a member of a world community by the sheer fact of being human; this is one’s cosmopolitan existence. And by the virtue of world citizenship, one has an inalienable human right of temporary sojourn, a right to associate, and the right to universal hospitality. Further, for Kant, humans can be called civilized or humane to the extent that this idea becomes the principle of both their judgments and actions. The maxim is “always act on the maxim through which this ‘original compact’ can be actualized in general law”. This Kantian viewpoint is crucial to *Perpetual Peace*. Likewise, Royce’s notion of loyalty and community leads to the idea of a beloved community and to a notion of a federation of states, respecting the loyalty of each, while asking all to be committed to a world community of peace.

The capacity, through imagination, to think “representatively” and impartially is central to Arendt’s essay, “Truth and Politics”. Concerned about the conflict between truth and politics, she argues that “Truth, though powerless and always defeated in a head-on clash with the powers that be, possesses a strength of its own, whatever those in power may contrive, they are unable to discover or invent a valuable substitute for it” (Arendt 1967, 65). She claims that the standpoint of the truth-teller is that of impartiality and this develops in a mode of being alone. “Outstanding among the existential modes of truth telling are the solitude of the philosopher, the isolation of the scientist and artist, and the independence of the fact finder, the witness and the reporter” (ibid.). Arendt, like Kant, believes the philosopher must undertake the role of enlightenment and speak and write publicly to educate both the citizens and the state. Given our current political situation in the United States and the world, this may be the hope for a return to political leadership that is not afraid of truth or of extending universal hospitality to all—this would be a government that

seeks to act in the best interests of the public. This was truly an objective of the pragmatists, certainly of Dewey and Royce, and to a lesser extent, of James. Thus, the notion of the philosopher as a public intellect who speaks this truth to leaders is a common interest of pragmatism and Kant.

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# Kant and Pragmatist Feminism

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## 1. Introduction

Can Kant be of use to pragmatist feminism, and, if so, how? My answer is that, despite significant problems with Kant's work from a feminist perspective, some aspects of his moral philosophy can be helpful to pragmatist feminists. I will begin by briefly explaining pragmatist feminism and then addressing two reasons why feminists rightly have tended to avoid Kant's philosophy: (a) its emphasis on reason over emotion/body/nature and (b) Kant's contributions to the development of modern scientific racism.

Even with these problems with Kant's philosophy, however, his concept of respect for persons can be valuable for pragmatist feminism. Working from Kant's *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1990), I will develop pragmatically the Kantian notion of respect for the dignity of others, basing it neither on rationality cut off from inclination and emotion (contra Kant) nor on self-abnegation (in agreement with Kant's insistence on duty to oneself), but on relationships of regard for others' commitments (in something of the spirit of Kant's realm of ends). For help doing this, I turn to Josiah Royce's concept of loyalty to loyalty as developed in his *The Philosophy of Loyalty* (1995). I will argue that understanding Kantian respect in terms of Roycean loyalty can achieve three things. It helps feminists (I) avoid the emphasis on rationality central to Kant's moral philosophy, (II) reinforce Kant's inclusion of self-respect as an important component of respect, and (III) reduce the exclusionary aspects of the universalization of respect.



## 2. Pragmatist feminism and problems with Kant

The historical roots of pragmatist feminism date at least from the late nineteenth century, with Ida B. Wells-Barnett's fight against the lynching of African American men and Jane Addams's work with immigrants at Hull House (McKenna and Pratt 2015). It was in the early 1990s, however, that contemporary pragmatist feminism began to blossom, with the publication of Charlene Haddock Seigfried's groundbreaking *Pragmatism and Feminism* (1996), in which Seigfried argued for the productive connections between pragmatism and feminism. As Seigfried demonstrates, both fields generally value intersections and question sharp dualisms, for example, between theory and practice, using theory to illuminate practice and practice to transform theory. They also tend to ground their work in concrete experience, eschewing abstraction for its own sake. To pragmatism's typical emphasis on experience, feminists add the important question "whose experience?" helping pragmatism avoid generic accounts of subjectivity. Pragmatism, in turn, has developed conceptual tools such as the notion of habit that can be extremely useful for feminist analyses of gender/sexism and race/racism (Glaude 2016, MacMullan 2009, Sullivan 2001 and 2006).

Perhaps because of pragmatist feminism's wariness of theoretical abstractions disconnected from experience and its suspicion that dualisms tend to uphold forms of hierarchy, power, and privilege, it has had virtually no engagement with Kant's philosophy. When those concerns are combined with Kant's explicit statements denying women political rights and affirming husbands' domination of their wives, it is no wonder that many feminists consider Kant's theory to be a classic model of sexist philosophy (Schott 1997b, 5; cf. also Christman 1995). While a small number of feminists have argued that Kant's analysis of rationality can be valuable to feminism (cf. e. g., Piper 1997), like many other feminists, pragmatist feminists would disagree with the sharp and false dichotomy between reason and emotion that operates within Kant's work. This is a gendered dichotomy that associates men with reason and women with emotion with the effect of subordinating women. It also tends to be a raced dichotomy that connects whiteness with reason and mind, and people of color with emotion and body with the effect of subordinating the people of color. Indeed, Kant can be considered the father of modern scientific racism not so much because of his racist claims about black people—plenty of scholars in his day made similar statements—but because he argues that seeking a

racialized order in nature, e. g., the chain of being, is an excellent regulative principle of reason (Bernasconi 2001).

As Dilek Huseyinzadegan (2016) recently has urged, however, feminists should not simply discard Kant. Nor should we buy into the sharp divide between the “good Kant” who produced a Copernican Revolution in metaphysics and epistemology and the “bad Kant” whose anthropology is racist. In spirit with pragmatist feminists, Huseyinzadegan argues that this is a false dichotomy, as is the choice between “good Kant’s” central texts and “bad Kant’s” peripheral work. After all, Kant himself understood his physical geography (anthropology) as a practical application of his metaphysical system. If feminists decide to engage with Kant, they will have to grapple with the problematic as well as the promising elements of his philosophy.

Instead of avoiding Kant, feminist philosophers would do better to occupy a position of “constructive complicity” with regard to his thought (Huseyinzadegan 2016). The contemporary sense of critique valued by many feminist and other philosophers is heavily influenced by/comes from Kant, to mention one salient example. Rather than necessarily contaminating feminist work, “‘complicity can be a starting point’... [allowing us to] recognize our ‘proximity to the problems we are addressing’” (Fiona Probyn-Ramsey, quoted in Ahmed 2012, 5–6). Being constructively complicit with Kant, we might ask how contradictions in Kant could be productive, such as the contradiction between Kant’s universal egalitarianism and his hierarchy of persons, and the tension between his cosmopolitanism and his Eurocentric geography/anthropology. Feminists need to inherit Kant, warts and all, rather than dismiss him as if he is not fundamental to critical forms of philosophy today (Huseyinzadegan 2016). There is no pure space to inhabit here, a point that both pragmatists and pragmatist feminists should appreciate.<sup>1</sup>

### 3. Respect for the dignity of persons

How then might pragmatist feminists productively engage with Kant’s thought? In my view, the aspect of Kant’s philosophy that yields the most constructive complicity is its notion of respect for the dignity of persons. Kant explains dignity in connection with concept of the realm of ends, which results from the idea of rational beings guiding the maxims of their

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Schott 1997a for fuller criticism and partial defense of Kant’s philosophy from a variety of feminist perspectives, discussion of which is beyond the scope of this paper.

will by means of the universal law that they give to themselves (Kant 1990, 50). This realm is an ideal union of rational beings who treat both others and themselves as ends in themselves. It is ideal in that it might never be achieved in practice, but the realm of ends nevertheless helps us appreciate the dignity of rational persons. It also helps us understand that, in Kant's terms, everything has either dignity or a price. Having a price does not necessarily mean that it has a monetary value or that it can be bought. Kant defines having a price as being fungible: things with a price can be made equivalent to each other, which is to say that they can be interchanged without loss (*ibid.*, 51). Dignity, in turn, is that which is not fungible. Someone with dignity has no equivalent; they cannot be exchanged with someone else. They cannot be compared with or measured against another without a loss or violation of their personhood. In that sense, a person's "worth" is not a price—market price or otherwise—but an intrinsic, unconditional quality that Kant at times describes as a kind of holiness (*ibid.*, 52).

The intrinsic quality which gives a person dignity and makes him/her/ them worthy of respect is a result of the rational ability to give the moral law to oneself because one appreciates the intrinsic value of the good will. Understood in this way—that is, as Kantian autonomy—morality is the sole way in which humanity is capable of dignity (Kant 1990, 52). Nothing associated with nature or the laws of nature is dignified; only the person who is free from nature and obedient to one's own reason out of recognition of the good will is deserving of membership in the realm of ends (*ibid.*).

As many scholars have argued, the sharp opposition that Kant draws between reason and emotion/nature is untenable from both pragmatist and feminist perspectives (cf. e.g., Christman 1995, Dewey 1988, and Sedgwick 1997). Personhood need not be defined in terms of rationality divorced from nature, emotion, and embodiment, however. Rational agency (understood dichotomously) and personhood can and should be teased apart, as feminist philosopher Ann Cahill (2012) has argued. Cahill persuasively demonstrates how feminists can affirm the importance of respect for persons at the same time that they understand human personhood to be essentially and unapologetically embodied. Cahill's positive focus on the body is an important corrective to Kant's moral philosophy from which pragmatists and pragmatist feminists can benefit.

Yet even when modified to avoid Kant's narrow focus on disembodied rationality, the concept of personhood can be problematic. We might

say of Kant what Kant reportedly said about a fellow human being in his “natural” state: you can’t put up with him, nor can you do without him (Royce 1995, 39). Respect for rational beings entails disrespect for other beings via the distinction, even if only implicit, between the respected group (“persons”) and another group (“sub-persons”) which does not receive the same regard (Mills 1998). Even if one expands the circle of who is respected—for example, by eliminating the criterion of rationality—the line must always be drawn somewhere. Include all human beings, not just rational beings, we might insist, but then the question emerges: why respect only humans? Do not non-human animals also deserve respect? Expand the circle to include non-human animals, and the question merely is pushed back one step: why aren’t plants, trees, and other non-animal parts of nature deserving of respect? Expand the circle further to include respect for the entire world, and, in theory, no one or thing would be disrespected. In practice, however, it is impossible for finite beings to respect others universally without reducing the notion of respect to a meaningless abstraction. Herein lies one version of the infamous severity of Kant’s moral philosophy. Respecting one concrete group, however expansively one characterizes that group, involves lack of the same respect granted to another group. The double-edged nature of respect thus makes Kantian respect a moral category that pragmatist feminists cannot live with.

At the same time, however, the notion of respect for persons is something that we cannot live without. Whether women, people of color, and other subordinated groups count as people worthy of respect is an important feminist issue, irreducible to other important issues such as fair access to and the just (re)distribution of material resources in a society. It is not merely or perhaps even fundamentally an empirical issue, even though it has empirical effects, and it is on this point that Kant’s philosophy is most helpful to pragmatist feminism. I hypothesize that the issue is an ontological one of personhood, a question concerning who the beings are who fully matter. Understanding the inequities considered below as ontological, rather than merely economic, helps make sense of them in a way that economic approaches alone cannot do. As I make that claim, let me be clear that, for pragmatist feminists, ontology is always grounded in history. Who beings are and whether they matter are matters born out of historical contexts and practices, and on this point pragmatist feminists would part ways with Kant’s transcendental philosophy. Yet they would agree with Kant that the question of who matters is something other or in addition to an empirically quantifiable question. While it is not an

*a priori* question—prior to experience—it is something of a transcendental question in that it concerns non-empirically verifiable conditions for the possibility of particular experiences of (sub)personhood.

The problem of gendered and racial injustice in the United States, for example, is not merely economic or social. It is ontological. It is the situation, sedimented by long historical practice, in which the personhood of women and people of color generally is regarded as less than that of men and white people. This is the problem of the value gap, as Eddie S. Glaude Jr. (2016) has called it in his analysis of race and white domination, or the problem of social value in Christopher Lebron's (2013) words. As Glaude argues,

We talk about the achievement gap in education or the wealth gap between white Americans and other groups, but the value gap reflects something more basic: that no matter our stated principles or the progress we think we've made, white people are valued more than others in [the United States], and that fact continues to shape the life chances of millions of Americans. The value gap is in our national DNA. Glaude 2016, 31

Lebron (2013, 42) concurs that American national character is problematically shaped by the marginalization of black interests and well-being, placing white privilege and white supremacy at the center of the nation's normative framework.

We also can see the value gap with respect to gender in the fact that, when women in the United States take over an occupation that previously had been dominated by men, the salary for that work drops. It is this pattern—and not, as sometimes is surmised, that women might be less educated or less qualified or refuse to pursue higher paying jobs—that explains why American women's median earnings have remained about 77% of men's wages despite civil rights and other advancements for women in the United States (K. Miller 2017). As sociologists Paula England, Asaf Levanon, and Paul Allison have documented (C. Miller 2016), there is considerable evidence that employers place lower value on work done by women. The amount that wages fell varied across different professions, but even after controlling for education, work experience, skill sets, and geography, when women became park rangers or camp directors, for example—jobs that shifted from predominantly male to predominantly female from 1950 to 2000 in the United States—wages fell 57%. Likewise, this fall occurred for the jobs of ticket agent (43% drop in wages), designer (34% drop), housekeeper (21% drop), and biologist (18% drop). In a

reverse pattern that demonstrates the same problem, when computer programming transitioned in the second half of the twentieth century from a menial job done by women to a field dominated by men, wages and prestige went up significantly. The feminization of labor is an important economic issue with practical consequences in people's lives, but economics alone cannot explain these patterns, which I argue are grounded in the disrespect of the personhood of women.

I am arguing that this *economic* data reflects or, we might say, is grounded in something *ontological*. In Kant's specific language, what the wages ("prices") listed above reflect is a question of dignity. This is a somewhat ironic claim, I realize, since it conflicts with Kant's assertion that a person's dignity does not have a price. And yet, in capitalist societies especially, people's value often *is* given an economic price, and it is Kant's philosophy that can help us recognize situations in which money means more than money. In many cases, money is a sign of the value of the person in society's eyes. Understood in that way, the wages of American women indicate that their average ontological value is about three-fourths (77%) that of (white) men. In other words, the economic data reveals or represents that they are about three-fourths less worthy of respect than (white) men. The numbers are even more striking, moreover, once we factor in race. While women in general might be ontologically worth 77% of white men, that number hides differences among women of different races. For example, based on their average wages as of 2015, we might say that African American women's personhood is worth about 63% (63 cents earned for every dollar earned by white men in the same job) and Latina women's personhood is worth about 54% (54 cents) of that of full persons (white men) (K. Miller 2017). (This data suggests that white women's average wages are more than 77% but still less than 100% of that of white men.) As Sara Ahmed (2017, 147) laments speaking as a woman of color about the academy, "the very fact of your arrival erodes the value of what it is that you enter, tarnishing something shiny". This value is not monetary even though it likely is related to a salary in this case. Ahmed made her observation after a colleague, who was a woman of color, became a professor, and someone in turn remarked, "They give professorships to anyone these days" (ibid.). The dignity of being in the academy drops—30%? 40%?—when "even" a woman of color can become a professor, which might help explain the ferocity with which the discipline of philosophy has fought to remain overwhelmingly white and male.

The claim about the impact of race on personhood is further supported by housing disparities in the United States that are racially patterned. In two similar suburbs in the Atlanta, GA area, for example, recovery from the 2007–08 housing collapse has been starkly different (Badger 2016). The houses in South DeKalb county look identical to those in North DeKalb, with manicured lawns and nearby golf courses, and both neighborhoods are owned by a similar set of middle-to-upper-class doctors, lawyers, teachers, and other professionals with six-figure incomes. The houses in both neighborhoods lost a great deal of value when the real estate market crashed, but as of 2016 the houses in North DeKalb, a community that is predominantly white, had recovered most of their value. In contrast, houses in South DeKalb, a community that is almost entirely African American, are still worth 25–35% less than they were before the crash. Even after controlling for income levels, measures of housing quality, the effect of subprime loans and foreclosures, and how far prices fell in 2007–08, race stands out as the reason that houses in black zip codes in the South, and Atlanta in particular, have lingering negative equity. The real story about America's current housing market no longer is about the devastating crash; it is about the crash's destructive racial aftermath (Badger 2016). And that, I would argue, is an ontological story: it is a story that cannot be adequately told or understood without understanding the racial value gap in the United States. White people in America generally are considered to have more intrinsic worth and thus are deemed more worthy of respect than black people and most other people of color are.

A similar claim could be made about nations other than the United States. I have focused primarily on the United States because a great deal of economic data on gender and race in America is available and also because its gender and racial inequalities are so striking and persistent, but data reflecting similar economic inequalities is available for other countries, such as Brazil, the United Kingdom, and South Africa (Downie 2009, Stewart 2017, *The Guardian* 2016). In contrast, in countries such as France, which have outlawed the official use of racial or ethnic categories, data on racial inequalities is virtually impossible to find, but data on gender pay gaps is not (Pasha-Robinson 2016). In yet another contrast, in countries such as Morocco, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Nigeria, and Vietnam, there is virtually no pay gap, and women actually make slightly more than men on average in Morocco (Kauflin 2017).

The example of Morocco points to a related but different issue. While Moroccan women who work for wages have relatively high earnings be-

cause of their high education levels, only 27% of Moroccan women are in the labor force in comparison with 78% of Moroccan men (Kauflin 2017). In other words, Moroccan women do not have equal economic status with men. Perhaps they would not want it, however, since it often is seen as the duty of men to provide income and wealth for the family (Morocco would not be unique in this respect, of course, since this view also persists in countries such as the United States). Does their unequal economic status necessarily mean that they have a lower ontological status? One might reply that even if the United States and other capitalist countries measure a person's worth economically, that does not mean that all other nations and societies must do so. Other measures of ontological worth are available, one might argue, and those measures might be more appropriate than economic ones in Morocco and other (non-Western) countries.

I agree that multiple measures of ontological worth can exist, and I do not wish to falsely universalize American value gaps. My claim is not that ontological worth is always and only reflected economically, and I recognize that representing dignity with money is a strong feature of capitalist societies in particular. It also is difficult to make global comparisons between countries that represent ontological worth financially. For example, are white American women worth more or less than white Bulgarian men, who benefit from one of the widest gender pay gaps across the globe but who still make less than American women on average (Kauflin 2017)? While I cannot answer that question here, I will point out that most nations in the world today use some kind of economic system, including currency, to remunerate labor even as economic measures of value might coexist with other measures of worth. It thus is a fair question to ask: to what extent are economic and other quantifiable inequities in a particular nation indicative of ontological inequities, across whatever ethnic, racial, classed, gendered or other axes of identity are salient in that nation? Kant's notion of personhood can help us recognize that when persistent patterns of economic and other quantifiable inequities exist, something more than just mere numbers, financial or otherwise, likely is at stake.

#### 4. Kant, Royce, and loyalty to loyalty

If pragmatist feminists can't live with a Kantian notion of respect but also can't live without it, then what should we do? Are there ways to develop Kantian respect that might mitigate its most problematic aspects? To grapple with these questions, I suggest developing another relationship



of productive complicity, this time with the pragmatist idealism of Josiah Royce. For pragmatist feminists, using Royce involves a relationship of complicity because of the racism and imperialism that saturate Royce's social philosophy (Curry 2009). And yet his ethics can help us maximize the valuable aspects of Kant's moral philosophy. My goal in this section is not to make detailed comparisons of Kant's and Royce's ethics, which other scholars have ably done (cf., for example Foust 2012 and Grady 1975). My goal also is not to eliminate the tensions in the relationship that feminists might have with Kant (or with Royce, for that matter). Rather, I turn to Royce's (1995) concept of loyalty to loyalty to flesh out a pragmatist feminist notion of respect that does not center on rationality, that highlights the importance of self-respect in connection with respect for others, and that resists exclusionary models of personhood somewhat better than Kant's philosophy does.

Royce's ethical philosophy never explicitly discusses embodiment nor, to my knowledge, does it ever directly address mind-body dualism. And yet it implicitly challenges, or at least bypasses hierarchies of mind and rationality over body and emotion by placing feelings of loyalty at its center. Even if loyalty is considered by some to be a quality or state rather than an emotion, it is clear that for Royce, loyalty is a passionate emotion. More specifically, Roycean loyalty combines passion with action. Loyalty is never merely a feeling or an emotion. A person's felt loyalties drive her to do things in support of the causes to which she is devoted (Royce 1995, 10). There is a kind of duty to loyalty in Royce's ethics, reminiscent of and yet reworking Kant's notion of autonomy. Roycean loyalty is autonomous not because a person uses reason to give herself the moral law, but because she is driven by her own will, with "will" here meaning what a person cares passionately about in contrast to merely conforming to what other people think is interesting or important. Nothing external can explain why a person has a felt commitment to this duty rather than another one. Only her own will can make that decision in such a way that the felt commitment has force, even as the loyal person believes that the cause to which she is devoted is intrinsically valuable apart from her devotion to it (ibid., 11). In that way, the loyal person's devotion to a cause bears some similarity to the autonomous person's appreciation for the intrinsic value of the good will. And yet, as Royce insists in a much more Nietzschean than Kantian fashion, each person must learn and even *create* their own will (ibid., 16). "Your duty is what you yourself will to do", Royce (ibid., 14) explains, "in so far as you clearly discover who

you are, and what your place in the world is". Royce's ethics thus gives Kant's concepts of duty and will an existential-pragmatic twist, transforming Kantian autonomy into a passionately driven individualism.

In contrast with Kant, duty for Royce is never abstractly rational. While some scholars have claimed that Roycean loyalties are rationally formed life plans (cf. e.g., Foust 2012, 74), I am concerned that this understanding of loyalty smuggles too much Kantian rationality into Royce's ethics. Royce does not claim that duty or loyalty is irrational; he instead sidesteps the rational-emotional dichotomy that fuels Kant's philosophy. For Royce, loyalty is part of a life plan that is fully charged with personal desire and emotion. In one of the few places where Royce mentions embodiment, moreover, he explains that genuine loyalty is loyalty to something that can be interpreted in terms of "bodily deeds" (Royce 1995, 62). Royce is adamant that impersonal moral theories can only fail; morality must be rooted in something specific that a person finds gripping (*ibid.*, 38). Listen to the passion in Royce's words as he summarizes his "moral formula": "Find your own cause, your interesting, fascinating, personally engrossing cause; [and] serve it with all your might and soul and strength" (*ibid.*, 65). This is the only way that autonomy can be carried out in practice (*ibid.*, 45).

Even as it is necessary, however, individual passion is not sufficient to satisfy the human need for meaning and purpose in life. For Royce, loyalty, as opposed to love, always involves devotion to an idea or a cause that is larger than the individual person. Loyalty is intrinsically social even as it is irreducibly individual. Loyalty weaves the individual in a social world through the individual's passions, uniting her with others through the ties that bind them together (Royce 1995, 11). Loyalty to a cause larger than the individual helps an individual intensify her self-consciousness by helping identify and sharpen her individual will (*ibid.*, 21). This provides a form of self-expression that might appear to be self-sacrifice, but in fact it is "selfish" rather than selfless in that the individual acts solely to discover and delight in who she is and her place in the world.

This point is important to feminists in particular because of the way that self-denial traditionally has been and often continues to be required of women. They often are expected to subordinate their interests and desires to others, be that their spouse, children, parents, students, co-workers, or whomever. An ethics that prioritizes self-interest and self-respect even as it does not pit the self against the other is one that implicitly challenges sexist expectations of women. This aspect of Royce's philosophy also il-

luminates a productive tension in Kant's work: Kant's insistence on the importance of self-respect can be used as a tool to serve feminist aims, subverting the subordination of women in his work. Even appreciating this tension, however, pragmatist feminists will find that Royce's ethics fits the description of an ethics that eliminates the selfish-selfless dichotomy better than Kant's ethics does. By removing the requirement of rationality from respect and tying individual passions with broader causes, Royce counters both the disrespect for women and the accompanying self-denial of women found in Kant's (and other philosophers') ethical theory.

If respect in the form of loyalty is the highest good, then the more that loyalties flourish in the world, the better. This observation leads Royce to his version of the Kantian categorical imperative: with your loyalties, act so as to increase the amount of loyalty in the world (Royce 1995, 57). Put more succinctly, be loyal to loyalty itself. Royce's call for meta-loyalty is no abstraction, however. His universalization of loyalty is not meant to uphold an abstract ideal, but rather to encourage people to think about how their particular loyalties support other people's particular loyalties. We can see here again how Royce's ethics includes self-interest even as it essentially connects that interest to the interests of others. Loyalty to loyalty never erases the fact that loyalty is a form of self-interest in which a person's desires drive her loyalties. A person's passionate devotion to a cause never disappears when she is loyal to loyalty.

The intrinsic connection between self-interest and the interests of others can take place in multiple ways. Just as there are two forms of duty for Kant, negative and positive, for example, there are two related forms of loyalty to loyalty for Royce. The negative form of loyalty to loyalty is to not conflict with or destroy other people's loyalties with one's own (Royce 1995, 63). The positive form is to support other people's loyalties by the example of the passion of one's own loyalty (*ibid.*, 64). Importantly, in its positive form loyalty does not involve adopting or supporting other people's loyalties directly. One can only be passionate about one's own passions, and "selflessly" working for something to which you yourself are not loyal is not loyalty on Royce's account. In fact, such selflessness is unethical in Roycean terms. But one still can and should support other people's loyalties because loyalty often is contagious: it can inspire others to find and devote themselves to their own loyalties (*ibid.*, 65). A loyal person's passion can serve as an important model for others' passions. As I understand the positive duty to model loyalty, moreover, it should not be associated with narcissism, egoism, or other forms of self-conceit that

lift oneself up by comparison with and dumping on others. If and when loyalty is contagious, it most likely is enacted in a non-spectacular manner. In addition, modeling loyalty is not achieved by lecturing or shaming others into being loyal. (For more on the counterproductive ethical effects of shame, cf. Sullivan 2014). The person who is loyal to loyalty is neither self-righteous nor a show-off. For Royce, both negative and positive loyalty are important and, indeed, complementary. By serving one's own cause passionately and avoiding unnecessary conflict with other people's loyalties when doing so, a person can increase the amount of loyalty in the world and encourage loyalty to loyalty in others.

What happens, however, when a person discovers that her loyalty hinders or destroys other people's loyalties? What should a loyal person do then? In a Kantian spirit, Royce answers that it is disloyal, and thus morally wrong, to break a loyal relationship *unless* a higher commitment to loyalty causes the change. A person's passions might change if she realizes that that they extinguish the passions of others. But on Royce's terms, changing one's passions should not be done out of self-negation. It should be done out of a passionate commitment to passion and the desire for the world to be a more passionate place. Out of loyalty to loyalty, therefore, I might stop being loyal to a particular cause. Broken in this way, however, my previous loyalty will still be something to which I am tied. Royce gives the example of a person who is loyal to a gang of robbers (Royce 1995, 97). This person is indeed loyal, but she is not loyal to loyalty until she realizes that her robber loyalty conflicts with other loyalties. Out of that greater loyalty, she would break with the gang. She would always have a special relationship with and obligation to the gang members, however, because of her previous, narrower loyalty. This is an obligation to help them achieve loyalty to loyalty by modeling it through her life as a former robber.

The robber gang example helps demonstrate how Roycean respect for loyalty allows pragmatist feminists avoid the Kantian problem of exclusion that occurs when respect is tied to rational personhood. The key is Royce's claim that breaking with the gang—that is, no longer respecting the gang's narrow loyalty centered on robbery—does not involve the former robber's scorning, abandoning, or otherwise disrespecting his fellow and sister gang members. Drawing on Glaude (2016), we could say that breaking with the gang need not create a value gap in which the gang members are disrespected or seen as inferior to people who have left the gang. Quite the opposite. The break in question does not cut off all ties.

Loyalty to loyalty instead brings about a transformation in relationships, one that includes a different and perhaps even a stronger responsibility to the former gang members since they previously shared a devotion to the same cause. The robber's loyalty to his former comrades might even increase even as the content, or cause, of that loyalty changes.

Of course, the other members of the gang might not experience this change as one that includes ongoing respect for or loyalty to the members of the gang. They might experience the break as treachery, especially if they continue to be devoted narrowly to their cause. Indeed, I think this is a likely outcome of universalizing one's loyalties, one that can make the life of loyalty isolated and lonely. I will return briefly to this issue below. But first, I want to adapt the robber gang example to analyze white people's loyalty to their race and how they might live that loyalty ethically. Royce helps us see that *more* loyalty, rather than less—in the form of loyalty to loyalty—is the way out, or we might say the way forward, when it comes to eliminating white people's habits of racial privilege and alleged superiority to people of color. Here is Royce's robber gang story verbatim, this time with "robber gang" and similar references changed to "privileged white people":

The once awakened and so far loyal [white person with racial privilege] would be found by his newly discovered loyalty to humanity in general, to break his oath to [other privileged white people]. But even in such a case, he would still owe to his [white privileged] comrades of the former service a kind of fidelity which he would not have owed had he never been a member of the [white privileged] band. His duty to his former [white privileged] comrades would change through his new insight. But he could never ignore his former loyalty, and would never be absolved from the peculiar obligation to his former [white privileged] comrades,—the obligation to help them all to a higher service of humanity than they had so far attained. Royce 1995, 97

For a white person to break with other white people who passively accept and/or actively seek racial privilege and superiority—that is, to break with a gang of white loyalists—would mean for her to live that loyalty such that it did not conflict with and perhaps even supported the loyalties of members of other racial and ethnic groups. (Note that as used here, the term "white loyalist" is not restricted to members of explicit white supremacist groups, but also includes white liberals who might consider themselves non- or even anti-racist.) For a white person to be loyal to loyalty in this way, however, would not mean for her to shun or disrespect

her former comrades. It would not create a value gap in which white loyalists were seen as inferior or disrespected. As a loyal person, the white person working for racial justice should not ignore her former comrades, but instead should transform her relationship to them so that in living their whiteness, she and other white people respect the loyalties of people of other races. As someone loyal to loyalty, a white person can simultaneously fight against white supremacy and racial injustice and be loyal to other white people (Sullivan 2012).

The same could be said for members of other privileged social groups with loyalties to their causes. For a man to be loyal to and then break with masculinity based on male privilege, for example, would mean for him to determine how to live his previous loyalty to other men in ways that do not conflict with and perhaps even support loyalties of women and other genders. (As with the white loyalist, the male loyalist described here is not necessarily a member of an alt-right men's group, but includes most men in societies with gendered hierarchies that privilege males.) A man who is loyal to loyalty would not stop being a man, nor would he disrespect or ignore other men. He instead would have a particular obligation and fidelity to other men to help them transform masculinity so that it is no longer grounded in alleged male superiority and male sexual aggression. As someone loyal to loyalty, a man can simultaneously be a feminist and be loyal to other men.

In the case of both gender and race, however, it is likely that the person who is loyal to loyalty would be considered a traitor by his or her former comrades. From the perspective in which loyalty is always and only particular or "local", transforming loyalty through its universalization can seem like a *reduction* rather than an increase in loyalty by allegedly destroying or abandoning concrete loyalties. Certainly this has been the case historically when it comes to race. In the United States, for example, the white person who has worked for racial justice often has been labeled a "race traitor" by the Ku Klux Klan and other white supremacist groups. While the use of "gender traitor" historically has been less common—although that is changing rapidly with the rise of so-called men's rights movements in the United States—the notion of a gender traitor also operates with a sharp opposition between social groups and charges a person with betraying their gender. The "neomascularity" website Return of Kings, for example, scornfully charges that some men are providing "vital reinforcements" to feminism by being "turn-coat gender traitors who willfully cannibalize other men to please their female overlords" (Sonofra 2013). These brief

examples point to the deep roots of exclusionary versions of loyalty and respect. Pragmatists and pragmatist feminists should not underestimate how socially and personally difficult it can be to universalize loyalty and respect so that they are not divisive. Here we see that Royce's ethics also includes a severity related to universalization, albeit not identical to that of Kant. The idea of loyalty to loyalty might sound simple in its abstraction, but putting it into concrete practice can be a very difficult ethical task.

## 5. Conclusion

I have argued that for all the significant problems with Kant's philosophy, his notion of respect for persons is valuable to pragmatist feminism. It illuminates racial and gendered value gaps that are difficult to identify or understand without some kind of ontological concept of personhood, and for that reason pragmatist feminists should be willing to become constructively complicit with Kant's philosophy. However, respect for persons need not and should not be yoked to rationality as understood by Kant. It can be grounded in emotion in such a way that respect for people's passionate attachments, including one's own, is universalized. This is what is accomplished when we pragmatize Kantian respect with Roycean loyalty, and for this reason pragmatist feminists also should be willing to become constructively complicit with Royce's philosophy. While it does not eliminate all the challenges of respecting others in non-divisive ways, Royce's concept of loyalty to loyalty can help pragmatist feminists fight racial and gendered value gaps that harm people of color and women of all races.<sup>2</sup>

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# Peace, Bread, and Ideas for a Cosmopolitan World: Addams' Unknown Pragmatist Legacy Today

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## 1. Introduction: Pragmatism and Kant's political philosophy

Pragmatists can accurately be called “Kant’s children” (Murphey 1968). As Sami Pihlström (2010) has recently shown, many pragmatist topics have been inherited from the transcendental questions posed by Kant: “What can I know?”, “What ought I to do?”, and “What may I hope for?”. The first of these refers to *epistemology and metaphysics*, and addresses the question of how we construct our experience of the natural world. The second is concerned with *ethics*, i. e., the way we judge and act morally. The third question concerns *belief and religion*, where no empirical evidence supports faith. These questions, together with a fourth, “What is man?”, seen as a summary of Kant’s philosophy, have been the main axes “around” which pragmatists have been working while assimilating Kantian ideas (McGiffert 1910, Pihlström 2010, Henschen 2013). Meanwhile, some important Kantian questions are not exhaustively discussed without taking into consideration his post-critical writings: questions of peace and war, universal history, anthropological antagonism, enlightenment, education, moral progress, etc. These all belong to the “primacy of practice”, which is a postulate for both Kant and pragmatists. For this reason, this paper focuses on the question “What can I hope?”, not in relation to religious faith, but from the perspective of possible social amelioration contained in Kant’s latest writings: *What is Enlightenment?* (1784), *Idea for*

*a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View* (1784), and *Perpetual Peace* (1795). The aim of this paper is to review Kant's political philosophy from a pragmatist perspective.

Kant's view of history as a plan of nature to reach perpetual peace between nations and its cosmopolitan ideal as the historical and moral *telos* has been very influential in shaping our current world in many ways. According to my reading, these ideas are very close to what I call the *utopian moment* within pragmatism: the prosecution of an ideal society which results from the development of human capacities and virtues, the progressive reduction of social injustice, and continuous deepening of the meaning of democracy. Universal social amelioration is at the core of both Kant's political philosophy and pragmatism. For pragmatists, this is to be achieved through the good use of reason and the reconstruction of experience. In some sense, we can see the pragmatist notion of a "community of inquiry" as both an epistemic and a political ideal: the prosecution and longing for some sort of enlightenment.<sup>1</sup> Just as Kant did, so pragmatist philosophy examines human history not only to provide historical evidence of past human experience and nature, but also as a series of stages towards the realization of a normative ideal.

The influence of Kant on pragmatist philosophy of history might be indirect but nevertheless important, since we find Kantian echoes in many progressive philosophies of the nineteenth and twentieth century, including pragmatism. It might be easy to concede that Kant's approach to historical dynamics fits well with another crucial impulse for classical pragmatism: the work of Charles Darwin on the evolution of the species. It is also worth noting that classical pragmatists concerned with pacifism, such as William James and Jane Addams, appealed to human nature as the driving force behind universal history in a way that draws together both Kantian and Darwinian theses. Nature's plan and the greatest problem for the human species according to Kant's fifth proposition in *Ideas* is "*that of attaining a civil society which can administer justice universally*" (Kant 1980, 45). Universal administration of justice should lead to perpetual peace between states, furthered by a Federation of Nations and cosmopolitan law.

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<sup>1</sup> "Community of inquiry" was a concept developed by Charles Sanders Peirce, initially restricted to the philosophy of science. John Dewey extended it to a broader social context, in particular, educational environments. Patricia Shields has applied the three key ideas contained in the concept (problematic situation, scientific attitude, and participatory democracy) to public administration (Shields 2003, 511).

More than two centuries went by without this desired state of universal peace being reached. Indeed, quite to the contrary, world history provided more and more examples of bloodbaths, as James (1971, 4) once stated. However, the ideal seems, to many of us, to be an aspiration which can never be given up. It is, therefore, our turn to revisit these ideas with the conceptual tools that pragmatism offers us to transcend Kant's political limitations and figure out how we should go about pursuing perpetual peace. The main limitation of Kantian political theory is, according to some feminist criticisms and standpoint theory, the presumption that universalization "assumes that the author takes an objective view disconnected from entanglements of experience" (Hamington 2009, 53). To my mind, we can better avoid blind formalization and universalization by recovering Jane Addams' legacy, a legacy that remains largely unknown to both pragmatists and political philosophers. Addams provided appealing philosophical arguments that connected pacifism, social justice, and a cosmopolitan spirit. I will provide an exposition of her arguments in dialogue with Kant in the hope that this allows us to better comprehend what is required to work towards perpetual peace in the future.

## 2. Jane Addams as a political philosopher

If there is someone within the pragmatist tradition of thought who has fought for perpetual peace, that, without a doubt, is Jane Addams (1860–1935). Addams is the only pragmatist thinker to have been awarded a Nobel Peace Prize, in 1931, and despite being not only a tireless social reformer but also a prolific philosopher, her legacy, as I have said, remains largely unknown (Deegan 1988, 1990; Fischer 2010, 2013; Hamington 2009, 2014; Hay 2012, Lake 2014, Haslanger 2017, Miller 2013, Mueller 2011, Pinhard 2009, Seigfried 1996, Warren 2009). Interest in Jane Addams has increased over the last three decades, but there is still no systematic consideration of her contributions, as exists for other classical pragmatists. It is worth addressing the question as to the reason for her exclusion from the official genealogy of pragmatism, which is constituted by some combination of John Dewey, William James, George Herbert Mead, Charles Sanders Peirce, Josiah Royce, George Santayana, and Alfred North Whitehead (Hamington 2009, 32).

Hamington suggests that she might not have been perceived as a philosopher for four reasons: "sexism, the strength of the division between academic disciplines, prejudices against activists and writing style" (Ham-

ington 2009, 32). The divisions between academic disciplines should no longer be a reason for overlooking Addams, since we are experiencing a general trend towards interdisciplinary work. Louis Menand (2001, 306) calls Addams a “sociologist” and Hull House, the settlement house she founded together with Ellen Gates Starr in 1889 in “one of the worst urban areas in the United States” (Menand 2001, 308) a “sociology laboratory”.<sup>2</sup> Addams’ social work is mostly what she is known for, but having published at least ten books<sup>3</sup> and hundreds of papers makes her an outstandingly public philosopher. John Dewey once declared that Addams’ essay “A Modern Lear” (1912) was “one of the greatest things I ever read both to its form and its ethical philosophy” (Westbrook 1991, 89).<sup>4</sup>

Prejudice against activists may be a reason for not reading texts within other philosophical traditions, but that kind of prejudice should not affect pragmatism since pragmatism defines itself as a philosophy “that stresses the relation of theory to praxis, takes the continuity of experience and nature as revealed through the outcome of directed action as the starting point of reflection” (Seigfreid 1996, 6). It is interesting to note that the fact of being involved in politics can today be a mitigation of philosophical criticisms. For instance, Richard Bernstein in one of his latest books introduces some criticism of Dewey for lacking concrete political initiative or institutional analysis. Bernstein then goes on to defend Dewey with this simple argument: “these criticisms need to be tempered by the fact that Dewey was the leading social reformer of his time” (Bernstein 2010, 87). A list of Dewey’s achievements in the national and international political arena is then given. Addams’ list of achievements is by no means less significant. Besides Hull House, she helped found the National Associ-

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<sup>2</sup> Hamington defines Hull House as “an incubator for social programs” and a “feminist ‘think tank’” (Hamington, 2009, 3, 25); for Menand, it was “primarily an educational institution” (Menand 2001, 308); Shield declares that it was “a living example of a community of inquiry guided by Addams” (Shields 2003, 526).

<sup>3</sup> Addams authored ten books: *Democracy and Social Ethics* (1902), *Newer Ideals of Peace* (1906), *The Spirit of the Youth and the City Streets* (1909), *Twenty Years at Hull-house* (1910), *A New Conscience and an Ancient Evil* (1912), *The Long Road of Woman’s Memory* (1916), *Peace and Bread in Time of War* (1922), *Second Twenty Years at Hull-house* (1930), *The Excellent Becomes the Permanent* (1932), *My friend, Julia Lathrop* (1935). She co-authored *Women at the Hague: The International Congress of Women and its Results* (1915, with Emily G. Balch and Alice Hamilton) and published, together with other residents of Hull House, the *Hull-House Maps and Papers* (1895).

<sup>4</sup> Addams and Dewey were lifelong friends and they mutually influenced each other. Dewey used Addams’ books in his courses and named one of his daughters Jane in honour of Addams (Hamington 2014).

ation for the Advancement of Coloured People and contributed to the drive for the American Civil Liberties Union. She was a leading figure in the fledgling Playground Association and in the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. For many people, she was a kind of civic heroine. Hamington recalls that she was so popular that "when Theodore Roosevelt sought the presidential nomination of the Progressive Party in 1912, he asked Jane Addams to second the nomination. The first time a woman had participated in such an act" (Hamington 2014). Considering that such achievements were more difficult for a woman at that time than they could have been for Dewey, I think that Jane Addams deserves at least the honour to share the label "the leading social reformer of that time". If the argument calls on us to see the broader picture of the philosopher, including not only his or her words but also his or her actions, the title "public philosopher" should most certainly be extended to Jane Addams.<sup>5</sup>

Writing style could be alleged as a reason for rejecting not only Addams' texts but also many of those of her contemporaries. I am sure all of us who have studied philosophy can remember some obscure and tortuous passages in Peirce or Mead. What is meant when an appeal is made to writing style? Was Addams not writing as a professional philosopher? There are many different styles within what we may call the "professional philosophy writing style". For instance, Martin Heidegger wrote in a radically different style from that of Ludwig Wittgenstein or John Dewey. Perhaps "professional philosophy writing style" means "using technical vocabulary". But not all philosophers use technical vocabulary such as *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein* or "naturalistic fallacy", especially if their aim is to be understood by a broad audience to bring real change to the world. Here we would do well to remember James' *Talks to Teachers and Students* or John Dewey's lessons on *The Public and Its Problems*.

It seems clear to me that it is only sexism that is left, and, unfortunately, this is still an issue in academic philosophy.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> I particularly like Mueller's observations to this respect: "Comparable to Rosa Luxemburg in Germany and La Pasionaria in Spain, Jane Addams grew into one of the most important activists and the theorists for the classical progressive causes at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. [...] Addams can count as one of the conceptual grandmothers of the United Nations" (Mueller 2011, 95).

<sup>6</sup> It might not be necessary to explain this affirmation, but, in order to support it, I can quote several recent studies and articles: "Reviving the Female Canon" (Susan Price, *The Atlantic*, 05/13/2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2015/05/reviving-the-female-canon/393110/>); "Student evaluations of teaching are not only unreliable, they are significantly biased against female instructors" (Anne Boring, Kellie Ottoboni,

Another reason could be that, although pragmatist genealogists would not be reluctant to call Addams a philosopher, they may well not see her as a pragmatist philosopher. Indeed, Addams rarely called herself a pragmatist, but, then, neither Mead, James, nor Dewey always identified themselves as pragmatists. It thus depends on how we define pragmatism, and there certainly are many different pragmatisms. It might be that Addams' adoption of pragmatism was due to pragmatic reasons "because it provided a means not just of understanding experience but of transforming it" (Seigfried 1996, 78). Addams was above all a woman devoted to action:

For action is indeed the sole medium of expression for ethics. We continually forget that the sphere of morals is the sphere of action, that speculation in regard to morality is but observation and must remain in the sphere of intellectual comment, that a situation does not really become moral until we are confronted with the question of what shall be done in a concrete case, and are obliged to act upon our theory.

Addams 2012, 103

In accordance with my reading of Addams, she stands for a pluralistic and fallibilist epistemology and for a radical commitment to social amelioration, democracy, and perpetual peace: and all these traits make her a true pacifist and feminist pragmatist philosopher.

Addams' social philosophy is presented here as a promising pragmatist reformulation and reappraisal of some Kantian insights. Moreover, we can find in Addams' writings solutions to some of Kant's limitations: specifically, the exclusion of women and of most non-European men from his pursuit of universal moral progress.

First, Addams' fight against warfare and for universal peace is to be understood in the light of growing internationalism among her generation. Her work at the social settlements of the industrialized Chicago and her journeys through Europe during World War I helped her to arrive at her principled stance for peace. Addams critically opposed Kant's philosophical views of war as "natural state" and the preservation of "military virtues" in James' moral equivalent of war.

Second, Addams' social ethics offers an adequate approach to current social experience. Addams attempted to elucidate the sources of moral

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Philip B. Stark, *LSE Impact Blog*, 02/04/2016, <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2016/02/04/student-evaluations-of-teaching-gender-bias/>, accessed 06/21/2017); "Science is still sexist. I know from my own experience" (Kirsty Duncan, *The Globe and Mail*, 06/19/2017, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/science-is-still-sexist-i-know-from-my-own-experience/article35336218/>, accessed 06/26/2017).



discrepancies among individuals and sought them as a necessary step for moral growth. According to Addams, many moral dysfunctions are caused by social evils, such as monotonous industrial work and the lack of opportunities to nurture creative citizenship. She used the powers of play and the arts to cultivate the imagination and as a means to work out generational conflicts. She also recovered forgotten histories and memories as tools for reconstructing the life narratives of cultural minorities, especially migrant women.

Third, if an authentic “cosmopolitanism” is to be achieved, we must revise our old-fashioned moral codes and narrow patriotisms. Addams acknowledged the fact that the sentiment of belonging is important for motivating action, but a cosmopolitan spirit requires an extended outlook beyond artificial national borders.

### 3. Peace: Fighting the anthropological roots of violence

A state of peace among men living together is not the same as the state of nature, which is rather a state of war. For even if it does not involve active hostilities, it involves a constant threat of their breaking out. Thus the state of peace must be *formally instituted*, for a suspension of hostilities is not in itself a guarantee of peace.

*Perpetual Peace*, Second Section; Kant 1980, 98

All wars are accordingly so many attempts (not indeed by the intention of man, but by the intention of nature) to bring about new relations between states, and, by the destruction or at least the dismemberment of old entities, to create new ones.

*Idea for a Universal History*; Kant 1980, 48

The account of the intellectual sources that influenced Jane Addams focuses mainly on the works of William Shakespeare, Leo Tolstoy, Thomas Carlyle, Arnold Toynbee, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Karl Marx and John Dewey. Since she preferred a more direct and argumentative approach, she rarely quoted other authors' works and all these influences must be indirectly reconstructed. She rarely mentioned Kant in her essays on peace and war, but I agree with Hamington on the appreciation that they were specifically Kant's ideas that “resonate with Addams' understanding of peace and her plan for international action” (Hamington 2009, 104). I would say that her concern with internationalism and peace is elaborated time and again in her works, from *Newer Ideals of Peace* (1906) to *Peace and*

*Bread in Time of War* (1922).<sup>7</sup> Between the former and the latter, she was confronted with a new historical fact, World War I, which inaugurated an era marked by violence. Nevertheless, Addams remained coherent in her war against militarism: she became even more radical and specific in her expression of the ideals of peace.

Addams' starting point sounds quite optimistic: "The following pages present the claims of the newer, more aggressive ideals of Peace, as over against the older dovelike ideal. These newer ideals are active and dynamic, and it is believed that if their forces were made really operative upon society, they would in the end, quite as a natural process, do away with war" (Addams 2008, 1). At the same time, she knows that the prior pacifist arguments lacked persuasive power, because they appealed to human feelings or to the avoidance of evil.<sup>8</sup> For that reason, she sought a philosophical case to defend the ideals of peace in a more robust way and she found some support in Kant's practical philosophy. Kant presents perpetual peace as an inescapable historical, though still distant in the future, *telos*. His hope in a future peaceful era is based upon the following thesis: (a) all natural creatures are subject to natural laws and, since humans are natural creatures, we are no exception to this general principle; (b) the natural state of human affairs, among individuals or nations, is one of violence and mutual aggression caused by animal instincts; (c) human beings are at the same time naturally rational beings and all natural capacities of creature are destined sooner or later to be developed completely and in conformity with their end; (d) the realm of reason can be reached, if not by a single individual, by the species; and (e) human history shows the re-

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<sup>7</sup> For Hamington, "Addams' work on war and peace is arguably the most enduring aspect of her intellectual legacy" (Hamington 2009, 108). Axel Mueller states something similar by suggesting that "Addams' work on peace makes its most original contribution when we see her as *completing* the traditional understanding of peace and continuing the agenda of explicating the possibility of a political obligation to seek lasting peace outlined by authors like Kant" (Mueller 2011, 98). My own approach to Addams' case for peace does not differ substantially from those expressed by other interpretations of Addams, but I emphasize the anthropological and historical aspects of her argumentation, on the one side, and the ethical and social consequences of Addams' model, on the other.

<sup>8</sup> Addams refers above all to the two main approaches of older advocates of peace: the first is adopted by Russian artists such as, for instance, Leo Tolstoy, and appeals to imaginative pity; the second is more philosophical and adopted by Jean de Bloch, for example, and appeals to the sense of prudence. Addams dismisses the second approach for being the "*reductio ad absurdum* of the peace-secured-by-the-preparation-for-war-theory" (Addams 2008, 2).

alization of this plan of nature, i. e., the realization of a civil society which can administer justice universally.

Addams is not so interested in discussing the moral and political end of history, as in Kant's implicit philosophical anthropology. However, she does share with Kant this philosophical hope (Kant 1980, 50). Both Kant and Addams presuppose some sort of historical dynamic. Just as for Kant, antagonism drives history for Addams, but her view of historical dynamics implies that industrialism and its machinery are pushing us towards new social challenges, something that Kant and his contemporaries could never have imagined. Addams refuses to make nature the holder of the secret of historical development: social morality is developed through sentiment and action (Addams 2008, 121). Civilization is the substitution of law for war (ibid., 124) and this requires different values. But where Addams distances herself most from Kant is in their respective ontologies: Addams rejects Kant's proposition (b), as expressed above.<sup>9</sup> Accepting that humans are natural creatures, Addams believes that human experience changes, not through complex moral abstractions, but through experience and habit (ibid., 7). War should not occupy the place in history ascribed to it by theorists such as Kant or Bentham (ibid., 12).

Would it be possible to reduce the impact of natural aggressive instincts or to use them for the benefit of all? Here James' pledge for a "moral equivalent of war" is introduced.<sup>10</sup> Social effort must drive to abolish poverty and disease. Addams calls this "a new heroism [...] so widespread that it may justly be called international" (Addams 2008, 13). Addams echoes James' utopia of an "army enlisted against *Nature*" with the result of injustice tending "to be evened out" and "other goods to the commonwealth" being pursued (James 1971, 13). Despite their agreement, there is a significant discrepancy between James and Addams in whether war is deeply rooted in human nature and history, and in whether the so-called "manly" military virtues should be preserved. For James, the contemplation of history reinforces the idea that our "ancestors have bred pugnacity into our bone and marrow, and thousands of years of peace won't breed it out of us" (James 1971, 5). A few years before, James had claimed that "our permanent enemy is the noted bellicosity of human na-

<sup>9</sup> I subscribe to Hamington's (2009, 106) argumentation in this respect.

<sup>10</sup> Addams had addressed the concept of a moral substitute for war since 1899. James acknowledged her unique contribution by asserting that Addams had "a deeply original mind and all so quiet and harmless! Yet revolutionary in the extreme". He was so enthusiastic about *Newer Ideals of Peace* that he sent copies to H. G. Wells and George Bertrand Shaw (Hamington 2009, 98).

ture. Man, biologically considered [...] is simply the most formidable of all beasts of prey, and, indeed, the only one that preys systematically on its own species" (James 1904, 845–6). Modern consciousness is, according to James, divided in a double personality: one rejects the idea of war because of its destructive potential, but, at the same time, we have inherited a warlike type and a history of cruelty. Supporters of war do not desire to give up the idea of war being "the romance of history" and militarism a "great preserver of our ideals of hardihood" (James 1971, 7). For those who back militarism, the exercise and preservation of values such as bravery and prowess is a duty to protect the survival of the human species.<sup>11</sup> Addams laments the manipulation of Darwin's evolutionary theory by the advocates of warfare. She explains in *Peace and Bread in Time of War* (1922) how concerned she was during the war by the increase of military propaganda to keep people in a fighting mood. That literature converged on the pseudo-scientific statement that war was valuable in securing the survival of the fittest. Addams paraphrases Nicolai's work on the "Biology of Peace"<sup>12</sup>: he insisted that "primitive man must necessarily have been a peaceful and social animal and that he developed his intelligence through the use of the tool, not through the use of the weapon; it was the primeval community which made the evolution of man possible, and cooperation among men is older and more primitive than mass combat which is an outgrowth of the much later property instinct" (Addams 2002b, 83). Addams stresses that when Darwin postulates a "struggle for survival" he is not meaning "struggle of one individual or species against the others". And today's struggle for survival obliges us to eradicate all destructive forces from society: war, poverty, disease, and injustice.

James' strategy is to persuade militarists to embrace pacifism, that there are legitimate uses of martial virtues in times of peace. Is there any social advantage of maintaining martial virtues? The difference between Addams and James is that Addams is neither persuaded by the thesis that war is rooted in human nature, nor does she desire to maintain "masculine virtues" if that means tolerating violent behaviour. Is there a gender dimension to violence? This is surely a controversial question. Addams

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<sup>11</sup> "The Moral Equivalent of War" was directed against *Die Philosophie des Krieges* (1907) by Sebald Rudolf Steinmetz, who asserted "if there were no war, we would have to invent it". The other of James' interlocutors was Lieutenant General Homer Lea, for who the "softness of feminism" was putting the nation in danger from a probable attack by Japanese military forces (Foust 2006, 893).

<sup>12</sup> For the influence of the German physiologist Georg Freiderike Nicolai on Addams, cf. Agnew (2017).

does not make a clear statement on this, but, for her, there is surely a gender issue in violence: the indisputable fact that women are more exposed to different types of violence in times of war. This is the sense of the resolutions adopted by the International Congress of Women at the Hague in 1915, particularly the second resolution through which the Congress “opposes the assumption that women can be protected under the conditions of modern warfare” and therefore it “protests vehemently against the odious wrongs of which women are the victims in time of war, and especially against the horrible violation of women which attends all war” (Addams, Balch & Hamilton 2003, 72). Would we be in a better place if women ruled the world? Addams’ response to this question is elaborate. She thought that social life would be improved through the inclusion of vulnerable collectives: women and immigrants. If perpetual peace is to be achieved, we should start with the militarism that continues to work in our local governments and everyday experience. This means, and I think this is an original contribution posed by Addams to the pacifist cause, that the institutional and political measures that may favor international peace among the states might be no less important than providing means of social pacification within the democratic societies.<sup>13</sup>

#### 4. Bread: Social justice, sympathetic knowledge, and imagination

The greatest problem for the human species, the solution of which nature compels him to seek, is that of attaining a civil society which can administer justice universally.

*Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose*, Fifth principle; Kant 1980, 45

Addams often denounced the presence of militarist ideals in local government, that is, a view of social order maintained through hierarchy and repression. This old-fashioned ideal had become inadequate for the state of affairs at the time: industrialism and immigration had brought social conflicts for which the era was not prepared.<sup>14</sup> The nature of those prob-

<sup>13</sup> Mueller also sees Addams’ emphasis on “solidary practices” and “affective attitudes” as a genuine contribution of the theoretical problems of older ideals of peace (Mueller 2011, 113). He goes further by asserting that Addams’ original contribution is that of “discovering the epistemic role of the cognitive entailments of *enacting* moral sentiments in collective practical and institutional ways of confronting social and economic basic needs” (Mueller 2011, 115).

<sup>14</sup> “Addams borrowed the terms ‘militarism’ and ‘industrialism’ from Herbert Spencer’s sociology. According to Spencer, in a militaristic society, order is maintained through hierarchy and repression. Spencer labels ‘industrial’ a society organized for freedom and

lems was mostly economic, but Addams refused to approach them in terms of class struggle.<sup>15</sup> The orators who divide the world into “proletariat” and “capitalists” were creating a new scholastic fragmentation, establishing two substitutes for human nature and ignoring “the fact that varying, imperfect human nature is incalculable” (Addams 2008, 47). It is precisely the complexity, richness, and variability within human nature and experience that makes theoretical tools of the past useless:

The philosophers and statesmen of the eighteenth century believed that universal franchise would cure all ills; that liberty and equality rested only upon constitutional rights and privileges; that to obtain these two and throw off all governmental oppression constituted the full duty of the progressive patriot. We still keep this formalization because the philosophers of this generation give us nothing newer.

Addams 2008, 23

In contrast to Kant’s formalism, Addams’ understanding of democracy includes a political dimension (constitution, rights, and administration) as well as epistemic and moral dimensions (social experience, knowledge, and civil virtues). Democracy is more than a “creed which believes in the essential dignity and equality of all men”; it requires furthermore “the practice of democratic spirit and it implies a diversified human experience and resultant sympathy, which are the foundations and guarantee of Democracy” (Addams 2012, 7–8). As it was for Dewey: “Democracy requires a robust democratic culture in which attitudes, emotions, and habits that constitute a democratic *ethos* are embodied” (Bernstein 2010, 86).

Being aware that a formal defence of democracy cannot achieve the real practice of it, Addams’ arguments for the inclusion of women and immigrants in local government are more related to social epistemology than to politics.<sup>16</sup> She believed that women were better prepared to assume the challenges of the most populated centres of the nation because

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concerned with personal and social well-being, traits he associated with laissez-faire, capitalism and classical political liberalism. [...] He was a pacifist, believing that warfare could no longer lead to social progress” (Fischer 2006, 5).

<sup>15</sup> Addams had read Karl Marx’s writing long before founding Hull House. Although she sympathized with socialistic notions, she never identified herself as a communist or socialist (Hamington 2009, 127, 147).

<sup>16</sup> Fischer stresses the strong connection between Addams’ pacifism and social work: “Addams did not come to pacifism through maternalistic beliefs about woman’s essential nature or through an unconditional commitment to nonviolence. She came to pacifism through her work with Chicago’s multinational, immigrant communities. Two dimensions of her work at Hull House were formative for her pacifism: the neighbourhood’s multinational charac-

the work they had been performing through the centuries had equipped them better. The militarist administration of city governments and its policies were not able to organize collective responsibility to tackle the internal problems of cities: insanitary housing, infant mortality, adulterated water, smoke-laden air, and juvenile crime. She proposed to change the model of city government towards what is called “public housekeeping”, so that city governance would resemble more closely that of a household. City governments were failing to include the valuable experience of those who had been acquiring the sort of skills that modern cities require, especially women. I think Sally Haslanger (2017)<sup>17</sup> makes a good point here by stating that Addams’ recovering of so-called “feminine virtues” is not essentialist. The reason why she recovered those skills is not only because most people who have these skills were women; it was because the accumulation of expertise in this role made women good housekeepers (Haslanger 2017, 161). I think Addams would accept without a problem that, if men develop these abilities, their contribution to city government would result in a benefit for all. She was a steady advocate of women’s right to vote, but she never held an essentialist view of gender roles.

Addams liked to learn from women and men from different countries. A very nice example is her book *The Long Road of Woman’s Memory* (1916). In that book, Addams developed her insight into how memory structures collective and individual lives. She collected her experiences from forty years at Hull House, and she observed how genuine solidarity can grow while sharing and elaborating past experiences. From her own memories, Addams explains how popular theatre was used at Hull House with the purpose of working out cultural and generational conflicts. For instance, Greek immigrants played Sophocles’ tragedies *Ajax* and *Electra* with other immigrants from Russia, Poland, and Latvia (Addams 1960, 179). This also worked for deconstructing prejudices among immigrants concerning their host nation. Addams recalls an amusing remark made by an Italian who visited Hull House, which was full of paintings. The visitor “expressed great surprise when he found that we, although Americans, still liked pictures, and said quite naïvely that he didn’t know that Americans cared for anything but dollars, that looking at pictures was something people only did in Italy” (Addams 1960, 174–5). The educational programmes

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ter and her participation in forming labor unions and negotiating strikes” (Fischer 2006, 2). Three quarters of Chicago residents were immigrants or children of immigrants in 1889.

<sup>17</sup> I would like to thank Encarnación (Esa) Díaz León for drawing my attention to this paper.

at Hull House included music to help immigrants' children regain and preserve the songs of their countries. In *Newer Ideals of Peace* (1906) Addams insists on how city government fails to utilize immigrants in that government. They represent hundreds of years of civilization, a source of culture that is not only valuable for enlarging social knowledge, but for integrating them effectively into public life. They were taught the American Constitution, and the local authorities thought that that was enough to make them citizens, but failed to understand that all this vocabulary was unconnected with their backgrounds (Addams 2008, 39). I think there are good reasons to claim that Addams opened interesting ways of building up a transcultural ethics based on sympathetic knowledge (comprehension of others using arts, shared memories, and imagination) and lateral progress (the inclusion of all).<sup>18</sup>

Addams stood up for both universal education and the renewal of educational methods, which would include play,<sup>19</sup> the arts, and the promoting of intellectual curiosity in children and adults. The global tendency spoke for monotonous industrial work, the use of children in factories, the reduction of human existence to the economic aspect, and alienation. Addams decided very soon that all human beings deserve the experience of beauty in their lives. Her faith was strong that "every human being is a creative agent and a possible generator of fine enthusiasm" (Addams 2012, 70). As Kant said, we are creatures of two realms: a natural and a spiritual. And Addams agreed with him that we need to feed our stomachs as much as our souls. Or, to express it in pragmatist terms: radical democracy requires the constant reconstruction of experience to nurture creative citizenship.

## 5. Addams' ideas for peace and a cosmopolitan spirit to come

One age cannot enter into an alliance on oath to put the next age in a position where it would be impossible for it to extend and correct its knowledge, particularly on such important matters, or to make any progress whatsoever in enlightenment.

*What Is Enlightenment?* Kant 1980, 57

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<sup>18</sup> On lateral progress see Hamington (2014).

<sup>19</sup> Addams knew of the innovations in play theories of her time, mainly *Kindergarten* philosophy by Friedrich Fröbl, which was taught at Hull House, and Karl Groos' books on play. She published *The Spirit of the Youth and the City Streets* (1909) and *A Plea for More Play, More Play and More Education for our Girls and Boys* (1914) opposing child labour and demanding more urban spaces for play.



Although Addams was committed to pacifism decades before World War I, her experience in European countries and the public ostracism she suffered in the United States<sup>20</sup> did not weaken, but indeed reinforced, her faith in a world without violence. In an analogous way to Kant, she believed that persuading people that war is foolish, wasteful, or unjustifiable might take time. But only when a general principle of peace would rule the earth, this would mean that we have morally evolved (Addams 2008, 130–3). She was convinced that a new internationalism or “cosmic patriotism”<sup>21</sup> was growing among the younger generations. During the conflict, the reasons given for participating in it were the same everywhere: self-defence, nationalism, patriotism, and the inevitability of war. But Addams also appreciated a social and generational split: the older generation tended to believe more in abstract, theological, or nationalistic grounds, to use patriotic phrases (Addams 2003, 29); whereas women, particularly mothers of soldiers, and a significant part of the young men in the trenches started to question the sense of all war. Again, Addams let experience be the starting point of her reflections, and she travelled to collect testimony from the different fronts. She was impressed by what she and other delegates of the Women’s Conference at The Hague found: stimulants were given to soldiers before a charge was ordered, there was a high percentage of insanity among the combatants, and young men would shoot in the air to avoid killing anyone. The general picture that was handed down of World War I is that it was embraced with enthusiasm by young Europeans and it was fostered with patriotic spirit by many intellectuals. Addams refused to give credit to this obscene war propaganda. She relied more on the real descriptions of what happened by those exposed to violence, like this young man who said to her:

We are told that we are fighting for civilization but I tell you that war destroys civilization. The highest product of the universities, the scholar, the philosopher, the poet, when he is in the trenches, when he spends his days and nights in squalor and brutality and horror, is as low and brutal as the rudest peasant. They say, those newspaper writers, that it is wonderful to see the courage of the men in the

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<sup>20</sup> Addams was accused of disloyalty, and her name appeared in a list of “dangerous radicals” in 1919 (Klosterman & Stratton 2006, 165).

<sup>21</sup> “Cosmic patriotism” can be defined as a “loyalty to the well-being of all” (Hamington 2009, 103). The term appears in *New Ideals of Peace*, although Addams is not yet happy with this formulation and acknowledges that the expression may sound rather absurd as referring to an important sentiment that is to move the masses from their narrow national considerations to new levels of human effort and affection in a near future (Addams 2008, 134).

trenches, singing, joking, playing cards, while the shells fall around them. Courage there is no room for, just there is no room for cowardice. One cannot rush to meet the enemy, one cannot even see him. The shells fall here or they fall there. If you are brave, you cannot defy them; if you are a coward, you cannot flee from them; it is all chance. You see the man you were playing cards with a while ago lying on the ground a bloody mass and you look at him and think, 'Well, this time it took him; in a few minutes it may be my turn; let's go back to the cards.' And all the time you loathe the squalor, the brutality, the savages around you, and the savage you are yourself becoming. Why should you kill men who live in other countries, men whom in times of peace you would like and respect? Addams 2008, 134

For Addams, old moral codes, such as patriotism founded upon military prowess, had become burdens and could not respond to the larger and more varied environment with which we were confronted (Addams 2008, 119–23). She proposed to move forward to a progressive patriotism, not of the clan or of the tribe, but one that embodies “the real affection and the real interest of the nation” (ibid., 123). I think she tended to identify the real interest of the nation with progress towards universal social justice combined with integration of cultural difference. This is what she might be aiming at when she uses the terms “cosmopolitan nation” or “cosmopolitan spirit”: the sense of belonging to an enlarged community that moves people’s energies towards social amelioration and which requires the abolition of war. Years later, in 1932, Addams published an article titled “Disarm and Have Peace” where we find a more precise formulation of her ideal: “We have reached a stage in the advancement of civilization when we are quite willing to concede that finance, industry, transportation, science, medicine, culture, and trade are not bounded by national frontiers, but must be international. Must our political thought alone remain insular and blindly ‘national’?” (Addams 1960, 323).

To this purpose, Addams’ specific political responses were quite similar to those posed by Kant: a federation or league of nations, disarmament, and a world court.<sup>22</sup> The differences in the theoretical strategies adopted to approach these ends are considerable. I would say that Addams is a Kantian political philosopher in her goals, but not in her methods. First, she shares with Kant the ideal of perpetual peace but still trusts in the

<sup>22</sup> “The Women at the Hague anticipated much of what became the United Nations and the World Court” (Hamington 2009, 105): a story which is far less known. Unfortunately, the International Criminal Court (icc) was not established until 1998, after the genocides in the ex-Yugoslavia (1991–1995) and Rwanda (1994).

power of nature, and believes in law and civilization as progressive substitutes for war: she rejects Kant's anthropological philosophy rooted in some sort of natural bellicosity. Human evolution is subject to interpretation, and cooperation might be as original as competition for survival, as she points out when arguing against ideological manipulations of evolutionist theories. I suggest that Addams' ontology of history is dynamic and caused by the collision, abandonment, and improvement of moral ideals. Second, she sees continuity between international peace and national issues because social injustice, economic conflict, and the clash of cultures, sexes, and generations cause violence within states. Her idea of "lateral progress", which is progress in the direction of inclusion of the vulnerable groups, brings the idea of collective moral development to completion. Again, as I say above, against the militaristic way of organising city government, she proposes "public housekeeping": a way of dealing with local affairs that focuses on care, universal education, and the arts. The pluralistic social epistemology provided by her can contribute to an enlarged social experience which avoids essentialism and dogma. Third, Addams acknowledges that a sense of belonging, affection, and feelings move the masses towards political action more than abstract ideals, but she attempts to redirect all these energies to the welfare of all by appealing to "cosmic patriotism" or "cosmopolitanism". Adding pluralistic and fallibilist epistemology to pacifism, I think she became quite close to far more recent formulations of cosmopolitanism, such as that of Kwame Anthony Appiah who uses the metaphor of conversation as that which best fits the cosmopolitan spirit:

Conversation across identities—across religions, races, ethnicities and nationalities—is worthwhile because through conversation you can learn from people with you different, even incompatible ideas from your own. And it is worthwhile, too, because if you accept that you live in a world with many different kinds of people, and you're going to try to live in respectful peace with them, then you need to understand each other, even if you don't agree. Appiah 2008, 41–2<sup>23</sup>

Addams put her hope in the emergence of an international mindset among the youngest of her time. Paraphrasing Addams' writing: it may

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<sup>23</sup> Hamington related Addams' cosmopolitanism to that defended by Appiah. She quotes Appiah's *Cosmopolitanism. Ethics in a World of Strangers* (2006): "Cosmopolitans suppose that all cultures overlap in their vocabulary of values to begin a conversation. But they don't suppose, like some universalists, that we could all come to agreement if only we had the same vocabulary" (Hamington 2009, 185).

take unique and collective faith and efforts, and constant reconstruction of social experience to establish a cosmopolitan spirit that will allow future generations to live and grow in peace.

I would like to conclude with a statement not of mine, but written just a few months ago by David Brooks (2017) for *The New York Times*, because I feel the goal of this paper is summarized by his words: “Many of the social problems we face today—the fraying social fabric, widening inequality, anxieties over immigration, concentrated poverty, the return of cartoonish hyper-masculinity—are the same problems she faced 130 years ago. And in many ways her responses were more sophisticated than ours”. Surely we would need to keep deepening and refining some of Addams’ conceptual tools to address present problems. For instance, global economy and the social inequalities require more than “public housekeeping” to achieve lateral progress. Addams’ notion of “Cosmic patriotism”, in its abstraction and vagueness, seems to me to be one of her weakest solutions to the problem of combining internationalism and cultural difference. She was aware of this conceptual weakness and, in a pragmatist experimentalist way, she kept testing new formulas. In my opinion, her work on immigrant’s and women’s memory anticipated some insights that would fit in what we know as “politics of recognition”. These are to me sufficient reasons to place a pacifist, feminist, transcultural revolution inspired by Addams’ model on the global political agenda.

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