

# ACTION, BELIEF AND INQUIRY

Pragmatist Perspectives on Science, Society and Religion

Edited by Ulf Zackariasson



Nordic  
Studies in  
Pragmatism

3

# ACTION, BELIEF AND INQUIRY

## Nordic Studies in Pragmatism

Series editors:

Mats Bergman

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The purpose of the series is to publish high-quality monographs and collections of articles on the tradition of philosophical pragmatism and closely related topics. It is published online in an open access format by the Nordic Pragmatism Network, making the volumes easily accessible for scholars and students anywhere in the world.

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PRAGMATIST PERSPECTIVES ON SCIENCE,  
SOCIETY AND RELIGION

Nordic Studies in Pragmatism 3

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# Preface

The Nordic Pragmatism Network was initiated in 2006 to facilitate the cooperation of Nordic philosophers and scientists whose work concerns philosophical pragmatism both with one another and with colleagues and collaborators elsewhere in the world. In 2008, the Network organized its first Nordic Pragmatism Conference in Helsinki hosted by Sami Pihlström. Subsequent conferences were organized annually in 2009–2011, respectively hosted by Jón Ólafsson in Reykjavík, Ulf Zackariasson in Uppsala and Margareta Bertilsson in Copenhagen. This series of conferences concluded in the first European Pragmatism Conference, itself a major achievement in the establishment of pragmatism as an independent area of inquiry in Europe, organized together with Italian colleagues in Rome, Italy, in 2012. Since 2007, Henrik Rydenfelt has acted as the coordinator of the Network and a co-organizer of each of the conferences.

In 2010, the Network also established its own online publication series, the Nordic Studies in Pragmatism. This volume, edited by Ulf Zackariasson, collects together contributions from the Nordic participants of the conferences arranged in 2009, 2010 and 2011. In accordance with the different themes of those conferences, the volume represents contributions to various topics and fields of inquiry related to philosophical pragmatism. It attests to the impact pragmatist notions and arguments may have if brought to bear on debates in philosophy of science, epistemology, philosophy of language, logic, ontology, ethics and metaethics, sociology, political philosophy and philosophy of religion. At the same time it provides an overview of key Nordic advances and debates in these areas of inquiry. The series editors would like to express their gratitude to Mr. Jukka Nikulainen for the technical production of this volume.

Helsinki, September 2015

*Henrik Rydenfelt*



PART I

DEMOCRACY

# Minimal Meliorism: Finding a Balance between Conservative and Progressive Pragmatism

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The philosophy of pragmatism has often been linked to reformist movements of different stripes. For many, this is part and parcel of what it means to be a pragmatist. According to this view, an authentic representative of the movement emphasises change, progress, and active engagement in human affairs while distrusting traditional epistemological and metaphysical concerns with knowledge and truth. In other words, the primary task of the pragmatist philosopher is not to unearth the ultimate secrets of the mind and the universe, but rather to change the world for the better.

Leading pragmatists such as William James, F.C.S. Schiller, John Dewey, and Richard Rorty have arguably outlined transformative philosophical programmes along such lines, albeit with varying vocabularies, emphases, and aims. Thus, it is not surprising that *meliorism* has been singled out as a characteristic element of the pragmatist world-view (e.g., Ruetenik 2008). Conversely, pragmatism has been lauded as a philosophy particularly conducive to social-melioristic efforts (e.g., Payton & Moody 2008). Although calls for amelioration and societal reform are by no means the exclusive prerogatives of pragmatists, the term ‘meliorism’

has occasionally even been used as a straightforward synonym for ‘pragmatism’ (e.g., Robinson 1924).<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, C. S. Peirce—the ‘putative father’ of pragmatism<sup>2</sup>—all but dismissed meliorist conceptions of philosophy in some of his writings and lectures. Where a pragmatist would be expected to glorify concrete action, Peirce ended up stressing the theoretical nature of philosophical work. More than that, he declared himself to be a “sentimentalist” conservative, and as such insisted that philosophers should avoid direct attempts to change traditions and established social practices.

As with all wide-ranging isms, it is not surprising that there should be noticeable internal strains and significant differences of opinions within the ranks of pragmatism; it can hardly be described as a unified school of thought. Attempts to produce systematic accounts of the ‘broad church’ of pragmatism have typically acknowledged certain more or less significant intellectual divisions in the field. Susan Haack has emphasised the differences between revolutionary neopragmatism<sup>3</sup> (whether literary or scientific) and classical pragmatism, but has also detected the insidious virus of “vulgar pragmatism” in Schiller’s humanism (see, e.g., Haack 2004). In contrast, Nicholas Rescher (2000) throws James, Dewey, and Schiller into the class of ‘pragmatism of the left’ along with neopragmatism à la Rorty, while Peirce and Rescher himself are portrayed as staunch defenders of realistic and objectivist right-wing pragmatism. Howard Mounce (1997) and Cheryl Misak (2013) have perhaps even more straightforwardly suggested that the movement is split into two radically different camps, personified by Peirce and James, practically from the outset.

It looks as if the attitude towards meliorism would also divide the key pragmatists into two groups; but in spite of the fact that we again seem to find Peirce pitted against the rest, this distinction between a conservative

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<sup>1</sup> Of contemporary pragmatists, Colin Koopman (2009) has suggested that meliorism provides a “summary statement of pragmatism,” construed as a “successful transitionalism” that encompasses humanism and pluralism (17–19). (I owe this reference to an anonymous reviewer of this article.)

<sup>2</sup> Looking back at the heyday of classical pragmatism and Peirce’s (depending of perspective, laudable or perfidious) renaming of his own doctrine, Schiller (1927, 83) elevated James to the “real progenitor” of pragmatism while he dismissed Peirce as its “putative parent”. Some fifty years later, Rorty echoed these sentiments as he asserted that Peirce’s “contribution to pragmatism was merely to have given it a name, and to have stimulated James” (Rorty 1982, 161).

<sup>3</sup> Fittingly enough, probably the first to use the term ‘neopragmatist’ was none other than Peirce back in 1905. Peirce did not specify to whom the term referred, but the context suggests that he had James and Schiller in mind.

and a progressive wing does not exactly correspond to the more familiar partitions based on metaphysical, epistemological, or truth-theoretical perspectives. From this angle, Dewey appears to constitute the clearest counterpart to Peirce—although, as we shall see, it is Schiller that draws some of the most radical conclusions from the transformative viewpoint.

In this essay, I will first discuss some of the main forms of meliorism within classical pragmatism. Naturally, I cannot trace all the varying associations and upshots of the melioristic strand of pragmatism in this short article; here, emphasis lies on the general justification for meliorism and conservatism in classical pragmatist thought as well as on the programmatic implications of these stances; I will bypass Rorty's agenda in this context. At the heart of the discussion lies the far-reaching question of the proper goal of philosophical activity, which with a nod to Marx might be portrayed as a conflict between philosophy as world-explanation and philosophy as world-amelioration—but which in more pragmatist terms also can be taken to imply a basic tension between theory and practice. Such a discussion can easily slip into caricature, with the central issue reduced to a struggle between two straw men: the naïve good-doer and the foggy defender of the *status quo*. Although pragmatist philosophers have at times given voice to both extremes, my central aim here is to argue that meliorism, in its broadest sense, underlies practically all forms of classical pragmatism—Peirce's pragmatism included—while at the same time preparing the ground for a moderate pragmatist perspective on the objectives of philosophical work—one in which melioristic and conservative sentiments can act as reasonable correctives of each other.

### Beyond optimism and pessimism

In spite of the close association between certain types of pragmatism and melioristic ambitions, the pragmatists did not invent meliorism. In different guises, related sensibilities have no doubt been expressed throughout history; and if Peirce was right, the same could be said about pragmatist ideas (see, e.g., EP 2, 399 [1905]). However, it is worth noting that the birth of the philosophical movement later named 'pragmatism' very nearly coincided with the explicit coining of the concept of 'meliorism'. Most likely, the first to use the term was the novelist George Eliot in the 1870s (Sully, 1877, 399; Clapperton, 1885, VIII). In his *Pessimism: A History and a Criticism* (1877), James Sully summarised the Eliotian view of meliorism as "a practical conception which lies midway between the extremes of opti-

mism and pessimism”, emphasising that it was not just a matter of our capacity to reduce evil; the melioristic credo crucially also implied a positive power to increase the amount of good in the world (Sully 1877, 399). No doubt, the idea captured something of the spirit of the times; at any rate, it did not take long before Lester Ward (1883) presented his sociological version of meliorism as an alternative to the dominant mix of social conservatism and economic individualism promoted by certain disciples of Herbert Spencer, such as William Graham Sumner.<sup>4</sup> Jane Hume Clapperton (1885) expanded on this progressive perspective in her social-reformist and feminist writings.

Thus, meliorism was from the very beginning distinguished from both optimism and pessimism, which were typically regarded as two variants of a passive attitude. In contrast, the meliorists advocated a voluntaristic conception of human agency. For Ward, meliorism also implied the malleability of nature.

Both optimism and pessimism are passive states of mind. The true state is an active one. Optimism and pessimism assume nature to be in an active state toward man. The true attitude makes nature passive and man active. To the developed intellect nature is as clay in the potter’s hands. It is neither best nor worst. It is what man makes it, and rational man always seeks to make it better. The true doctrine, then, is *meliorism* – the perpetual bettering of man’s estate. This will be possible in precise proportion to man’s knowledge of nature, so that the condition of the race ultimately depends upon the degree of its intelligence that shall attain.

Ward 1895, 136

With hindsight, it is easy enough to see how Ward’s meliorism, with its emphasis on deliberate action, evolutionary change, and the indeterminacy of the world, might be interpreted as a close ally of some types of pragmatist thought. However, the pragmatists were rather slow in adopting an openly melioristic vocabulary, and generally failed to recognise a possible debt to the initial wave of meliorism. The first to clearly establish a bond between pragmatism and meliorism was William James, who in *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (1907, 127) argued that the “sole meaning” of abstract concepts such as ‘free will’ and ‘absolute mind’ was given in the way they promised to improve this world, irrespective of their truth or falsity.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Sumner’s anti-meliorism is succinctly captured in his oft-cited laissez-faire dictum: “Society needs first of all to be free from meddlers” (1883, 120).

<sup>5</sup> There is at least one possible, but rather problematic, antecedent to James’s linking of pragmatism to meliorism. In an undated manuscript (MS 953), which probably stems from

James introduced the melioristic approach as an alternative to both tender-minded rationalism, which optimistically defended spiritual sentiments and idealism, and tough-minded empiricism, which clung to the more pessimistic world-view of materialism and determinism. In his reflections on free will, in particular, James emerged as a natural meliorist, who desired to view the future as radically open—uncertain and precarious, but also full of opportunities. Symptomatically, James tended to express the matter in religious terms, as he defined optimism as the cheerful doctrine of the inevitability of the world's salvation and pessimism as the unhappy belief in the impossibility of such redemption, with meliorism as the reasonable compromise.

Midway between the two there stands what may be called the doctrine of meliorism, tho it has hitherto figured less as a doctrine than as an attitude in human affairs. . . . Meliorism treats salvation as neither inevitable nor impossible. It treats it as a possibility, which becomes more and more of a probability the more numerous the actual conditions of salvation become. It is clear that pragmatism must incline towards meliorism.

James 1907, 285–6

Still, James's meliorism is more accurately categorised as a philosophical creed than as a social or practical programme. It was primarily a metaphysical theory or mind-set, which combined the potential for improvement with a basically individualistic *Weltanschauung* (see James 1907, 119–20).<sup>6</sup> James's meliorism was an unequivocally voluntaristic doctrine; a better existence was possible—but not guaranteed—if human agents were prepared to strive for it. This vision of struggle and possibility was predicated on the irreducible diversity of the evolving "melioristic universe". In James's (1907, 280) evocative phrase, the pragmatist chose to interpret the particulars of experience—"the world's poem"—in a pluralistic-melioristic way.

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the mid-1890s, Peirce associates his conception of the "predestinate settlement" of inquiry with an approach that he dubs 'meliorism', and which he characterises as the view that the universe has a tendency toward a definite state of things (the 'truth' or the 'good'). This perspective, which might better be labelled 'universal optimism' than 'meliorism', accords with the gist of Peirce's grand cosmogonic speculations; but it is also significantly qualified by his more modest contention that the 'final opinion' is to be understood as a hope pertaining to any particular genuine line of inquiry. However, Peirce also draws a kind of moral from this optimistic meliorism in the form of a 'maxim of happiness', which demands contempt for the individual ego and "love for the community of soul" as "the truest and happiest sentiment".

<sup>6</sup> In this respect, James's meliorism was in line with Ward's (1895, 132) "cosmological" reflections on "the true relation [...] of man to the universe."

In James's account, the melioristic attitude was deemed to be pragmatically admissible, as long as it made life richer and rendered the universe more meaningful for the human agent. In the face of real-world challenges, meliorism was expected to inspire 'healthy' tenacity and intelligent problem-solving rather than blind optimism or dispirited pessimism. Yet, despite James's recurrent appeals to the particulars of our experience, the melioristic aspect of his pragmatism was typically broadly painted in terms of individual free will, on the one side, and metaphysical pluralism and anti-determinism, on the other. His position included no overt demand for social engagement.

Still, some later commentators have submitted that James's writings do contain the seeds for a programme of social meliorism, although this 'activist' streak is mostly implicit. Tadd Ruetenik (2005; 2008), in particular, has argued that proposals such as "The Moral Equivalent of War" might be viewed as the melioristic manifestations of a pragmatist social philosophy (see James 1982). From this point of view, James's "heart-felt belief that human action can mitigate suffering in the world" (Ruetenik 2008, 498) is naturally followed by a hope for social justice, which in turn might lead to actual involvement in societal affairs.

Yet, the fact remains that James never properly linked his meliorism to concrete reform. While he undoubtedly wanted his philosophy to be generally accessible and did function as a public intellectual, his metaphysical position did not lead to an across-the-board reconsideration of the philosopher's task.<sup>7</sup> In later usage, 'meliorism' has typically been interpreted more concretely, as implying a specific demand for positive social activism. These two acceptations were nicely summarised in an early definition published in the *Century Dictionary* (1889–91), where 'meliorism' was characterised as

- (1) "[the] improvement of society by regulated practical means: opposed to the passive principle of both pessimism and optimism"; or
- (2) "[the] doctrine that the world is neither the worst nor the best possible, but that it is capable of improvement: a mean between theoretical pessimism and optimism".

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<sup>7</sup> One plausible explanation for James's failure—if it indeed was one—to follow through on his melioristic agenda may be the fact, biting recorded by George Santayana (1922), that Harvard professors in the pre-ww1 era tended to function as "clergymen without a church . . . at once genuine philosophers and popular professors" (43). It was perhaps only with the gradual professionalisation of philosophy that the need for a distinct 'public philosophy' and the idea of the activist-philosopher made themselves felt.

Part of what makes this delineation relevant is that the second part was most likely penned by Peirce;<sup>8</sup> but here, the juxtaposition of the two differing senses, which nicely brings out some key tensions in melioristic thought, is more pertinent. The latter use of the term is obviously broader, as it suggests that comprehensive meliorism is primarily to be understood as a theoretical doctrine; in broad outlines, it seems to accord with the Jamesian version of meliorist philosophy. In contrast, the first acceptance refers more narrowly to society, associates meliorism with practice rather than with theory, and suggests active involvement through regulative measures. It is also worth noting another difference: whereas the second part presents meliorism as a compromise position, the first pits it *against* both pessimism and optimism. Significantly, this suggests a more dynamic, materially transformative conception of meliorism.

Although not necessary, the step from holding the world to be improvable to maintaining that human beings *ought to* actively engage in such betterment seems to be a rather natural one. At any rate, this is the conclusion that many pragmatists have embraced—and no one more influentially so than Dewey, who also distinguished the melioristic tendency from both pessimism and optimism:

Pessimism is a paralyzing doctrine. In declaring that the world is evil wholesale, it makes futile all efforts to discover the remediable causes of specific evils and thereby destroys at the root every attempt to make the world better and happier. Wholesale optimism, which has been the consequence of the attempt to explain evil away, is, however, equally an incubus.

After all, the optimism that says that the world is already the best possible of all worlds might be regarded as the most cynical of pessimisms. If this is the best possible, what would a world which was fundamentally bad be like? 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. It encourages intelligence to study the positive means of good and the obstructions to their realization, and to put forth endeavor for the improvement of conditions.

MW 12, 181–2 [1920]

At first blush, this may not seem all that dissimilar from the position expounded by James. However, instead of emphasising individual change, Dewey spoke more generally of the “improvement of conditions”. The tone was more active, as meliorism was supposed to inspire dynamic en-

<sup>8</sup> I am indebted to François Latraverse for this information.

agement in the betterment of this world. Thus, Dewey espoused an explicitly activist conception of meliorism, which did not halt at the theoretical view that the world is improvable; opposing the purported paralysis resulting from pessimism and optimism, he moved on to an advocacy of the concrete involvement of philosophers in the present problems of society. For Dewey, this meant, above all, a new conception of social philosophy. In contrast to the traditional philosopher, who dwelled "in the region of his concepts", solving problems "by showing the relationship of ideas", the Deweyan social meliorist was expected to ameliorate the lot of human beings "by supplying them hypotheses to be used and tested in projects of reform" (MW 12, 190 [1920]).

The starting point of Deweyan reformism was extant human habits and present social conditions; in this respect, his programme could be characterised as *immanent* meliorism.<sup>9</sup> This rootedness was needed to guarantee the feasibility of the meliorist agenda; as Dewey put it *Democracy and Education* (1916), the challenge was to unearth the desirable facets of actual community life, and to "employ them to criticize undesirable features and suggest improvement" (MW 9, 89). At the same time, Dewey strived to overcome what he viewed as a untenable choice between "positivistic" and "transcendental" approaches to social philosophy; in his naturalistic vision,<sup>10</sup> criticism was to be "derived from the positive phenomena" of this world, but not as a "mere record of given valuations" (MW 15, 230 [1923]). In this spirit, his programme was intended to accommodate preservation as well as reform, while the need for social-theoretical interventions was purportedly justified by actual conflicts caused by contacts between different social groups. The special task of social philosophy was to provide a technique for clarifying judgments and valuations with the aim of rendering "the social criticism and projection of policies which is always going on more enlightened and effective" (MW 15, 233 [1923]). At times, Dewey generalised this viewpoint to a recovery of philosophy as "a method, cultivated by philosophers, for dealing with the problems

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<sup>9</sup> This contention, and most of the rest of the arguments and direct quotations in this paragraph, were suggested by an anonymous reviewer. I am truly grateful for this amelioration of my essay; but the responsibility for the specific claims made here is mine.

<sup>10</sup> In the later essay 'Anti-Naturalism in Extremis' (1943), Dewey characterised philosophical anti-naturalism as the view "that anything remotely approaching a basic and serious amelioration of the human estate must be based upon means and methods that lie outside the natural and social world, while human capacities are so low that reliance upon them only makes things worse" (LW 15, 55). The consequence, he suggested, was a sweeping lack of respect for scientific method that led to dogmatism and 'finalism'.

of men" (MW 10, 46 [1917]). The distinct positive job of the philosopher, in addition to the negative undertaking of combating timeworn prejudices and stale traditions, was to develop useful tools for intelligent planning and action.

[I]ntellectual instruments are needed to project leading ideas or plans of action. The intellectual instrumentalities for doing this work need sterilizing and sharpening. That work is closely allied with setting better instruments, as fast as they take shape, at work. Active use in dealing with the present problems of men is the only way they can be kept from rusting. Trial and test in and by work done is the means by which they can be kept out of the dark spots in which infection originates. The fact that such plans, measures, policies, as can be projected will be but hypotheses is but another instance of alignment of philosophy with the attitude and spirit of the inquiries which have won the victories of scientific inquiry in other fields.

LW 15, 166 [1946]

According to Dewey, modern science had made human beings susceptible to the idea of development, which manifested itself practically as the "persistent gradual amelioration of the estate of our common humanity" (MW 9, 233 [1916]). However, while Dewey appealed to the model set by natural science in his argument for immanent standards and methods in social criticism, he also maintained that social theory was "comparable not to physics but to engineering" (MW 15, 235 [1923]).<sup>11</sup>

Although Dewey's meliorism acknowledged the need to work with and within extant habits, values, and social conditions, his experimental approach to philosophy also seemed to imply a somewhat secondary or instrumental status for established social habits and customs. Thus, he contended that questions of precedents and origins were "quite subordinate to prevision, to guidance and control amid future possibilities", and suggested that any scheme and project that promised ameliorative consequences was worthy of consideration, free from interference from old theories and principles (MW 8, 201 [1915]). Dewey explicitly contrasted his own progressivism to the conservative "disbelief in the possibility of constructive social engineering", and argued that the "only genuine opposite to a go-as-you-please let-alone philosophy is a philosophy which

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<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, Dewey also suggested that natural science could or should be 'moral' in the sense of contributing to the broader cause of human improvement. The purported melioristic contribution of seemingly technical science was to provide "the technique of social and moral engineering" (MW 12, 179 [1920]).

studies specific social needs and evils with a view to constructing the special social machinery for which they call" (MW 10, 241 [1916]). According to Dewey, this active employment of intelligent method in dealing with the "concrete troubles" of the world entailed the adoption of the techniques of scientific inquiry in social meliorism, understood as a broad "philosophy of life". In this context, 'scientific method' primarily meant experimentation, the conscious and deliberate implementation of new ways of seeing and doing things by means of an intelligently guided process of trial and error. Dewey argued that the most fruitful breeding ground for social improvement was to be found in the relatively flexible and immature, rather than in adults whose "habits of thought and feeling" were more or less fixed, and whose environment was relatively rigid (MW 13, 402 [1921]). This was the melioristic motivation underlying his pursuits in the field of education, the practice of which he also viewed as a form of social engineering (LW 5, 20 [1929]).<sup>12</sup>

In its recognition of remediable evils and call for active engagement, Dewey's meliorism was akin to philanthropic perspectives, which no doubt motivated many melioristic endeavours. However, there was a significant difference between Deweyan meliorism and more general humanitarianism. Although he at times spoke approvingly of new types of "classless" philanthropy, Dewey also made a distinction between altruism and the kind of social reformism he advocated. His meliorism was not primarily portrayed as an ethical mission fuelled by compassion; it was to be guided by intelligence—"the power which foresees, plans and constructs in advance" (MW 10, 238 [1916])—rather than by the heart. Perhaps mindful of the potential scorn of Social Darwinists, positivists, and Marxists, who tended to dominate much of the social-scientific debate of the day, Dewey emphasised the scientific character of melioristic pragmatism. From this perspective, society was approached as a laboratory, where the scientific meliorist worked to find the best tools and solutions by the means of ex-

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<sup>12</sup> Dewey's work for educational reform is no doubt his best-known endeavour to concretely improve the lives of his fellow human beings. However, it would be misleading to claim that this engagement was simply an application of a previously formed philosophical idea; it is probably more accurate to say that his philosophical meliorism and his activism developed in tandem. It is at any rate telling that his first explicit characterisation of 'meliorism' (as "the idea that at least there is a sufficient basis of goodness in life and its conditions so that by thought and earnest effort we may constantly make better things") occurred in a contribution to *A Cyclopaedia of Education* (1912–13). Nor was Dewey's social activism restricted to the field of education; his earlier attempt to improve society through journalism—the abandoned newspaper project 'Thought News'—could also be cited as an instance of meliorism-in-action, badly as it may have fared.

perimental methods. Consequently, in the end Dewey did not posit the humanitarian amelioration of particular problematic situations as the ultimate goal of meliorism; its ideal aim was the engineering of optimal conditions for communal development.

Admittedly, Dewey himself did not push this line of thought to its possible extremes. In contrast, Ward, whose social theory had many affinities with pragmatist thought,<sup>13</sup> did not hesitate to promote meliorism as unsentimental rationality.

[Meliorism] may be defined as humanitarianism *minus* all sentiment. Now, meliorism, instead of an ethical, is a dynamic principle. It implies the improvement of the social condition through cold calculation, through the adoption of indirect means. It is not content merely to alleviate present suffering, it aims to create conditions under which no suffering can exist. It is ready even to sacrifice temporary enjoyment for greater future enjoyment—the pleasure of a few for that of the mass.

Ward 1883, 468

From such a 'scientific' and broadly utilitarian meliorism, which not merely worked to improve specific situations but endeavoured to abolish suffering altogether by radically transforming the conditions of human life, there was arguably but a short step to the brave new world of Aldous Huxley—or perhaps something even more disturbing. The stated aim of Ward's 'sociocracy'—or "the scientific control of the social forces by the collective mind of society for its advantage"—was to acknowledge natural inequalities while eliminating artificial imbalances (Ward 1897, 822). To accomplish this, it professedly needed to distance itself from naïve philanthropy, which was just "injurious to society, as tending to preserve and perpetuate those who are naturally unfit to survive" (Ward 1883, 468). Meliorism was not necessarily tender-hearted.

During the glory days of pragmatism, meliorists such as Ward and Clapperton advocated versions of quasi-Darwinian eugenics. It was unquestionably a hot topic in education and social philosophy when Dewey articulated his melioristic approach. Thus, given his pledge to address the 'problems of men' and his well-known egalitarian sensibilities, it may feel a bit puzzling that the question was all but ignored in his writings (McCune 2012).<sup>14</sup> Of course, not all of the things advocated in the name of

<sup>13</sup> It is worth noting, however, that Dewey found Ward's psychology wanting and that Peirce was critical of the sociologist's individualism.

<sup>14</sup> In contrast, George Herbert Mead discussed the problem, e.g. in the essay 'Experimentalism as a Philosophy of History' (Mead, 1938, 494–519).

eugenics—birth control, for example—were automatically condemnable; but in addition to suspect racial and medical views, the progressivism of some eugenicists could take on rather authoritarian guises. The possibly inconvenient truth is that pragmatist philosophies were not necessarily incompatible with or even indifferent towards the eugenicist agenda. In the later development of Schiller's 'humanistic' pragmatism, eugenics came to play an increasingly central role.<sup>15</sup>

While Schiller did not really promote his philosophy under the banner of meliorism, his eugenicist ideas can plausibly be interpreted as a version of meliorist pragmatism—an engineering application of what was perceived to be state-of-the-art biological science to societal problems. Essentially, it amounted to a proposal for the rational improvement of society by means of both negative and positive eugenics—or, to put the matter in the more provocative Schillerian lingo, "a sort of social hygiene on a large scale" (Schiller 1914, 241). Although we may recoil at such opinions today, it is clear that they were fundamentally motivated by a broadly melioristic animus (cf. Porrovecchio 2010). Contemporary readers may feel even more troubled by the fact that Schiller later expressed approval of certain tendencies in Fascism; to a lesser degree, he also found something acceptable in the spirit of Nazism (see, e.g., Schiller, 1934; 1935).

With Schiller, we come face to face with one of the potential dilemmas of melioristic pragmatism. Although social reformism is typically associated with democratic ambitions, pragmatists such as Dewey and Schiller lived and worked in politically turbulent times, where an avant-garde disposition could assume an anti-democratic as well as an egalitarian guise. While it is possible to detect a markedly traditionalist undercurrent in Schiller's eugenics—namely his promotion of the family unit as the prime agent of society—it is also evident that his programme was progressive in its emphasis on conscious regulation and in its focus on future development. Although some old-style conservatives embraced certain aspects of eugenics (typically the negative variant that aimed at blocking the reproduction of 'bad stock') and the agenda eventually became tainted by the actions of far-right regimes, eugenicist ideas often found natural allies

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<sup>15</sup> It might also be worth noting that Jane Addams, who is often included in the ranks of the Chicago pragmatists, approved of certain aspects of eugenics (Kennedy, 2008); and that Oliver Wendell Holmes, a close associate of the classical pragmatists, notoriously proclaimed that "Three generations of imbeciles are enough" in a Supreme Court decision concerning forced sterilisation.

among feminists, socialists, and some democratic activists.<sup>16</sup> This is not to say that eugenics or similar hard-core measures were necessary consequences of a melioristic spirit; but nor did meliorism provide automatic defences against such outcomes. This may have been particularly true of the scientific variant, with its call for cold calculation, intelligent control, and social engineering. When combined with a pragmatism that firmly focused on the future and treated the world as radically plastic, the results of meliorism could be unpredictable.

Thus, the critical problem of meliorism might be rephrased in terms of the legitimacy of applying certain scientific perspectives—or what are perceived as such—to societal affairs. This also includes the wide-ranging promotion of such a programme by philosophers, irrespective of whether they perceive of philosophy itself to be a science or not. As partisans of Darwin, both Dewey and Schiller deplored the detachment of idealistic philosophy from the scientific world; in this, at least, they seemed to follow in the footsteps of Peirce. However, with regard to the application of philosophy—scientific or not—to the ‘problems of men’, their disputed predecessor appears to have drawn almost diametrically opposite conclusions to the melioristic pragmatists.

### Radical science, conservative sentiments

When James asked Peirce to deliver a series of talks on ‘vitaly important topics’ in 1898, he had no idea what he was about to unleash. Peirce, who had wanted to discourse on logic, responded with a polemical opening lecture on the irrelevance of philosophy for practical concerns. At the same time, he offered a spirited defence of ‘pure theory’ and the search for truth, freed from external motives and pressures. Here, Peirce ostensibly advocated the complete separation of the life of inquiry from the world of practical needs and desires; in what looked like a resolutely un-pragmatic motto, he proclaimed that “the two masters, theory and practice, you cannot serve” (CP 1.642 [1898]).

This contentious position, which seems to fit poorly with the pragmatic viewpoints that Peirce had introduced in the 1870s, has sometimes been dismissed as mere hyperbole brought on by James’s patronising treatment of Peirce in the build-up to the lectures in question. However,

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<sup>16</sup> Only recently has it been revealed to what extent the Nordic social democracies—often viewed as the paragons of political moderation and reason—embraced eugenicist programmes in their treatment of the mentally ill.

Peirce had already expressed similar opinions in manuscripts a couple of years before the lectures were even conceived, so that explanation is partial at best. It is not clear what brought on Peirce's change of heart—if it ever was one—but the motives surely ran deeper than mere annoyance at James. In the wake of the Darwinian revolution, calls for a more scientific approach to social affairs had increased in strength, promoted by second-generation positivists and meliorists alike (two by no means mutually exclusive groups). Although Peirce did not object to the development of social science or utilitarian theories *per se*, he was deeply suspicious of rationalistic programmes for transforming society on such grounds as well as of attempts to reduce science to a producer of social goods. This is perhaps most clearly expressed in his rejection of Karl Pearson's (1900) claim that science ultimately aims at the maintenance of societal stability—a position that Peirce acerbically branded as "narrow British patriotism" (EP 2, 60 [1901]).<sup>17</sup>

Still, whatever motives lay behind Peirce's unexpected validation of the chasm between theory and practice, the fact is that we encounter a position largely opposed to a Deweyan melioristic approach in his later writings. At first, it might seem that Peirce's advocacy of such a surprisingly sharp dualism between the theoretical and practical was simply motivated by his wish to protect scientific inquiry from outside pressures. This was indeed part of the story. Peirce repeatedly argued that traditional moralities, as embodied in the ordinary social habits of human beings, were prone to encroach on the free pursuit of knowledge. In particular, he insisted that the *habit of conservatism* had no place in science:

[C]onservatism is a habit, and it is the law of habit that it tends to spread and extend itself over more and more of the life. In this way, conservatism about morals leads to conservatism about manners and finally conservatism about opinions of a speculative kind. Besides, to distinguish between speculative and practical opinions is the mark of the most cultivated intellects. Go down below this level and you come across reformers and rationalists at every turn—people who propose

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<sup>17</sup> Peirce wrote appraisals of the 1892 and 1900 editions of 'The Grammar of Science'. In the first, Peirce offers a sharp criticism of Pearson's 'Kantian nominalism' and the accompanying approval of notions of immediate sense-impressions and the relativity of motion (w 8:352–4), but has nothing to say of the social justification for science that is explicitly denounced in the later review. In view of Peirce's negative assessment of Pearson's programme, it may be of some interest to register that the book in fact inspired many prominent scientists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, most notably Albert Einstein. It is also worth remarking that Pearson was a leading promoter of eugenics.

to remodel the ten commandments on modern science. Hence it is that morality leads to a conservatism which any new view, or even any free inquiry, no matter how purely speculative, shocks. The whole moral weight of such a community will be cast against science.

CP 1.50 [c. 1896]

While Peirce argued that conservatism "in the sense of a dread of consequences" obstructed inquiry, he also maintained that science had "always been forwarded by radicals and radicalism, in the sense of the eagerness to carry consequences to their extremes" (CP 1.148 [c. 1897]). Thus Peirce, who maintained that the dictum "do not block the way of inquiry" was a corollary of the first rule of reason, advocated speculative open-mindedness and progressivism in science (cf. CP 1.662 [1898]).

However, as the passage quoted above reveals, Peirce was not only a scientific radical out to protect inquiry from conservative intrusion; he also wanted to keep scientific or pseudo-scientific "reformers and rationalists" at bay. Arguing that morals and social norms embodied "the traditional wisdom of ages of experience", Peirce warned against attempts to reform such habits by employing scientific intelligence; indeed, he averred that it was not even safe to reason about such matters, "except in a purely speculative way" (CP 1.50 [c. 1896]). Hence, he defined the meaning of "true conservatism"—that is, the *sentimental* variant of conservatism he embraced—as "not trusting to reasonings about questions of vital importance but rather to hereditary instincts and traditional sentiments" (CP 1.661 [1898]). Peirce's 'sentimentalism'—"the doctrine that great respect should be paid to the natural judgments of the sensible heart" (CP 6.292 [1893])—was in effect a creed for everyday life; but as a theoretical ism, it was also part of a broader philosophical world-view.

So, Peirce not only wished to defend the autonomy of scientific inquiry, but also emphatically argued that sentimental conservatism was the appropriate attitude towards morals and non-scientific social affairs. In part, this was predicated on a rejection of the excesses of rationalism—that is, the belief that 'cold calculation' and scientific deliberation should always guide our conduct. Science, for its part, was to be given complete freedom in its abstract pursuits, no matter how outlandish and perilous they might seem to traditional mores. Philosophical thought was thus liberated and restricted at the same time; while theoretical ethics was permitted to question traditional proscriptions like the incest taboo as well as to freely imagine and discuss alternative social arrangements, it was not to have any direct consequences for our established habits, whether these manifested themselves as seasoned traditions or as instinctual sentiments.

Parts of Peirce's argumentation could easily be read as direct criticisms of the activist brand of meliorism.<sup>18</sup> He called the tendency to allow mere reasoning to subdue "the normal and manly sentimentalism which ought to lie at the cornerstone of all our conduct" "foolish and despicable" (CP 1.662 [1898]), and objected strongly to the view that philosophy should be of practical use.

No doubt a large proportion of those who now busy themselves with philosophy will lose all interest in it as soon as it is forbidden to look upon it as susceptible of practical applications. We who continue to pursue the theory must bid *adieu* to them. But so we must in any department of pure science. CP 1.645 [1898]

Thus, Peirce's 'purified' philosophy apparently excluded *any* consideration of practical applicability. Interpreted charitably, this stance could be viewed as a denunciation of the kind of utilitarianism that would reduce science to technology and philosophy to ideology (cf. Potter, 1996, p. 68). However, it was also clearly designed to let philosophers ignore concrete problems that might trouble lesser mortals; genuine 'scientific men' were to focus on the nobler "study of useless things" (cf. CP 1.76 [c. 1896]).

In sum, then, Peirce's position boiled down to the separation of two spheres of life, each of which needed to be protected from the baleful influence of the other. No doubt, his primary motivation was to ensure the autonomy of science, but the flipside of the coin revealed a deep suspicion of philosophical meddling in social affairs. This faith in the wisdom of tradition could slip into outright conformism, as when Peirce condensed his conservatism to the maxim "obey the traditional maxims of your community without hesitation or discussion" (CP 1.666 [1898]). Such an acceptance of the *status quo*, with its blunt ban on societal debate, had definite authoritarian undertones. It may have been an exaggeration on Peirce's part, but the outburst was not entirely unanticipated; already in 'The Fixation of Belief', he had opined that the "method of authority will always govern the mass of mankind" (CP 5.386 [1877]). In some of Peirce's later writings, this supposition was developed into a distinctly elitist vision of societal affairs.

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<sup>18</sup> Peirce offered no assessment of the melioristic tendencies in Deweyan pragmatism; but he did worry that Dewey's natural history conception of logic might exclude normative concerns (CP 8.190 [1904]; cf. CP 8.239 [1904]). However, complaining that Schillerian pragmatism tried to pay attention to "every department of man's nature", Peirce declared it to be incompatible with his own conception of philosophy as a "passionless and severely fair" science (CP 5.537 [1905-8]).

[I]n any state of society about whose possibility it is at all worthwhile to speculate, there will be two strata, the poor and the rich, the virtual slaves and the truly free; and every individual of the lower stratum, as long as in it he is, is forced to live to do the will of some one or more of the upper stratum, while every one of the higher stratum is free to realize whatever ideal he may, working out his own self-development, under his own governance, subject to such penalties as there are certain to be, if he fails to govern himself wisely. [...] [Liberal education] befits those who, belonging to the upper of the two main classes of society, are to be free to govern themselves and to take what consequences may befall them. MS 674, 7-8 [c. 1911]

In fairness, Peirce's conservatism was hardly meant to serve as a social philosophy in a Deweyan sense. In spite of the aristocratic yearnings conveyed by the quotation above, Peirce does not really strike the contemporary reader as a politically engaged figure;<sup>19</sup> at any rate, such considerations seem to have had little if any direct influence on the development of his core interests in logic. It should also be noted that his anti-egalitarian views were at least to some extent offset by a softer side to his sentimental conservatism. In 'Evolutionary Love', Peirce condemned the capitalistic 'gospel of greed' in terms that contrast starkly with the views expressed in the previous quote.

[P]olitical economy has its formula of redemption, too. It is this: Intelligence in the service of greed ensures the justest prices, the fairest contracts, the most enlightened conduct of all the dealings between men, and leads to the *summum bonum*, food in plenty and perfect comfort. Food for whom? Why, for the greedy master of intelligence.

CP 6.290 [1893]

Peirce was not even a complete stranger to proposals for concrete social reform; in 'Dmesis' (1892), he put forward a system of more humane treatment of prisoners on sentimental-Christian grounds.<sup>20</sup> It is perhaps debatable whether Peirce was speaking as a theoretician or a concerned citizen in this context; but one can in any case question whether he was really able to stop his philosophical speculations from creeping into practical considerations in the manner in which his conservatism dictated.

<sup>19</sup> Most commentators have simply ignored the possible political undertones of Peirce's writings; but T. L. Short (2001) has argued that Peircean pragmatism is compatible with a more contemporary political conception of conservatism.

<sup>20</sup> In the article, Peirce refers approvingly to Jesus's "profound" dictum "You cannot serve God and Mammon". This is obviously the precursor to his own ban on serving the two masters of 'Theory' and 'Practice'.

Consequently, it is not surprising that Peirce did qualify his position by issuing a conservative warning against pushing *any* position or doctrine—including conservatism itself—to extremes. He acknowledged that there might be exceptional situations in which sentiment ought to be guided by reason, and admitted that even radical reforms could be acceptable under certain circumstances (CP 1.633 [1898]). However, in general Peirce insisted that philosophical speculation should be allowed to affect moral conduct “only with secular slowness and the most conservative caution” (CP 1.620 [1898]). Thus, it is obvious enough that he was not a meliorist in the sense of actively calling for the “improvement of society by regulated practical means”; and it is highly unlikely that he would have approved of Dewey’s reconstructionist and reformist projects, had he lived to witness them in full bloom. Nor, may we surmise, would Peirce’s sentimental conservatism have been sympathetic to a ‘scientific’ programme of social hygiene. In these respects, at least, it looks evident that conservative and progressive pragmatism were—and possibly still are—expressions of two incompatible philosophical temperaments.

### Towards better habits

Few, if any, contemporary intellectuals can be exactly classed as radical meliorists or anti-meliorists along the lines sketched above. Progressive pragmatists of today are not likely to prescribe to an agenda of calculative control of society in Ward’s or Schillers’s sense—at least not without significant qualifications—and often tend to emphasise the ethical and even personal implications of meliorism rather than promoting a strictly social-scientific programme of improvement (see, e.g., Hildebrand 2013; McDonald 2011; Stroud 2007). No doubt, most self-professed pragmatists would balk at being labelled ‘conservatives’; but they might still agree that the singular emphasis on the future needs to be tempered by a moderate respect for tradition as a manifestation of more or less intelligent social habits. Yet, practically all variants of present-day melioristic pragmatism seem to subscribe to a leading idea traceable to Dewey, namely the notion that “philosophy’s *raison d’être* is to make life better” (Hildebrand 2013, 59). That is, moving beyond the mere acknowledgement that the world is improvable, meliorism is explicitly taken to involve a call to action; it entails a moral *duty* to ameliorate the conditions of existence (McDonald 2011, 171).

At first blush, it would appear that the pragmatists—that is, the Peircean pragmatists—simply have to disagree, at least if they wish to stay true to the outlook of Peirce. The demand that philosophy ought to contribute to the betterment of concrete human existence, now or in the near future, sounds precisely like the kind of intrusion of 'Practice' into the autonomous province of 'Theory' that Peirce abhorred. In his division of labour among intellectual agencies, the "passionless" and "abstract" philosopher was unequivocally excused from dealing with practical aspects of life—with human existence *in toto* (CP 5.536 [c. 1905]). The only overriding scientific obligation was the ideal commitment to pursue truth wherever it might lead the inquirer, with no concern for external demands or consequences. Presumably, the possible real-life damage of such theoretical activity was to be kept in check by the proscription against application and the dictum that scientific speculation ought not to directly influence actual moral or social conduct.

Given this antagonism between the melioristic and the conservative temperament, it does look as if we have uncovered another deep rift—or an alternative way of articulating an essential divide—in the field of pragmatism. It is certainly difficult to see how Peirce could ever be brought into the ranks of the reformists; and those pragmatists who follow in the footsteps of James and Dewey are unlikely to rescind their aspirations to assist humankind in the face of Peircean censure. Yet, there may be room for some rapprochement. It all depends on how we understand 'meliorism', and to what extent and in what respect a melioristic outlook is taken to demand engagement in actual social affairs.

For this purpose, it is useful to introduce a couple of coarse distinctions. Actually, the first has already been sketched; it is the differentiation between the "improvement of society by regulated practical means" and the non-committal doctrine that world is "capable of improvement", which could be dubbed *societal meliorism* and *metaphysical meliorism*, respectively. The former presumes the latter; but it is perfectly possible to be a metaphysical meliorist without thereby being obliged to engage in societal amelioration. A Peircean world-view can accommodate a metaphysical meliorism of sorts. As his logic of vagueness, metaphysical doctrine of tychism, and endorsement of a "thoroughgoing evolutionism" indicate, his universe could hardly be characterised as finished, static, and determinate—although his idealist-tinged talk of final opinion and absolute truth may suggest otherwise.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> As noted, Peirce's developmental standpoint could be construed as generically melioristic, since it involves the idea of the world becoming ever more rational (see n. 5; MS 953).

However, there is a second sense in which Peirce's philosophy might be described as involving meliorism, or, perhaps more accurately, as being conducive to a broadly melioristic viewpoint. Expanding on a key insight of his original pragmatism, Peirce envisaged a trichotomy of normative sciences—esthetics, ethics and logic (or semiotic)—busied with the criticism and improvement of habits of action. Using Peircean terms, this could be understood as a matter of developing a *logica docens* from the *logica utens*<sup>22</sup>—that is, logic in use—that coping in a challenging world inevitably produced in human beings and which, to a large extent, was inherited through varying traditions (in the broad sense that, among other things, included linguistic habits). Viewed from this perspective, the special province of Peirce's normative philosophy was the deliberate formation and reformation of habits of feeling, action, and thought (or, more broadly, sign-utterance and sign-interpretation) (cf. CP 1.574 [1903]).<sup>23</sup> It was an explicitly critical process ultimately aimed at clarifying and improving our habitual ideals. On the other hand, Peirce emphasised that such habits were not simply made, but a product of active experimentation in a world—internal and external—which did not simply bend to our will; in this sense, we might say that they were discoveries at least as much as artefacts. This point of view does would not necessarily entail abandoning the search for truth for a more instrumentalist conception of philosophical work, for in the end the development of ideally optimal habits of thought would coincide pragmatically with the discovery of truth.

Not only did Peirce suggest that normative inquiry could be construed as a critical review of habits—or, perhaps more accurately, as criticism of the processes by which habits are evaluated and developed—he also argued that the “continual amelioration of our own habits [...] is the only alternative to a continual deterioration of them” (MS 674:1 [c. 1911]). In a sense, this is pragmatist meliorism in the broadest acceptance con-

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However, that position is perhaps more accurately classified as cosmological optimism than as meliorism.

<sup>22</sup> Here, ‘logic’ is best understood broadly, as semiotic. It is worth pointing out that ‘logica utens’ does not have to refer to reasoning in a narrow sense; it can plausibly be said to encompass our ‘rhetorica utens’ as well as the ideals in use that form the experiential groundwork of Peircean esthetics and ethics.

<sup>23</sup> Often, Peirce presented this process hierarchically, with esthetics (as the science of ideals) taking precedence over ethics, which in turn provided principles for logic; but the process is perhaps more fruitfully understood as one of cyclical phases within one department of inquiry.

ceivable. From this angle, the course of life could be described as incessant modification of habits of different grades of concretion and abstraction; normative philosophy simply represents a higher level of awareness and abstraction in this process. We might designate such a conception as *minimal meliorism*. Again, it might be argued that societal meliorism involves such a comprehensive perspective, as any attempt at reform must presuppose at least some degree of modifiability of personal and communal habits by means of reason. Still, minimal habit-meliorism is not equivalent to the metaphysical variant. Although they do not exclude each other, the former is narrower than the latter without thereby necessarily presupposing it. A minimal meliorist is specifically committed only to the notion that *human* habits can to some extent be improved by rational means.<sup>24</sup> True, it might be argued that a synechist perspective implicitly entails metaphysical meliorism, insofar as human agents are viewed as parts of the world and not as 'subjects' over and against a fundamentally indifferent 'objective' universe;<sup>25</sup> but one can very well be a minimalist without accepting such cosmological commitments.

Granted, this perspective will render practically all forms of self-conscious cognitive activity ameliorative to some extent; and it is still a far cry from a reformist notion of meliorism. Yet, in his conception of normative philosophy Peirce may—unwittingly, perhaps—have hit on the common core of the pragmatist-meliorist outlook. The fact that such normative activity is not restricted to pragmatists, but can embrace the endeavours of many different schools of philosophy (and beyond), is not a defect; pragmatism simply makes this more explicit. The particular contribution of the minimalist conception is its highlighting of the core significance of the concept of habit for meliorism. In fact, this may indicate a subtle but substantial difference between pragmatist meliorism and some other programmes of social altruism. *Deep meliorism* (to introduce yet another term) requires the improvement of personal and social habits, not just the mitigation of current circumstances of existence.

Similar considerations led Dewey—the father of transformative pragmatism—to sharply rebuke the reformers of his day for pursuing too restricted aims.

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<sup>24</sup> For Peirce, such a capacity for meliorism would not have been restricted to human beings; arguably, it would have been one of the characteristic marks of his broader (but somewhat misleadingly named) conception of a 'scientific intelligence', i.e. "an intelligence capable of learning by experience" (CP 2.227 [c. 1897]).

<sup>25</sup> Here, one might refer to Peirce's approval of the *il lume naturale* thesis and his particular conception of anthropomorphism (on the latter, see Bergman 2014).

“Social reform” is conceived in a Philistine spirit, if it is taken to mean anything less than precisely the liberation and expansion of the meanings of which experience is capable. No doubt many schemes of social reform are guilty of precisely this narrowing. But for that very reason they are futile; they do not succeed in even the special reforms at which they aim, except at the expense of intensifying other defects and creating new ones. Nothing but the best, the richest and fullest experience possible, is good enough for man. The attainment of such an experience is not to be conceived as the specific problem of “reformers” but as the common purpose of men. The contribution which philosophy can make to this common aim is criticism.

LW 1:307–8 [1925]

Instead of “the richest and fullest experience possible”, we could perhaps speak of ideal habits of feeling, action, and thought. True, the Deweyan conception, with its focus on ‘problematic situations’, entails a stronger implication of changing the world than a more conservative Peircean notion of habit-amelioration would allow; but the primary target remains the same. It is our assemblage of habits—and by extension, our sphere of meaningful experience—that is meant to be improved or expanded.

Accordingly, it is possible to find a common pragmatist denominator in minimal meliorism, thin as it may be. Yet, even if one accepts that there may be a link between Peirce’s talk about habit-amelioration and the more familiar senses of pragmatist meliorism, one might still feel that his point of view, like James’s (cf. Ruetenik 2005), was too focused on personal amelioration and omitted the vital social dimension. It is undeniably true that Peirce tended to speak of *self*-criticism and *self*-control, and that the overriding focus and aim of his ‘normative science’ was the development of reasoning. However, this does not mean that the self in question was strictly speaking a human being; Peirce suggested that a community may be viewed as a kind of person in a loose sense (EP 2, 338 [1905]), and repeatedly argued that seemingly private reflection was more adequately understood as communication between temporal ‘selves’. Furthermore, he contended that reflection should not be construed “in that narrow sense in which silence and darkness are favorable to thought”, but “should rather be understood as covering all rational life, so that an experiment shall be an operation of thought” (EP 2, 337 [1905]). In its fullest sense, critical reasoning is something that takes place in the external as well as the internal world; Peirce’s conservatism notwithstanding, this can

also entail the testing of normative conceptions in and through their social consequences—as long as we proceed with due conservative caution.<sup>26</sup>

Another argument that might be marshalled against the inclusion of the Peircean conception of habit-improvement in the meliorist fold is that it is severely marred by Peirce's quest for the *summum bonum*, or an esthetic end that "recommends itself in itself without ulterior consideration" (EP 2, 260 [1903]; cf. CP 2.199 [c. 1902]). Hugh McDonald (2011), in particular, has contended that "meliorism constitutes an argument against absolute standards" (p. 216), of which the notion of a highest aim would seem to be a prime specimen. Peirce certainly appeared to break with pluralist sentiments when he suggested that there could really be only one *summum bonum*, "the broadest, highest, and most general possible aim" (CP 1.611 [1903]) common to all mankind (if not to all forms of 'scientific intelligence'). However, he also proposed that the ultimate good could be understood in terms of "the development of concrete reasonableness" (CP 5.3 [1902])—a notably vague conception that might be spelled out in terms of embodying ideas "in art-creations, in utilities, and above all in theoretical cognition" (CP 6.476 [1908]). Although this might not allay all possible worries concerning Peirce's perfectionism, there is no obvious reason why such a view of the highest objective could not accommodate a meliorist notion of gradual and relative improvement.

That said, it needs to be acknowledged that Peircean conservatism can be overly restrictive, in effect denying the philosopher a voice in the public sphere. If taken literally, Peirce's defence of the autonomy of scientific philosophy would also muzzle some of his most spirited followers today.<sup>27</sup> To this one could append some of the less appealing features of his standpoint; in his almost nostalgic yearning for an intellectual aristocracy, Peirce seemed to forget his own cautionary warning against doctrinal extremes. Perhaps more worryingly, he appears to have ignored the possibility that a strict theory-practice divide could violate *synechism*, the methodetic cum metaphysical principle of continuity—thereby blocking some paths of inquiry. Yet, in spite of the often un-pragmatist tone of Peirce's conservative arguments, there is also wisdom to be found in Peircean sentimentalism. At the very least, Peircean conservatism might function as an apposite reminder of the dangers of reformist fervour. Charitably interpreted, sentimental conservatism can be construed in terms of

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<sup>26</sup> I have developed this argument in greater detail in (Bergman 2012).

<sup>27</sup> Here, I am primarily thinking of the kind of public philosophy developed by Susan Haack (1998; 2008).

admonitions against scientific hubris—warnings that any wise pragmatist should take seriously, especially keeping in mind Schiller’s troubling forays into eugenics and flirtation with real political authoritarianism of the darkest kind.

Both melioristic and conservative variants of pragmatism involve certain perils. The former can lead to an excessive confidence in progress, where the capacity of reason to control habits of action is exaggerated and traditions are treated as mere prejudices. At the end of this road awaits extreme rationalism, fuelled by visions of brave new worlds but haunted by the spectre of eugenics. As it turns quasi-scientific, meliorism risks losing sight of its original ethical impetus. For its part, conservative pragmatism, with its simplistic partition of life into the spheres of theory and practice, can all too easily descend into an insidious form of social conventionalism. This is not to deny the prudence of a division of labour; in many respects, Peirce’s worries about crass utilitarianism and imperialistic scientism were entirely justified. But there can also be something disconcerting in Peirce’s advocacy of perfect autonomy for science, at least if it causes us to forget that we are still talking about a fallible endeavour, one that is rooted in more mundane pursuits and always—even in the most abstract mathematical speculations or outlandish physical theories—to some degree connected to human experience. To quote Peirce, our science is a “middle-sized and mediocre” affair, for all its glory rather insignificant in the bigger picture of things (CP 1.119 [c. 1897]).

What I have sketched in this this article is in effect a compromise position, in which the social-melioristic and scientific-conservative temperaments could—perhaps even should—restrain each other. It is not a programme for action, and as such it provides no prescription for how any particular problem that we may encounter ought to be treated; in each case of proposed social engagement and application, pros and cons will need to be weighed afresh, taking heed of sentiments as well as of the judgments of reasoning and the possibilities for renewal. However, the approach suggested here can provide a different way of assessing the pragmatist tradition; an interpretation of the normative core of Peirce’s philosophy in terms of minimal meliorism, with an accompanying metaphysical meliorism, may at least help us avoid dividing pragmatism into two radically disconnected camps in a way that is simply not productive. This is not just a matter of saving Peirce from isolation; it can also be seen as an opportunity to put Peircean instruments to work in the kind of projects envisaged by Dewey—with some conservative care, of course.

Only time can tell if this is truly practicable; but whatever the outcome, the investigation will almost certainly contribute to the improvement of pragmatism.

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# John Dewey and Democratic Participation under Modern Conditions

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## 1. Introduction

Dewey's mature conception of democracy may be seen to employ resources from political as well as academic traditions. In particular, his emphasis on democratic participation may be viewed in the light of the civic republicanism of Thomas Jefferson.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, as Dewey suggests in *Freedom and Culture* (Dewey, 1969–91 [1939]),<sup>2</sup> Jefferson's preference for a local, communicatively based polity accords with traits of Dewey's own conception of a democratic public as originally presented in *The Public and Its Problems* (Dewey, 1969–91 [1927]). As both works suggest and *Freedom and Culture* explicitly shows, Dewey's mature notion of democratic participation rearticulates Jeffersonian ideals and Jefferson's concern for freedom. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, such rearticulation requires a sociological sensitivity to conditions for participation in modern complex societies. In this paper I consider two ways in which Dewey analyses social conditions for democratic participation, and then I briefly compare Dewey's analysis to similar efforts in the Chicago school in sociology in the 1920s. Firstly, in works such as *Democracy and Education* (Dewey, 1969–91 [1916]), *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (Dewey, 1969–91 [1920]) and *Lectures in China, 1919–1920* (Dewey, 1973) Dewey points out that political participation is enabled not only through state institutions that have been developed in Western societies but through membership in voluntary associations in civil society. More specifically, he understands participation

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<sup>1</sup> See Carreira da Silva, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> See LW 13, 175–7.

in terms of membership in social movements and in terms of cooperative, social inquiry conducted through such membership. Secondly, Dewey further problematizes participation through a notion of cultural lags that typically characterises industrial societies, and that may be related to conditions for participation at a subjective as well as at a structural level. I will end by briefly discussing Dewey's attempt to address the problem at stake through proposing a cognitive division of labour between lay agents and social scientific experts.

## 2. Participation: the example of social movements

In *Freedom and Culture* Dewey discusses the continuing relevance of Thomas Jefferson's political ideas. In appreciating Jefferson's democratic ideas, the transformation of America from an agrarian to an industrial society gains significance not only as an historical background of interpretation but becomes all the more important since Jefferson saw freedom in the political domain as depending on freedom in the cultural and economic domain.<sup>3</sup> Jefferson's model of a local, town hall polity, and his preference for participation in terms of direct communication, must thus be reinterpreted and assessed in view of modern cultural and economic conditions that either enable or prohibit a communicatively based polity. Yet, not only in *The Public and Its Problems* and his political writings from the 1930s, but in several works and lectures from the years before his book on the public Dewey considers conditions for democratic participation in modern societies without, however, explicitly referring to the Jeffersonian tradition.

In works such as *Democracy and Education*, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, and *Lectures in China* Dewey points out that democratic participation is based not only in local traditions: it is more extensively conditioned and enabled through voluntary associations that have arisen from the complex division of labour in modern societies. In *Reconstruction in Philosophy* he argues that:

Along with the development of the larger, more inclusive and more unified organization of the state has gone the emancipation of individuals from restrictions and servitudes previously imposed by custom and class status. But the individuals freed from external and coercive bonds have not remained isolated. Social molecules have at once

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<sup>3</sup> See LW 13, 68–9; 177–8.

recombined in new associations and organizations. Compulsory associations have been replaced by voluntary ones; rigid organizations by those more amenable to human choice and purposes—more directly changeable at will. What upon one side looks like a movement toward individualism, turns out to be really a movement toward multiplying all kinds and varieties of associations: Political parties, industrial corporations, scientific and artistic organizations, trade unions, churches, schools, clubs and societies without number, for the cultivation of every conceivable interest that men have in common. MW 12, 196

Adding that “[p]luralism is well ordained in present political practice” (MW 12, 196), Dewey sees the need for a modification of political theory. As Filipe Carreira da Silva (2009) has pointed out, Dewey’s approach to democratic participation through membership in voluntary political associations draws not only on Jeffersonian sources but shows affinity to the civic republicanism expressed through Harold Laski’s theory of political pluralism that became popular in the USA in the 1920s and 30s (cf. Westbrook 1991, 245). Further, using the terminology of *The public and Its Problems*, the reference to voluntary associations at least suggests that *publics* can be empirically and historically conceived of in the plural, and that they arise under distinctively modern conditions.<sup>4</sup>

Yet, how are voluntary associations to become organised as publics to effectively enable political participation, and how does a public interact with existing institutional structures such that sometimes, as Dewey points out, “to form itself, the public has to break existing political forms” (LW 2, 255)? To approach these questions we turn to Dewey’s *Lectures in China* where we may find exemplifications of social and historical processes through which publics develop and instigate institutional and legal reform. Taking the fresh example of how suffrage for women was achieved in the USA in 1919 through the women’s rights movement, Dewey instructively suggests how democratic participation defines the end, and to some extent the means, through which a modern public is organised and become politically significant. Extending his exemplification to include the labour movement Dewey’s account further suggests that the development of publics is rooted in economic and industrial conditions (LC 76–9). Women, “as wage-earning participants in an expanding industrial milieu” (LC 77), and workers generally, developing “concepts

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<sup>4</sup> Yet, in *The Public and Its Problems* Dewey concludes by favouring the local community as a model for how a public is to be integrated (see LW 2, 369–72). See also James Bohman’s recent criticism of Dewey’s notion of a “unitary public” as the solution of the problem of integration (Bohman, 2010, 63).

of the dignity of labour, and of equality of treatment, and of opportunity" (LC 78), understand themselves in the light of their contributions to the welfare of the whole society. Such self-understanding, together with raised awareness of the injustice they have suffered, motivates the organisation of social movements through which moral claims become politically effective.

The example of modern social movements shows that Dewey's thought on democratic participation, like that of Jefferson, is motivated by an overarching normative concern: *freedom from domination*.<sup>5</sup> While the historical and political context of Jefferson's civic republicanism is the resistance to British colonial domination, Dewey makes generalisations on the basis of European as well as American history to the effect of showing that Western democracies have developed through resistance to certain institutionalised forms of legitimisation, and to political, economic, and cultural domination inherent in such legitimisation (LW 13, 175; LC 65–70, 73–4). Through what we may see as a Left-Hegelian approach Dewey here adopts Hegel's notion of *recognition* to analyse how social movements have emerged through the struggle for public recognition of demands made on behalf of suppressed groups, and how such groups have finally achieved recognition, such as in the cases of women's suffrage and legislations for improved work conditions in industry (Midtgarden, 2011). This Left-Hegelian approach thus suggests a close connection between democratic participation and freedom. While the mature Dewey often explicates the concept of freedom in terms of a notion of "growth" or self-realisation, the example of social movements suggests that the value of social and political participation is not only the self-realisation of individuals (e.g. MW 12, 186, 198; LW 7, 305–6). Participation enabled through social movements contributes to resisting various forms of domination that undermine one's capacity to engage in changing actual political practices and institutions,<sup>6</sup> such as was the situation for women through centuries of European and American history.

In addition to serving the task of articulating a conceptual relation between participation and freedom, the example of social movements sheds

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<sup>5</sup> In *Freedom and Culture* Dewey emphasises Jefferson's concern for freedom from domination, and he thinks that it would not be against Jeffersonian principles to hold that economically conditioned domination in civil society would legitimate interference on part of the state: "[i]t is sheer perversion to hold that there is anything in Jeffersonian democracy that forbids political action to bring about equalization of economic conditions in order that the equal right of all to free choice and free action be maintained" (LW 13, 178).

<sup>6</sup> Melvin Rogers makes a similar claim based on different textual material (see Rogers 2009, 220–1).

further light on the relation between *participation* and *inquiry*. Here, too, the Hegelian notion of recognition is helpful to the task at hand: Dewey requests members, and particularly leaders, of social movements to “adopt an attitude of inquiry” to determine “which needs of their society are not being reasonably met” and who “are not being afforded opportunity to develop themselves so as to contribute to enrichment of the total society” (LC 80). In other words, the task is to find out what individuals and groups are not yet publicly recognised as to their legitimate needs, as well as to their actual or possible contribution to society. Yet, Dewey further suggests that inquiry through inclusion of representatives of relevant groups in society, the dominating, as well as the dominated ones, may increase the possibility for a peaceful, non-violent resolution of social conflicts. “If the people on one side of the issue adopt an attitude of calm inquiry”, he thinks, “it becomes less difficult for those who hold opposing views also to adopt a rational approach to the problems” (LC 80). Dewey’s ideal notion of participation as cooperative inquiry no doubt reflects his hopes for the situation in China during his visit where he met leaders of Chinese reform movements. Yet, it is tempting to extend the application of the notion of participation as cooperative inquiry to his contemporary America, with its multiethnic composition and mass immigration. In fact, around the same time, shortly after World War I, prominent American sociologists develop a similar, and in some respects more articulated, notion of participation in terms of inquiry, and among these are Dewey’s former student at the University of Michigan, Robert E. Park (1864–1944), and Dewey’s former colleague at the University of Chicago, William I. Thomas (1863–1947).<sup>7</sup> By appealing to the “Founding Fathers” for legitimating their concern for participation, Park and Thomas suggest a model of inquiry for grappling peacefully with conflicts that may arise in times of mass immigration, rapid industrialization and urbanization, and that demand “a new definition of the situation” (Park and Burgess 1921, 765–6). Like Dewey, these sociologists are driven by a concern for inclu-

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<sup>7</sup> The context of this suggestion is a sociological discussion of the assimilation of new immigrants in America to which Thomas and Park contributed in *Old World Traits Transplanted* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1921). Although Thomas was the main contributor to the book, Robert E. Park and Herbert A. Miller were in fact officially recognized as the authors of the first edition of this work. For the intriguing circumstances behind this recognition of authorship, see Rauschenbusch (1979, 92–3). Yet, in Park’s and Ernest W. Burgess’s classical sociological textbook, *Introduction to the Science of Sociology* (1921), there is an edited version of the same discussion to which I refer below.

sive social participation beyond the sphere of institutionalised politics,<sup>8</sup> but more distinctively than Dewey they suggest an *action theoretical* basis for a notion of cooperative social inquiry. While stressing language as a medium of coordination of action, and that new immigrants would need a sufficient mastery of the language in their new country, they argue that the inclusion and participation of members of new immigrant groups would provide cultural resources for facing social issues through "constant redefinitions of the situation".

The ability to participate productively implies [...] a diversity of attitudes and values in the participants, but a diversity not so great as to lower the morals of the community and to prevent effective cooperation. It is important to have ready definitions for all immediate situations, but progress is dependent on the constant redefinitions for all immediate situations, and the ideal condition for this is the presence of individuals with divergent definitions, who contribute, in part consciously and in part unconsciously, through their individualism and labors to a common task and a common end.

Park and Burgess, 1921, 767

Like Dewey they emphasise the open-ended experimental character of such cooperative efforts and that "it is only through their consequences that words get their meanings or that situations become defined" (Park and Burgess, 1921, 768). Yet, they provide no account of how such cooperative inquiry may become institutionalized, or how it may interact with institutions of the state.

### 3. Obstacles to democratic participation: cultural lags

Dewey's ideal notion of inquiry as conducted through membership in social movements must be seen in the light of the social transformations of industrialisation that had taken place in Western societies and America in particular by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In his *Lectures in China* Dewey admits that the emergence of the women's rights movement was largely due to economic factors: "[e]conomic factors were primarily responsible for the change in women's status; political action served chiefly to ratify

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<sup>8</sup> "The founders of America defined the situation in terms of participation, but this has actually taken too exclusively the form of 'political participation'. The present tendency is to define the situation in terms of social participation, including demand for the improvement of social conditions to a degree which will enable all to participate" (Park and Burgess, 1921, 767).

what economics had already accomplished' (LC 109). This suggests that an assessment of the social conditions for democratic participation must take further account of the socially transformative character of economic and industrial processes. In *The Public and Its Problems* Dewey famously adopts Graham Wallas's term "The Great Society" to stress the extent to which economic activities, involving the implementation and use of new technologies, have transformed social conditions for politics and political participation (Wallas, 1914; LW 22, 95–6, 301–2). Here, however, his analysis is more pessimistic, pointing out how economic activities and new transportation and communication technologies undermine established political institutions and practices, without giving rise to new ones.

New technology undercuts the authority of political and legal institutions on a national level since, Dewey points out, "[g]reen and red lines, marking out political boundaries, are on the maps and affect legislation and jurisdiction of courts, but railways, mails and telegraph-wires disregard them. The consequences of the latter influence more profoundly those living within the legal local units than do boundary lines" (LW 2 301–2).<sup>9</sup> Dewey is concerned about the poor conditions and capacities at hand for responding politically and legally to social and moral issues arising through the consequences of modern industrial activities. Like Robert Park he sometimes refers to "the cultural lag thesis" of the American sociologist William F. Ogburn (1922) who accounts for social change by distinguishing between "material" or technological culture, the driving force of social change, and "immaterial culture", such as morality and politics, which typically lags behind, failing to adapt swiftly and adequately to the new situation established through modern technologies.<sup>10</sup>

Dewey is particularly concerned with how the new situation deeply affects capacities for participating in politics in a reasoned way. The impact of a cultural lag may be seen on several levels: on a *subjective* level a certain inconsistency or "insincerity" arises when agents adapt to tech-

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<sup>9</sup> Dewey's observations interestingly parallel the efforts of prominent Chicago sociologists to conceptualise the social consequences of the implementation and use of modern technology. In particular, in their outlines of a Human Ecology, Robert E. Park, Ernest W. Burgess and Roderick D. McKenzie emphasize how modern transportation and communication technology enable an ever more extensive physical and economic integration, not only of the North American continent, but of territories and continents across the globe, without a corresponding moral integration. See in particular McKenzie 1924; 1927, and Park and Burgess 1921, 162, 556; and Park 1936.

<sup>10</sup> As for Dewey's direct reference to William F. Ogburn's book (1922), see MW 15, 259; for Park's reference, see Park 1926, 6.

nological and economical conditions through their professional and everyday habits, but fail to adjust their deeper moral commitments and to rearticulate these as publicly acceptable reasons for action.

Insincerities of this sort are much more frequent than deliberate hypocrisies and more injurious. They exist on a wide scale when there has been a period of rapid change in environment accompanied by change in what men do in response and by a change in overt habits, but without corresponding readjustment of the basic emotional and moral attitudes formed in the period prior to change of environment. This "cultural lag" is everywhere in evidence at the present time [. . .] Not merely individuals here and there but large numbers of people habitually respond to conditions about them by means of actions having no connection with their familiar verbal responses. And yet the latter express dispositions saturated with emotions that find an outlet in words but not in acts. No estimate of the effects of culture upon the elements that now make up freedom begins to be adequate that does not take into account the moral and religious splits that are found in our very make-up as persons. LW 13, 97-8

One example of such inconsistency or "insincerity" is when American citizens in the Southern states through the 1920s appeal to traditional democratic ideals, such as the Jeffersonian principle of local self-government, but immediately face the incapacity of local governments to deal with illegal import of liquor enabled by new means of transportation, and they are thus forced to recognise, against their own principles, the practical need for amendments on a national level (LW 2, 317-8).

Yet, besides such inconsistencies on a subjective level, a cultural lag would further concern certain *structural* conditions that affect the possibility of organising and participating through what Dewey calls a public.<sup>11</sup> Let us first briefly recall Dewey's definition: the public "consists of all those who are affected by the indirect consequences of transactions to such an extent that it is deemed necessary to have those consequences systematically cared for" (LW 2, 245-6). Dewey stresses "the far-reaching character of consequences, whether in space or time; their settled, uniform and recurrent nature, and their irreparableness" (LW 2, 275). In a modern "Great Society" such far-reaching and recurrent consequences arise on certain structural conditions of action: corporations come into being as powerful economical agents through national legislation;<sup>12</sup> and new technological

<sup>11</sup> See also chapter 7 ("Publics as Products") in Hickman 1990.

<sup>12</sup> See MW 15, 254, 259, 261; LW 2, 354. See also Dewey's comment in *Freedom and Culture*: "Modern industry could not have reached its present development without legalization of

infrastructure enables their range of action to be vastly extended in space and time. Such structural conditions suggest a cultural lag that motivates the conceptual strategy of introducing the notion of the public in the first place: the economic activities that are legally and technologically enabled have indirect social consequences that were foreseen neither by law givers and industrial entrepreneurs nor by scientists and engineers; and politics and legislation lag behind in dealing with such consequences. At the same time, structural conditions that enable powerful economic agents to act undermine the ability of those who are affected negatively by consequences of these activities to organise themselves and to make their claims effective.<sup>13</sup> Yet, as the example of social movements above suggests, at certain points in recent Western history, those affected by unforeseen consequences of modern economical activities have in fact managed to organise themselves to the effect of instigating legal and social reforms.

However, an *unorganised* public would not only consist of those who have suffered unhealthy work conditions, low payments, and unemployment, but those who in their capacities as *consumers* are becoming increasingly economically dependent on available and affordable goods in an ever expanding, international market. Particularly in his lectures on social philosophy at Columbia University in the mid-1920s Dewey focuses on a certain lag in the economic cycle of production and consumption: whereas individuals and groups participating in industrial production, transportation and exchange of material goods are organised through powerful economic and technological agencies and through social organizations, individuals in their role as consumers are “an undefined mass”, being “remote in space and time”, having “no mechanism for making their requirements effective” (MW 15, 262), and they are thus “not organized so as to make their wants economically effective” (MW 15, 269). In other words, consumers *qua* consumers lack social and technological means of communication for organising themselves. Such a lag is de-

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the corporation. The corporation is a creature of the state: that is, of political action. It has no existence save by the action of legislatures and courts” (LW 13, 112).

<sup>13</sup> Dewey here also ascribes a cultural lag thesis to Karl Marx: “[M]arx did go back of property relations to the working of the forces of production as no one before him had done. He also discriminated between the state of the forces of productivity and the actual state of production existing at a given time, pointing out the lag often found in the latter. He showed in considerable detail that the cause of the lag is subordination of productive forces to legal and political conditions holding over from a previous regime of production. Marx’s criticism of the present state of affairs from this last point of view was penetrating and possessed of enduring value” (LW 13, 119).

fined by a legislation which *de facto* favours the economic interests behind industrial mass production but which does not handle long term and irreparable consequences of industrial production for future consumers *and* producers. In particular, "[t]he time phase is seen in ruthless exploitation of natural resources without reference to conservation for future users" (MW 15, 262).<sup>14</sup> Hence, both in their state of being socially unorganised<sup>15</sup> and in their present or future state of suffering under market conditions unfavourable to their health, interests or developmental potentials, consumers, or rather subsets of consumers, would form a paradigm case of an unorganised public.

On Dewey's analysis, capitalist societies reproduce social conditions that disable members of a public—such as consumers—to organise themselves and make their requirements bear on politics and legislation. Such social reproduction even concerns subjective dispositions and attitudes; as Dewey learns from Thorstein Veblen, consumer habits and subjective preferences are heavily conditioned by economic conditions: "[t]he market and business determine wants, not the reverse" (MW 15, 264; see also LW 2, 299–301). In so far as processes of forming wants are conditioned by actual conditions of the market, capacities for articulating common interests and for organising collective efforts would be further undermined. In ways similar to Veblen, Dewey analyses such failing capacity in terms of "the economic-industrial activities that affect the distribution of power, and of abilities, capacities" (MW 15, 247), and in terms of "the capitalistic system" that has "restricted and deflected the direction of progress on the basis of the wants and powers of the class having the surplus" (MW 15, 266). Given such sociological sensitivity to asymmetric and structurally embedded distributions of power, one may be surprised to find that Dewey's overall approach to the problem of the public in *The Public and Its Problems* is caught in terms of a general requirement of perfecting "the means and ways of communication of meanings so that genuinely shared interest in the consequences of interdependent activities may inform desire and effort and thereby direct action" (LW 2, 332). Since on Dewey's account members of an unorganised public typically lack social and technological means for organising themselves through communica-

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<sup>14</sup> In his *Social Change* William F. Ogburn similarly uses the issue raised by the exploitation of the forests as a natural resource in USA as an example of cultural lag, see Ogburn 1922, 204–5.

<sup>15</sup> See how Dewey in *The Public and Its Problems* stresses that "[i]n itself [the public] is unorganized and formless" (LW 2, 277).

tion, this ideal requirement of communication thus does not seem to take us very far. Nevertheless, by being connected to other suggestions in *The Public and Its Problems*, Dewey's hopes for a communicatively organised public may be developed in ways that may appear more realistic in the internet age than in his own days. I will end this paper with some reflections on his proposal of a cognitive division of labour between lay agents and scientific experts, and on the technological infrastructure that may support such division of labour.

#### 4. Cooperative inquiry through cognitive division of labour

Dewey's proposal of a cognitive division of labour is motivated by a consideration of the asymmetric distribution of cognitive resources among citizens. To some extent, Dewey argues, the economically conditioned asymmetric distribution of *power* can be correlated with an asymmetric distribution of *knowledge* and *information*: whereas the majority of the members of society lack knowledge that could have put them in a better position to understand how the market affects their lives, including knowledge of processes through which wants and preferences are formed, members of the economic elite "occupy strategic positions which give them advance information of forces that affect the market" (LW 2, 338–9) and by which they may influence economic processes to their own benefit.<sup>16</sup> Such asymmetric distribution of knowledge and information, Dewey tends to think, can only be countered through "a kind of knowledge and insight which does not yet exist" (LW 2, 339) but which he through his famous discussion with Walter Lippmann thinks of in terms of a cognitive division of labour, rather than an "intellectual aristocracy" of experts (LW2, 362).

In *The Public and Its Problems* Dewey proposes that social scientific experts and lay agents should cooperate to develop the kind of knowledge that would capture the conditions under which individuals and groups become unfavourably affected by indirect consequences of economic action, and that would contribute to a shared perception of the situation. Lay agents are to enter the process of inquiry in order to assess proposals developed by the experts.<sup>17</sup> James Bohman has emphasised that Dewey's

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<sup>16</sup> Dewey stresses the contingent and arbitrary nature of such differences between members of society (see MW 15, 238).

<sup>17</sup> "It is not necessary that the many should have the knowledge and skill to carry on the needed investigations; what is required is that they have the ability to judge of the bearing of the knowledge supplied by others upon common concerns" (LW 2, 365).

model challenges and complements the epistemic authority of scientific experts, and that it recognises and authorises the practical knowledge possessed by lay agents as being adequate for assessing expert proposals (Bohman, 1999, 465–6). Bohman further emphasises that such cooperative inquiry would reflexively involve an assessment of the very framework of cooperation; hence, what is brought to the test are not only expert proposals, but, on a second order level, the terms of the cooperation itself. Bohman uses the example of how AIDS patient groups and activists in the United States through the 1990s responded to the rather ineffective medical treatment they originally received, and how this response effectively altered the terms of the cooperation between medical experts and lay agents through affecting the authority of the norms of validity underlying the medical research at stake (Bohman, 1999, 465). Yet, in focussing on medical expertise Bohman's example is not fully adequate for understanding the role of *social* scientific expertise. Further, Bohman's interpretation focuses primarily on justificatory stages in a process of inquiry, where lay agents are to "practically verify" expert proposals (Bohman, 1999, 466, 475–7), whereas Dewey suggests that lay agents should also take part at an early stage of inquiry, when issues are detected and problems formulated. In order to come up with relevant and adequate proposals social scientists should thus be informed about issues through the agents that are affected (LW 2, 364–5). Let me briefly expand on this suggestion to complement Bohman's interpretation.

On Dewey's account lay agents would participate through initial stages of inquiry that are directly motivated by "an indeterminate" or "conflicting (social) situation" (LW 12, 108, 492–3). Lay agents would here offer their various "definitions of the situation", to borrow Park's and Thomas's terms. Such definitions would be diverging, and they would contain various implicit values and valuations, given the various social and cultural backgrounds that would be involved. One important task of the social scientists would be to make such implicit value-orientations explicit and to make the value orientations bear on alternative proposals of how issues can be addressed and grappled with. The proposals would articulate expected practical and social consequences of value-orientations when acted on through available institutional and technological means.<sup>18</sup> Such

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<sup>18</sup> See how Dewey in *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (1938) more generally and abstractly defines social inquiry in terms of analyzing a problematic situation: "any problematic situation, when it is analyzed, presents, in connection with the idea of operations to be performed, alternative possible ends in the sense of terminating consequences" (LW 12, 495).

articulations would thus concern what Dewey famously calls “end(s)-in-view” (MW 9, 112; LW 1, 280). The proposals should be tested by lay agents re-entering the process of inquiry by performing what Bohman calls a “practical verification”. A practical verification would not only bring expert proposals to the test but would force lay agents involved to reflect on the social and practical consequences of their value commitments. Such moral reflection could disclose common values among the agents involved, or it might instigate the formation of inclusive interests and ends that would motivate collective action.<sup>19</sup> Yet, as Melvin Rogers has pointed out, on Dewey’s account, moral reflection could also make agents realise the tragic dimension of moral conflicts and the incommensurability of moral values (Rogers, 2009, 183–9).

This brief elaboration on Dewey’s suggestion of a cognitive division of labour could be complemented by a few words on the role such co-operation could play in organising otherwise dispersed individuals and in forming collective identities through communication. In the era of modern information and communication technologies Dewey’s hopes for a communicatively organised public may seem less utopian than in his own days. Through Internet and computer based networks, social scientists may not only effectively reach large numbers of agents and engage in dialogue with them, but the agents themselves have a technologically enabled communicative medium through which they may articulate experiences, exchange descriptions, form identities and agendas.<sup>20</sup> Researchers may facilitate such encounters technologically; and recent examples show how social scientists have invited citizens and stakeholder to participate in online discussions about the consequences of emerging technologies

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<sup>19</sup> In the second edition of *Ethics* (1932) Dewey holds that “[t]he development of inclusive and enduring aims is the necessary condition of the application of reflection in conduct” (LW 7, 185). Later in *Ethics* he qualifies the formation of inclusive ends in terms of *sympathy* as an enabling condition, and which “consists in power to make us attend in a broad way to all the social ties which are involved in the formation and execution of policies. Regard for self and regard for others should not, in other words, be *direct* motives to overt action. They should be forces which lead us to *think* of objects and consequences that would otherwise escape notice. These objects and consequences then constitute the *interest* which is the proper motive of action. Their stuff and material are composed of the relations which men actually sustain to one another in concrete affairs” (LW 7, 300).

<sup>20</sup> Note, for example, how the organization of the transnational agrarian movement *Via Campesina*, resisting and contesting land appropriation in the South by states in the North and multinational corporations, have been enabled through information and communication technologies the last two decades (see Borrás and Franco, 2010, 134).

affecting the lives of an increasing number of people.<sup>21</sup> The new possibilities opened up for citizens to engage in exchanges about how new technologies affect their lives across the globe, may perhaps be seen as a partial fulfilment of democratic hopes that Dewey had. In any case, the new historical possibility to conceive of what Bohman has called "Internet Publics" (Bohman, 2008) suggests that technological inventions are not only detrimental to democratic participation, as they may have seemed in Dewey's days. In addition, general traits of Dewey's social ontology may be seen as adaptable to the new era of information and communication technology in so far as he defines the very category of *the social* such as to include technology,<sup>22</sup> and in so far as he stresses that *communication* has as a necessary condition mechanical *associations* of the sort that technological applications, as well as physiological processes, exemplify.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> I here use the example of the EU funded and now completed *TECHNOLIFE* project coordinated by the University of Bergen: *TECHNOLIFE* designed and used an open-source software to invite citizens and stakeholders to discuss ethical issues of concern related to Biometrics; Geographical Imagining Systems, and Emerging Technologies of Human Enhancement. See the website: [www.technolife.no](http://www.technolife.no).

<sup>22</sup> See "The Inclusive Philosophical Idea" (1928) and particularly the comment: "What would social phenomena be without the tools and machines by which physical energies are utilized?" (LW 3, 47).

<sup>23</sup> See *Experience and Nature* (LW 1, 138–9), *The Public and Its Problems* (LW 2, 250–1, 330), and his elaboration on the distinction between *association* and *communication* (*community*) in *Freedom and Culture*: "There is a difference between a society, in the sense of an association, and a community. Electrons, atoms and molecules are in association with one another [...] Natural associations are conditions for the existence of a community, but a community adds the function of communication in which emotions and ideas are shared as well as joint undertakings engaged in. Economic forces have immensely widened the scope of associational activities" (LW 13, 176).

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# Democracy and the Problem of Pluralism: John Dewey revisited

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## 1. Introduction

John Dewey's faith related approach to democracy and democratic institutions has sometimes elicited an awkward response from liberal commentators. Why talk about democratic *faith*? What does Dewey mean when he uses the term? Is it really necessary to assume that elements of faith help justify or explain a commitment to democracy or democracy itself? Does Dewey's idea that democratic participation is an expression of faith perhaps simply show that Dewey is at heart a religious thinker even though he attempts to secularize a faith based way of thinking? (See Dewey, 1892/1971, 8–9; Dewey, 1933/1986, 67; Ryan, 1995, 100–2). Closely related to such questioning is the more general criticism that Dewey's conception of democracy is a moral conception—rather than political—and cannot be taken seriously as a part of a political theory. Dewey's democratic theory is on that account nothing more than a "comprehensive doctrine." It has been argued that from a Rawlsian point of view Deweyan democracy can never become a sufficiently general political conception but will always imply moral demands, which in a pluralistic political environment anyone can "reasonably reject." (Talisse, 2003, 11–2). Dewey seems oblivious to such worries in his approach. To be politically and socially active is to express faith in liberal democracy. Moreover, participation in civic and political life is a form of self-realization and one way of leading a meaningful life (Dewey, 1935/1987, 20, 64).

In this paper I will argue that Dewey's general conception of democracy captures a deep insight about the nature of decision-making in liberal

society. Dewey's democratic ideal in my view makes sense of a liberal, pluralist conception of democracy morally and epistemically. I show that dismissing Deweyan democracy on purported Rawlsian grounds for being or depending on a "comprehensive doctrine"—a morally laden view, which may well appeal to reasonable people, but can also be rejected reasonably—is mistaken.

Dewey's democratic outlook provides a way to understand the importance of participation in decision- and policy-making. Participatory democracy is an *epistemic approach* to democracy if ideal conditions of participatory democracy are also ideal conditions of decision- and policy-making. In order for the individual to become committed to democracy it must be seen not only as an offer to become part of decision-making, but also as a framework for "social intelligence" to design and create the best solutions (See e.g. Dewey, 1935/1987, 38; Dewey, 1916/2008, 105). If a *moral* view of democracy emphasizes participation on the grounds that participation best reflects a self-rule principle inherent in all democratic strategies, on the *epistemic* view participation is rather emphasized because increased diversity of decision-makers increases the quality of decisions made and their responsiveness to experience (See e.g. Landemore, 2013, 103). Without this epistemic side, Deweyan democracy could not offer the rich vision of political meaning that it does.

This democratic framework moreover creates conditions of revision since democratic decisions are responsive to experience. Revisability is one of the main characteristics of democracy that links it to science in Dewey's view (Dewey & Tufts, 1932/1985, 365–6; Westbrook, 2010, 25; Cochran, 2010, 314; Dewey, 1927/1984, 365–6). The fallibility of a democratic decision facilitates sensitivity to new information and its "method" therefore resembles the method of science: It enables a dynamic relation between experience and decision-making. A decision can in light of more experience be surpassed by another option, unseen or not available before just as is the case in the revisionary enterprise that characterizes the method of science (Dewey, 1927/1984, 337–8). Reasons for the acceptance of democracy can be seen as analogous to reasons for accepting the method of science: Democracy is not about bargaining to get the most for oneself out of common decisions, but acting so as to allow the full capacity of "the demos" to make the best, (or smartest) decisions, all the while minding the common good, where convergence to truth and to what is in the long run best for everyone, coincide (Dewey, 1892/1971, 8). My conclusion in this paper is that the best defense of Deweyan democracy is

epistemic. This is a practical defense: If the scientific community provides a background of critical participants in corroborating and accepting truths, the community at large should play an analogous role in democratic decision-making, where the effort should be on the one hand to elicit what the public “knows” and on the other to engage not only in debates but also in common inquiry.

## 2. The problem of modern society as the *problem of pluralism*

Participation in social and political affairs is often seen as an important component in civic virtue in liberal democratic society. Since participation, even participation in selecting leaders, is necessarily voluntary any attempt to translate virtue into duty would be to abandon liberal principles for the sake of an oppressive “comprehensive doctrine.” As John Rawls has argued such duties amount to coercion in which a particular view of the good life is taken for granted (Rawls, 2001, 183). Political conceptions must be independent of any particular view of the good life since otherwise anyone could reasonably reject them. One could say—in a more practical sense—that political conceptions must be independent of any trade-offs. In this way they are absolute, i.e. they can be adopted whatever else is taken for granted about society or human nature.

A *political conception*, such as the idea that justice is best understood as a general and universally valid demand for fairness, on the other hand, is a sufficiently unrejectable doctrine to serve as a basis for the constitutional structure of society. This is in a nutshell a central problem that liberal thinkers have brought out clearly during the last two centuries: Civic virtues associated with participation cannot be translated into duties of participation.

This is also the basis for the most common and general liberal criticism of communitarianism. Engagement in communal life rests on the embeddedness of the individual self in communal practices where moral ideals, as well as the most mundane views and habits can only arise from the reality of culture (Taylor, 1989, 204). The individual is committed to such values and therefore is neither fully able to resist what community prescribes, nor choose ways of life that contradict community values. Thus community imposes limits on the individual, whereas it is unclear how or whether the individual can impose limits on communal guidance. Pluralism appears from this point of view as a form of resistance to communal authority. It acknowledges that values are not independent of cultural

practices yet insists that they are ultimately a matter of individual choice. Thus pluralism imposes limits on community by placing individual acceptance or choice above cultural practice. From the liberal point of view the pursuit of happiness is, crucially, an individual affair and this has serious consequences. The primacy of individual choice is one of the key characteristics of society that distinguish it from community. On the liberal model, in society, the individual places limits on authority, not vice versa, as conceptions of justice and individual rights replace (at least to some extent) cultural practices.

John Rawls describes “the fact of Pluralism” as the point at which society must be distinguished from community. According to the theory “democratic society is hospitable to many communities within it [...] but it is not itself a community nor can it be in view of the fact of reasonable pluralism. For that would require the oppressive use of government power which is incompatible with basic democratic liberties” (Rawls, 2001, 21). In other words, an individual may well be born into a certain community, but as a member of society he/she has a choice of values and may also choose a community to belong to. Communities within the same society may have widely different cultural characteristics, since society imposes no direct restrictions on them. But the idea that society hosts different communities is far from being unproblematic.

Citizenship, however, does not need community membership. An individual belonging to society and able to engage in political dialogue can choose not to belong to any particular community and therefore society doesn’t depend on a community based structure. The set of values basic for society can be defined in entirely procedural terms (on this view). They have to do with reasonable assumptions about the necessary common ground for things to work, not with aspirations about common life. To insist on community as the only authentic source of value however is to prefer multiculturalism to pluralism: Multiculturalism is then understood as the general idea of social structure where communities are actors and society refrains from interfering with communally protected cultural practices. Pluralism on the other hand protects the autonomous choice of the individual, whose rights to abandon any cultural practice are more important than community rights. The “fact of pluralism” can therefore lead to contradictory results. Community is the social environment necessary to foster beliefs, values and moral commitments that could be reasonably rejected if taken out of that particular context. Society hosts communities and provides the space for the “overlapping consensus” where individu-

als and communities can, in light of what is shared between them find political conceptions that they are in reasonable agreement about. But since society, on this view, does not promote cultural practices, it is difficult to see how it can be a source of shared value rather than just a place where values may (or may not) overlap. A paradox follows: Society should generate value (but cannot), while community is a source of values whose form that makes them in most cases unfit for public reason. This is what I call the *problem of pluralism*.

Value-pluralism depends on a social environment that prioritizes the coexistence of incompatible values over the creation of common values. We are left with two sets of values—those that overlap and those that don't—and the distinction between them is both unclear and uncomfortable. While it seems clear that values that do overlap are needed to place a limit on the scope and validity of values that do not overlap, it is also unclear how such limits can be described and justified. One might be tempted to dissolve the paradox by accepting multiculturalism. That however would clearly mean abandoning liberalism and thereby pluralism. Society would become the market square of communities and politics reduced to bargaining. Assuming that this is an unacceptable result one must conclude that society, rather than community is the source of a number of basic common values, determining at least procedural issues, which then must be prioritized over whatever is community generated or culture bound. This is also Rawls's solution. But there are compelling reasons not to accept that either.

Given the understanding of multiculturalism and pluralism that I have outlined, there is a choice to be made between options that prioritize either individual rights (liberalism) or community (communitarianism). In contemporary political philosophy this is a familiar conflict. The problems with multiculturalism are also fairly obvious: Although it certainly does not exclude the idea that the public sphere/political society can be seen as a source of value, it does not promote that idea. It seems to make relativism about values and cultures inevitable. It seems therefore to leave us with an intolerably narrow space of political deliberation. Multiculturalism and pluralism then, in the sense described, provide the inspiration for quite different kinds of policies and outlooks. There is good reason to conclude that the problem with both is an inability to provide the means to articulate basic commitments of society in acceptable ways. Since contemporary societies are to an always greater extent multicultural—i.e. inhabited by many rather than just one cultural group—

it seems unavoidable to bring cultural difference to bear on political society, rather than seeking to conceive of it as essentially neutral to or independent of cultural difference.

While Rawls certainly does suggest ways to avoid what I have called the problem of pluralism (Rawls, 2001, 192-3) it seems to me that his distinction between comprehensive doctrines and political conceptions will have to be abandoned to properly address the problem I have described. In the next section I will argue that this makes the Deweyan approach attractive. Thus I conclude that the criticism of Deweyan democracy mentioned at the beginning of this paper is misplaced. Rather one should be worried about the proper use and understanding of the idea of comprehensive doctrine.

### 3. Dewey and the democratic ideal: Community

Dewey described democracy as a "way of life". For him that means participation "according to capacity" in public decisions and "according to need" or desire in forming values. He also characterized democracy as "a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience" (Dewey, 1916/1980, 93; 1927/1984, 327-8) . One can interpret Dewey's discussion as outlining a framework or a semantic space where concepts such as "associated living" or "communicated experience," point to the social dimensions he was particularly interested in. He repeatedly claims that democracy demands "social return" from every individual and that democracy liberates "man's capacities" (Dewey, 1916/1980, 98). A related claim emphasizes how, in a democracy, "all share in useful service and enjoy a worthy leisure" (Dewey, 1916/1980, 265).

Thus the logic of democracy involves a give and take, but there is no particular argument given to justify it (See also Westbrook, 2005, 179). One's contribution (according to capacity) creates a claim (according to need). The individual has duties to society and society has corresponding duties towards him or her. Such mutual dependence of individual and society yields a dynamic that generates values. Intellectual freedom, cultural and intellectual diversity, growth and participation are examples of central values made possible by this democratic dynamic. Democracy for Dewey is thus primary: It is an ideal because of the conditions for value formation that it creates. Other values also can be derived from the democratic ideal (See Dewey, 1927/1984, 327, 329).

Although for Dewey democracy is on the one hand a moral choice, it is misleading to think of it as a choice. Society makes democracy necessary. Of course it is possible to opt out of democratic participation—in a liberal society no one is forced to participate—but that is not the same thing as a “reasonable rejection” of some form of democracy. We should see Dewey’s argument as an attempt to convince his audience that other options than democracy will not work long-term as organizational principles for society. In a later piece Dewey tries to show why liberalism and democracy are better than e.g. Nazism and Stalinism (Dewey, 1935/1987, 60–1, 64). The distinction drawn between “democracy as a social idea” and “democracy as a system of government” also creates a dynamic between the system and the idea: The system is criticized and improved by going back to the idea, rather than by abandoning the idea where going back to the idea means reflecting on the communal practice associated with it in the first place (Dewey, 1927/1984, 325–6).

Dewey’s claim is not that democracy is just one of many possible choices of a way to organize society or one way to live. It is the only possible framework to face the ever-increasing intricacies of the modern world. It is not so much its daunting complexity that makes democracy necessary, but its unmapped territories, the uncertainty of consequences of decisions and therefore the continuous exploration that the modern world requires. “Community” is familiar environment, where routine and past experiences simplify tasks and create some certainty. Society means conflict and therefore Dewey argues that one of the goals of modern society—the “great society” as Dewey speaks of it using Graham Wallas’s term—should be its transformation into a new kind of community. In what Dewey calls the “great community” individuals have re-appropriated ways that characterize community to share knowledge and combine forces in dealing with social problems and conflicts (Dewey, 1927/1984, 333–4). The problem with Dewey’s account here might be a certain unwillingness to face up to the idea that some conflicts of society are persistent, he sometimes seems to think that social conflicts can always be resolved if enough effort and intelligence is put into it (See Rogers, 2012, 28).

It has been argued that John Dewey as a political thinker is just as committed to communitarian ways of conceptualizing the political and social, as to liberal ways. Richard Bernstein has pointed out that the traditional opposition of communitarian vs. liberal values is simply absent in Dewey (Bernstein, 2010, 301). Since the contemporary notion of communitarianism was not current when Dewey wrote his better-known works in the

twenties and thirties however he never referred to himself as a communitarian. Much of his political philosophy is devoted to defending the version of liberalism he favored and referred to as “renascent liberalism” at one point (Dewey, 1935/1987, 41). To portray him as a communitarian as some people argue (See Ryan, 1995, 100–1) is unhelpful since his main emphasis in contrasting his favored view of liberalism with its less attractive forms such as “laissez faire liberalism” is a richer conception of social control and socialized economy as what individuals should be able to expect from the state. It would be more helpful in my view to connect Dewey’s discussion to ideas of second and third generation rights rather than to communitarianism (See Dewey, 1935/1987, 61).

Dewey’s distinction between community and society suggests that he thinks that there exists a dynamic relation between the two forms of “associated” life. Democracy, since it illustrates the mutual dependence of citizens in public decision-making, is for Dewey an important link between community and society. In *Reconstruction in philosophy* e.g. he is quite concerned to show that democracy must not be limited to “a consecration of some form of government” but rather understood as “a name for the fact that human nature is developed only when its elements take part in directing things which are common” (Dewey, 1948, 209). He argues that democracy is a framework for any social and communal interaction, political as well as non-political and as a framework for group interaction including interaction between communities (Dewey, 1927/1984, 328). Dewey thus offers a richer picture of the interrelation between society and community than does Rawls.

There is no question that for Dewey community is a primary source of democratic value. “Only when we start from community, [...]” he argues, “can we reach an idea of democracy that is not utopian” (Dewey, 1927/1984, 329). From a Rawlsian point of view democracy must be a reasonable social arrangement rather than a community-based ideal since a “common aim of political justice must not be mistaken for [...] ‘a conception of the good’” (Rawls, 1996, 146n). For Rawls personal conceptions of the good—including comprehensive doctrines—are community-related whereas political conceptions seek their justifications elsewhere. From a Deweyan perspective one would have to see a relation of interdependence between comprehensive doctrines and political conceptions. To hold a different view would be “utopian” in the sense of insisting on a social arrangement based on a too abstract conception of social life. The basic model of social life is community. It would therefore, pragmatically speaking, be unwise to bypass it in political theory.

Dewey always regarded himself as a liberal and his political writings in the interwar years show a strong commitment to defending liberal values against totalitarian ideologies, such as Nazism and Bolshevism. But Dewey's argument that liberal democracy was a stronger form of government than the dictatorships, which dominated Europe did not sound very convincing in the 1930's. This was a time when liberal policies appeared weak to radically-minded thinkers, and it was far from being a marginal opinion that liberal ideas would be pushed aside in a final battle between Fascism and Communism (Dewey, 1935/1987, 64, see also 1934/1986, 91-5). Dewey seems to recognize (he does not say so explicitly) how totalitarian regimes evade rather than face the real tasks in modern society. Dewey does not present an analysis, such as Hannah Arendt later did when she described totalitarian regimes as imposing ideology on reality to the point of denying "factuality"—creating a propaganda world where any reference to experience is meaningless (Arendt 1975, 458). But he also saw (this he expresses clearly in the final paragraphs of *Liberalism and Social Action*) that in the long run ideology would make these regimes weak: In the end that form of government is stronger which conforms to reality rather than the one that seeks to mold reality to fit ideology (See Dewey, 1935/1987, 65). Dewey's contemporary and historical outlook helps understand the deeper reasons that motivate his democratic ideal and the underlying idea of pluralism according to which the diversity of valuations broadens the cognitive base of democratic choice and thus feed into a liberal conception of democracy, rather than a communitarian notion of the good.

The conclusion here is that a Deweyan approach is much more inclusive than Rawls's. The reason in is simple. While Rawls is concerned to maintain a distinction between reasonable and unreasonable claims in public reason, Dewey is interested in making the full diversity of community value and cultural difference bear on democratic decision-making in a constructive way. His thinking therefore is closer to and more helpful for epistemic conceptions of democracy than the Rawlsian model. Yet as I will explain, I believe that Rawls's discussion of pluralism and comprehensive doctrines in the end proves helpful for acknowledging the strengths of the Deweyan approach.

#### 4. Pluralism and the democratic ideal

The criticism of Deweyan democracy that originates in a Rawlsian perspective is, as I have argued, based on the claim that it is nothing more than a comprehensive doctrine: an inspired value commitment that may appeal to some but can never be sufficiently generalized to be taken seriously as a political conception (Talissee, 2003, 12). If this criticism holds, the commitment to democracy Dewey requires would imply abandoning pluralism, on the grounds that it ignores a vital distinction between doctrines that are rejectable and those that are not. There are two related reasons for opposing it: (1) The criticism does not properly take into account the difference between simple and reasonable pluralism, and therefore fails to properly recognize the importance of “considered value” (2) it is based on a simplified understanding of what constitutes a comprehensive doctrine. I will consider each in turn.

##### 4.1 Dewey’s pluralism and Rawls’s

Dewey was a realist methodologically and practically: Problems that human beings face in everyday life—as individuals or collectives—are real, and the choice is to face them or avoid them. His main complaint about philosophers was that they show a tendency to stick to questions that have become irrelevant while avoiding real and pressing problems (Dewey, 1920/1982, 92–93). Dewey’s pluralism plays an important role in enabling a full and comprehensive view of differences, problems and conflicts. By enlarging democracy’s cognitive scope, pluralism strengthens democratic society in the long run while a totalitarian entity would be weakened with time by a decision-making process, which may be controlled more by propaganda than by actual experience (Bohman, 2010, 202; Dewey 1928/1984, 222, see also 249).

Dewey’s pluralism is not the standard value pluralism as described by thinkers like Isaiah Berlin. Dewey makes a distinction between “impulsive” value and “considered” value. Impulsive value is personal and relative to various personal, cultural and emotional factors, while considered value has a cognitive component. It is based on thinking critically about the consequences of value ranking and may therefore lead to changes in valuation (See Dewey, 1930/1984, 281–2). Dewey points out that there must be a dynamic relationship between values and problems, i.e. that values affect what we see as problematic and vice versa, the problems we encounter affect our values. This suggests that value conflict is a certain

kind of discrepancy resulting from acknowledging the consequences of various possible courses of action and considering the unavoidable trade-offs. The relevant kind of value pluralism for Dewey is the pluralism of considered rather than impulsive value, which necessarily connects the choice of value to actual problems rather than simply insisting that the "good life" is in the end is a personal choice (See also Dewey & Tufts, 1932/1985, 176–8).

Value pluralism—the Rawlsian conception of "reasonable pluralism" could also be discussed in this context—is not the situation where different persons (or groups) hold different values and that's that. Rather, pluralism is an invitation to think about the world, or about experience, in different ways and from a variety of different perspectives on common problems. In this way pluralism increases the cognitive scope of democracy and is therefore an important feature of democracy, rather than a sad fact of modern life. One might of course ask whether difference is always good: Will all value difference increase cognitive ability in groups or only while it remains within certain limits? (Landemore, 2013, 192). The Deweyan answer to such a question should be to point to the problems rather than to difference in value. A collective dealing with a problem perceived as common will profit from using insights that different value commitments provide, no matter how different, as long as the collective is on the whole committed to respecting different values. The question of limits in other words becomes irrelevant.

In *Political Liberalism*, Rawls draws the distinction (mentioned above) between the "fact of pluralism" and the "fact of reasonable pluralism." The fact of pluralism is the situation in which individuals and groups—including communities—simply have values and beliefs. These may conflict but that should not interfere with the fair organization of society. The fact of reasonable pluralism, however, is "the fact that among the views that develop are a diversity of reasonable comprehensive doctrines" (Rawls, 1996, 36).

Reasonable pluralism is "not an unfortunate condition of human life [...] but the inevitable outcome of free human reason" (Rawls, 1996, 37). If pluralism makes it a challenge to achieve fairness in spite of difference, reasonable pluralism creates a rich context for "framing political conceptions" which need the support of reasonable comprehensive doctrines. Reasonable pluralism thus contributes to public reason.

The distinction between pluralism and reasonable pluralism is important for Rawls's theory. If pluralism begets comprehensive doctrines, they

can be all kinds of doctrines, values, religious beliefs etc. that may or may not be reasonable. Reasonable pluralism on the other hand begets reasonable doctrines, which does not mean that reasonable people may not choose to reject them, but at least makes it possible for them to be entertained, discussed and contested by those sharing a political society.

The difference here between Rawls's pluralism and Dewey's appears in the different roles of community. While it is vital for reasonable pluralism that reasonable views originate in a political environment that has cut its ties to community values and therefore arise in the space of political value, Dewey, as I argued before, is committed to a view of community as a source of value. Rawls's pluralism is therefore too abstract for Dewey, whereas Dewey's pluralism, from the Rawlsian point of view, does not allow for the distinction between reasonable pluralism and pluralism simpliciter.

Thus Rawls's theory depends on the ideal of society as a distinct entity where a particular kind of political discussion has replaced the noise and bargaining of communities. Value difference will also be seen as a good and a potential social strength, not as a simple fact making pluralism necessary as a "modus vivendi" (Rawls, 1996, 146–7). Dewey on the other hand is committed not to abandoning the community noise but rather upon finding ways to develop and transform it. Democracy, rather than just representing a way of decision-making proper for a society in which reflective equilibrium has more or less been achieved, is a necessary channel of such transformation of community. The deliberation it promotes, the procedural techniques it offers and the problem-solving to which it commits those who participate, serve to legitimate and optimize common decisions. More simply the difference between Rawls and Dewey can be described as the difference between the thought experiment about the just society at the core of Rawls theory and the insistence of connecting with "genuine problems" so conspicuous in Dewey's theorizing (Dewey, 1917/1980, 4).

#### 4.2 On Comprehensive doctrines

"Comprehensive doctrine" as mentioned earlier can be understood in two different ways as comprehensive doctrine simpliciter and as reasonable comprehensive doctrine. Rawls sometimes describes it as a private position, which reflects moral, religious or ideological belief, and therefore should not be a part of public reason—this is the first understanding, the

simpler one. If a political conception can be shown to be based on such a doctrine, that would be sufficient reason to put it aside and demand that political reasoning avoid it (Talisso, 2003, 6).

The characterization of reasonable comprehensive doctrine is more complex. If the first characterization depends on a dubious idea of there being certain basic political values that can somehow be regarded as "un-rejectable" in terms of reason, i.e. whose rejection would be unreasonable under all circumstances, the second characterization avoids such "articles of reason" altogether. There is no need for basic political values on that view and the presence of comprehensive doctrines as moral beliefs to which one may or may not adhere is simply taken for granted. Such doctrines are generally unhelpful in justifying political conceptions but may be very useful in creating such conceptions. Therefore they may well have a place in public reason, although a legitimate political argument cannot refer to them alone as justification.

The two views Rawls describes as exclusive and inclusive (Rawls, 1996, 247). On the second, inclusive, view of comprehensive doctrine the "un-rejectability" condition is irrelevant. No particular comprehensive doctrine is necessary to justify a political conception; political conceptions can therefore (and should) be discussed and evaluated without reference to particular comprehensive doctrines. On the inclusive understanding of comprehensive doctrine, however, there is no test to determine whether a view or an argument is a part of public reason or not and it does not follow that a conception of democracy philosophically connected to, or built into, some deeper insights in morals or metaphysics is thereby in opposition to pluralism. A political conception can be derived from a number of different comprehensive doctrines, and therefore in discussing its strengths and merits and in presenting it in the political sphere no particular underlying comprehensive doctrine can serve to explain or justify a political conception. An inclusive view of comprehensive doctrines has consequences for the problem of pluralism: The exclusive view makes pluralism problematic since it demands that comprehensive doctrines be abandoned. The inclusive view on the other hand allows that different comprehensive doctrines lead to different or similar political conceptions. If democracy as a way of life depends on the acceptance of a certain comprehensive doctrine—on a substantive view of the moral life—it can only be made sense of from the point of view of the exclusive understanding.

One could see this as illustrating, as Stanley Fish e.g. has argued, that different values—whether religious, moral or ideological—do not as such

have any particular connection to common political conceptions (Fish, 2003, 389–90). They may in individual cases be causally connected to political conceptions: My moral beliefs may compel me to being attracted to conservative or nationalistic views, without necessitating either. The same moral beliefs might lead me to adopting firm liberal views. This rather obvious point suggests that drawing a distinction between shared values, i.e. values that cannot be reasonably rejected, and rejectable values is at least implausible. One should therefore not reject a proposal on the grounds that it is based on doctrines that can be reasonably rejected (See also MacGilvray, 2012, 54). To explore and discuss proposed political conceptions is partly to search for diverse supportive arguments. A view or conception that can only be supported by one kind of reasons will most probably fail to become a part of public reason, whereas a conception supported by different kinds of arguments and reasons may be more likely to succeed. When we think of democracy in the Deweyan sense as a way of life, we should be thinking about it as a framework of discussion and decision-making that profits from a diversity of views, values and doctrines.

This understanding of democracy allows for seeing it as an ideal without thereby being committed to any particular comprehensive doctrine. Moreover it will not depend on a conception of public reason which excludes from consideration views that are inspired by comprehensive doctrines, given at least that they can be discussed and evaluated independently of any particular comprehensive doctrine.

## 5. A democratic commitment

I have argued that Dewey's conception of democracy rests on the idea that diversity in knowledge and value characterizes contemporary society. I will now show how Deweyan democracy addresses some of the most important concerns about liberal pluralistic society. I argue that Deweyan democracy is a powerful moral and epistemic framework for public deliberation and choice.

Dewey's concern with democracy's moral dimensions, and his search for a more personally fulfilling content than the political conception alone allows for, may make Deweyan democracy appear to be an untenable position. But the worry, as I have tried to show, rests on an overly narrow interpretation of the role of comprehensive doctrines in public reason—to use the Rawlsian characterization of public reason. Dewey's concern is

with the "spirit" of democracy, rather than questions of procedural rules in a situation where being a citizen is to be a stakeholder. Democracy's moral and epistemic superiority has less to do with procedure than with common problem-solving that diversity of views and sensitivity to new information and experiences best help solve. The moral and epistemic aspects of Deweyan democracy create conditions for an understanding of pluralism that makes it possible to show how increased diversity of values and outlooks increases its cognitive scope and depth of reflection and therefore help problem-solving in the public realm, given that the collective dealing with such problems does see them as common and in need of collective solutions.

### 5.1 Diversity and decision-making

Deweyan democracy is often characterized as participatory democracy where citizens, not only elected officials, are involved in forming policy and making decisions. A democratic commitment is toward, on the one hand, influencing decision-making and, on the other, on contributing to problem solving. The problem-solving aspect of it implies the conviction (shared with epistemic democrats) that participation not only increases legitimacy of public decisions but may increase the quality of decision-making. The assumption is that broad participation and a diversity of views and backgrounds within a group deliberating about the common good will help in the task of identifying best solutions (Page, 2007, 345–7). Therefore Deweyan democracy must face questions similar to those raised by the epistemic approach: It is not obvious that all participation is desirable in a representative democracy where elected officials are committed to dealing with public issues in a focused and orderly manner. Why should one think that public participation improves decisions if this is the case? Public ignorance is also a problem since the general public is in many—or even most—cases not very well informed about policy issues (Fishkin, 2009, 59). It might be better not to involve the public rather than risk that a large number of ill-informed individuals make a decision that should rightly be entrusted to politicians who have studied the issues, or to specialists and professionals inside governmental administrations (See also Dewey, 1927/1984, 312). Moreover, the emphasis on participation raises questions about civic duties and the extent to which participation should be required rather than invited. Thus important opposition to Deweyan democracy is not only to be found among liberal

thinkers who emphasize value neutrality (such as Robert Talisse) but also from those who favor institutional approaches to policy, such as Jürgen Habermas whose discourse theory could also be discussed in this context. Habermas's emphasis on the public sphere focuses on the quality of public reason rather than participation as such (See e.g. Habermas, 1996, 274–6).

Dewey is, just like Rawls, interested in the deliberative rather than aggregative aspects of democracy and for that reason focuses not on measuring views or tapping public opinion but on communication, i.e. the communication between government and social groups as well as between groups (See e.g. Dewey, 1922/1983, 337–45).

Democracy is a way of forming, deliberating and molding views, rather than of aggregating them. Democracy would be meaningless if one should regard individual opinions as fixed before discussion. But Dewey is curiously uninterested in democratic procedure (See Westbrook, 2005, 187) although he has a lot to say about method of "social inquiry" (Dewey, 1927/1984, 351). He thus leaves it open how decisions are made and sometimes seems to treat such discussion as a part of the discussion about forms of government. The dismissive attitude to forms and procedures points away from institutionalization—an impression strengthened by Dewey's claim that "the clear consciousness of a communal life [...] constitutes the idea of democracy"—and towards *care* in his characterization of equality as "effective regard for whatever is distinctive and unique in each, irrespective of physical and psychological inequalities." His focus is on the necessary conditions for a "democratically organized public" and it seems that replacing habit with inquiry is the most important condition, although, as Dewey emphasizes, not sufficient to bring about genuine democracy. He does not try to spell out sufficient conditions (Dewey, 1927/1984, 328–30, 314).

## 5.2 Community, truth and fallibility

The choice of democracy on the individual level is in Dewey's view strongly connected to understanding the meaning and consequences of "combined action." In modern societies people find themselves under various different obligations of different kinds, which also move them to action for different reasons (Dewey, 1927/1984, 252). Combined action never requires that individuals abandon self-interest however, and it is "pure mythology" that they are primarily moved by "calculated regard for their own good." Combined action is the basis for understanding the

connection between private good and communal good (Dewey, 1927/1984, 330–1, 335–6).

The idea of democracy Dewey is advocating is certainly richer and more complex than standard normative conceptions of democracy, even when the emphasis is on its deliberative aspect. As a moral choice it involves more than a method of selection or priority ranking. The faith in democracy that Dewey advocates is a faith in the ability of the many to deal successfully with the common good, as well as faith in the ability of local publics to reasonably frame and deal with common concerns. The challenge of choosing democracy amounts to believing that in the long run it is a wise decision for the individual to trust in decision-making that he or she may only be able to influence very slightly rather than either not trusting in any system or insisting on some other form of decision-making. The democratic ideal requires not self-sacrifice for the common good, but a communal understanding of self-interest. As Dewey puts it in his *Ethics* "it is not too much to say that the democratic ideal poses, rather than solves, the great problem: How to harmonize the development of each individual with the maintenance of a social state in which the activities of one will contribute to the good of all the others" (Dewey, 1932/1985, 350).

The individual strength expressed by choosing democracy involves a leap of faith. A person who chooses democracy thereby commits to an arrangement where trust in the judgment of others is necessary. Moreover since democracy, as I argued before, is an attempt to have reality shape policy, rather than vice versa, this choice also implies a commitment to explore, search and investigate. Again one can see this commitment as an analogy to a commitment to scientific method: The scientist can certainly generate results more easily by being loose on method. But lack of method reduces the value of the results. The democratic choice is inspired by the understanding that experience can never be evaded in public choice, real problems must be dealt with.

It has been argued that Charles Peirce's notion of truth creates a connection between truth and inquiry, which is absent from the more traditional accounts of truth as correspondence or coherence. Peirce's notion is thus more apt to serve scientific inquiry. His non-foundationalist idea consists in thinking along the lines of seeing true belief as the best belief "were we to inquire as far as we could on the matter" (Misak, 2000, 49). "Best" here means of course best in the sense of most closely in accordance with experience. A true belief is the belief that withstands doubt, i.e. goes uncorrected, no matter how thoroughly examined or for how long inquiry continues.

"Truth" is perhaps superfluous here, but fallibility, revisability or corrigibility of results and decisions are central issues. The conception of actually aiming at the best result depends on responsiveness to experience. The essence of the pragmatic approach is not to "seek truth" but rather to be open to experience and revisions of beliefs when such revisions are needed. To let oneself be influenced in that way is not to adopt a passive standing against the world but rather to seek the best way to face experience, relying on communal, diversified wisdom rather than on single-minded individual "knowledge".

Can democracy be empirically supported or refuted? One could argue that historical examples from recent decades at least suggest that democracy can lead to disasters, and that other forms of rule might be more likely to avert disasters. The Deweyan answer to that question is necessarily evasive. There are no sufficient conditions of democratic success, and a failure of democracy can only be responded to by more democracy (Dewey, 1927/1984, 327). No failure of some form of governing, or of a procedure, can create legitimate doubts about democracy itself or about the transformation of society into what Dewey calls "the great community" (Dewey, 1927/1984, 332–3). The great community realizes the ideal of "an organized, articulate Public" which one might understand as a vision in which each citizen is not only a stakeholder but also actually an activist (Dewey, 1927/1984, 350). The great community and Rawls's "well ordered society" clearly share many features. Since Dewey however insists on common problem solving, and that means on inquiry, rather than common value as the necessary basis of public reason, there is room for more diversity in the Deweyan model than in the Rawlsian. In his discussion of public reason, Rawls points out that the relation between comprehensive doctrines and political conceptions depends on the social environment. The less ordered a given society is, the more need to refer to and rely on comprehensive doctrines in social and political disputes. In the well-ordered society political conceptions will be developed enough, and have sufficient support to cover the range of disagreement between groups or parties. If a society is not well-ordered, each group's comprehensive doctrines will surface in its argumentation, which thus may or may not violate public reason in the sense that one side will rely on beliefs that either are irrelevant or are unreasonable from the other group's perspective (Rawls, 1996, 250–1).

Dewey's vision of the great community is thus closely related to Rawls's well-ordered society where the democratic way of life has become

sufficiently entrenched to provide values and norms that are genuinely shared and help dealing with social and political issues, making common problem solving at least easier. Dewey's community vision also gives us a new, pragmatic, perspective on political conceptions, where they are subject to empirical testing. A political conception is simply a shared belief about political arrangements that has been sufficiently discussed and explored to be taken for granted. Of course such a belief may later be revised or rejected, but the reasons for such revision or rejection will all things considered be empirical.

Dewey's democratic ideal is in this sense a commitment to diversity—the belief that the common good is best promoted in an environment that places no artificial restrictions on legitimate claims or arguments for public reason. This can be described as a moral position, but it is also, and no less, based on an epistemic argument. While the Rawlsian model involves an attempt to achieve a certain purity of public deliberation, Dewey's model seems to tolerate mess: Therefore Deweyan pluralism also tolerates not only reasonable difference but difference as such. The remaining question is whether the kind of problem-solving we would be interested in as a part of democratic practice is well served by this outlook.

### 5.3 The epistemic view and doubts about democracy

Deweyan democracy, as I have argued, partly rests on the belief that democracy is the framework of public choice most likely to promote the common good and keep track of reality. Dewey's belief in democracy differs from the acceptance of democracy as the only acceptable form of public decision-making. One might point out that acceptance of democracy rather than belief in democracy characterizes the dominating political attitudes towards it in today's world. Discussion therefore is often focused on eliminating perceived dangers of democracy such as demagoguery, vulgar populism, hijacking of special interest, lack of professionalism and rational ignorance among voters (Urbinati, 2014, 139–40). Thinkers like Dewey, who emphasize the worth of the democratic ideal as such, risk being put in the populist category and seen as promoters of "the people's will" rather than responsible theorists of fairness and reason. In Dewey's case the more difficult criticism concerns the nature of his democratic ideal which for authors such as Robert Talisse is simply too

comprehensive, too linked to personal views and preferences to be really useful as a political conception.

There are many ways to put democracy in doubt. As Bo Rothstein has shown, the correlation between democracy and good life is not always in democracy's favor (Rothstein, 2013, 15). Many surveys show it to be negative over a range of accepted indicators measuring quality of life. Good governance seems, on the other hand, to be strongly correlated to success in improving the lives of citizens. Increased democracy may even lead to deterioration in governance. The alternative to democracy might thus be efficiency and justice in the design of institutions, as well as basic liberties that promote equality and individual freedom in accordance with liberal principles. It is clear in any case that if increased democracy is shown to go against improving the quality of life for citizens that indeed would deliver a strong argument against democracy.

I have argued that according to a Deweyan understanding democracy is not choosing a particular method or procedure for a specific kind of decision-making but rather a general framework for public choice and deliberation. Critics of Deweyan democracy will point out that this must be seen as a moral choice: The argument required would be to show the moral superiority of this choice, even in case democracy will not generally increase the quality of decision-making (increase the number of right decisions, decrease the number of wrong decisions). I want to finish this paper with an attempt to show that this is not Dewey's approach. His justification of democracy is epistemic rather than moral, and consequently the moral argument (if there is one) rests on the epistemic argument. So for Dewey democracy must in the long run, provide a better environment, better tools and on the whole better approaches to problem solving than other conceivable (or available) approaches. This does not mean of course that one must show that in any single case democratic choice is better than an undemocratic choice in making decisions, but it must imply that democracy's long term power to bend decision-making towards right decisions rather than wrong is essential for its justification.

In *The Public and its Problems* Dewey argues that to develop democracy is to perfect "the means and ways of communication of meanings so that genuinely shared interest in the consequences of interdependent activities may inform desire and effort and thereby direct action" this Dewey points out, is certainly a moral problem but "dependent upon intelligence and education" (Dewey, 1927/1984, 349). In other words, to engage in democracy is to take seriously a commitment to seek not only solutions that can

be had by majority decision or solutions that can be forged by bargaining or by negotiation and compromise but to seek the best solutions. If "real" democracy often (even most of the time) falls short of this democratic ideal that does not make this idea of democracy any less clear. It just articulates the need for continuous criticism as a part of democracy.

#### 5.4 Experimentation

The problem Dewey focuses on in *The Public and its Problems* is how to discover "the means by which a scattered, mobile and manifold public may so recognize itself as to define and express its interests" (Dewey, 1927/1984, 327). This is in his view an "intellectual" problem since it is essentially a search for necessary conditions. The "manifold public" on becoming able to think together in this sense, can create a space between the inevitable ("economic facts" e.g.) and the possible transformation and direction of "industry and its eventual consequences" (Dewey, 1927/1984, 349–50; see also 313–4). The choice made by the public is better than decisions by experts if information and communication allow for the recognition of common goals because the expert is non-political and therefore has a tendency to ignore or at least not recognize the ways in which such transformation and direction may be influenced (See Dewey, 1927/1984, 316). Only the public can, under the right circumstances, identify and choose the best solutions, i.e. "an organized, articulate public." This raises the question of how these circumstances or conditions are best described, i.e. of how the public's cognitive abilities can be exercised rather than abused.

Although I seek in this paper rather to show that the basis for Deweyan democracy is epistemic than to claim that this kind of a defense of democracy is successful, a few things should be said about what could count as ideal democratic circumstances on this Deweyan view. First, since democracy is based on non-routine ways of dealing with problems, similar to what we would expect from research or scientific thinking, situations of social upheaval or discontent may provide, support democracy rather than vice versa. In Rawls's theory that would not be the case, since the ideal thinking situation is where overlapping consensus has created a space of reflective equilibrium. The ideal circumstances for healthy democratic choice will therefore be associated with highly organized environment, social unrest will be seen as essentially creating threats to democracy.

The Deweyan emphasis on exploration and experimentation also distinguishes this approach from political theorists such as Rawls and Habermas and, to some extent, makes it unique (See Dewey, 1927/1984, 343). The idea that democracy is the common search for the best solutions is a vague description, but correct in the sense that the question of how to organize democratic processes should be built on this idea. Therefore the Deweyan view of administration and administrative practice must be understood accordingly. In his political activism Dewey was a great promoter of projects where policy-making and even decision-making was entrusted to non-governmental associations, or in some way brought out of the traditional environment of public administration serving representational bodies of elected officials. This should not be seen as an attempt to subvert or oppose representational democracy, and Dewey was certainly no anarchist. But he did understand the value of making policy- and decision-making more diverse by creating methods to bring the public into it on higher and lower levels, in creating a public sphere as well as in instructing politicians in particular concrete cases.

## 6. Conclusion

My aim in this paper was to show that Deweyan democracy is not a vague idealist position demanding a particular moral commitment from every citizen and therefore a view of "human nature and flourishing" (Talisie, 2003, 13). Rather I argued that it is an attempt to construct a more complex picture of democracy as way to seek best solutions, where pluralism and diversity of doctrines is essential for creating a broad cognitive scope for democratic inquiry and to harness the epistemic power of the public. I hope I have succeeded in doing so. I have not tried however to show that Dewey's attempt is, in the end, successful, although my suggestion is that it is. But it requires a separate discussion.<sup>1</sup>

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PART II

NORMATIVITY

# Pragmatism, Objectivity and Normative Realism

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## 1. Introduction

There is a variety of views that get called pragmatism, and various positions that have been offered as *the* pragmatist position concerning meta-ethical questions such as those of moral realism. In this paper, I will draw from both contemporary and classical pragmatist approaches in an attempt to show that pragmatism enables us to reconceive and reconceptualize objectivity and realism in a way that allows for the development of a new and interesting stripe of normative realism. I will not claim that this is the only version that a pragmatist account of morality may take; what I do hope to illuminate the fact that the position developed is both plausible and compelling with respect to the contemporary philosophical debates in general.

Contemporary pragmatists such as Richard Rorty and Huw Price have proposed that there is no interesting philosophical theory to be given about truth or reference, or “aboutness” in a semantic sense, for any domain of language. In this, the non-representationalist view approaches the expressivist stance in the current meta-ethical debate—indeed Price calls his non-representationalist position “global expressivism”. However, we commonly think that at least some moral truths are independent of the opinions we, our groups and societies happen to have: our moral claims aspire to *objectivity*. The most central difficulty of the expressivist view is its unsettling implication that there is nothing to back our views beyond the preferences we merely happen to have—a form of relativism that this position appears to result in.

I will argue that the views of the classical pragmatists, especially Charles S. Peirce's account of the scientific method and its commitment to realism, will be helpful in addressing such problems. The Peircean view, which I will here refer to as *hypothetical realism*, is not motivated by strong representationalist assumptions but is, instead, compatible with the non-representationalist view. I will suggest that this version of realism goes along with global non-representationalism. Moreover, once we have adopted the global expressivist perspective, there is no principled, "representational" difference between normative and non-normative claims or opinions. Philosophical pragmatism, then, can help us develop a novel meta-ethical position which is robustly realist enough to avoid charges of relativism while avoiding the semantic commitments and tasks a realist position is usually assumed to incur.

## 2. Cognitivism and non-cognitivism

With their linguistic and analytic bent, contemporary philosophers working on issues of normativity have concentrated on its linguistic expressions: normative judgments or claims. To find out what it is to be right or wrong, good or bad, correct or incorrect, and so forth, we set out to find out what we mean by saying that something is so. Indeed the whole of *meta-ethics* has been considered the study of normative language. Accordingly, forms of normative realism (such as *moral realism*) have standardly been conceived as the combination of two theses. The first is the *cognitivist* semantic thesis: it maintains that normative claims are fact-stating, or describe the ways things are. The second thesis is ontological: it holds that things are as described by (some) normative judgments. As a third component, many moral realists have insisted that the facts in question are independent of what we think, believe, desire and so on, while others have been content to formulate "realist" views where the facts in question are dependent on what we do or would think or desire under certain (perhaps counterfactual) conditions.

The cognitivist semantic thesis faces two major challenges. The first is the problem of accounting for the facts our normative claims are "about"; the second is giving a suitable account of moral motivation, or the connection between normative claims and the motivation to act. The source of the first issue—and the starting point of the contemporary meta-ethical debate—is G. E. Moore's (1903) famous Open Question Argument. This argument challenges the cognitivists to make sense of the sort of properties

normative terms such as “good” and “right” predicate. In Moore’s view, such predicates cannot be analysed in other terms; moral judgments are *sui generis*. Specifically, as normative notions cannot be analysed in any *non*-normative terms whatsoever, Moore’s position came to be viewed as the strong defence of moral non-naturalism.

Following the lines set by Moore, some contemporary cognitivists have proposed forms of non-naturalism about normative “facts” (Shafer-Landau, 2003). But this view contradicts philosophical naturalism, which maintains that all of reality could be studied by science, resulting in countless difficulties with making sense of normative claims and properties—questions about what would count as evidence for a normative claim, how there can be properties that appear to have no causal consequences at all, and how two things with the same natural properties seem to (also) have the same normative properties.<sup>1</sup> The prospects of non-naturalism have commonly been considered dim, and cognitivists have mostly attempted to provide naturalist accounts of normative predicates.

The first strategy of doing so is what we could call *analytic* naturalism. It maintains that it simply does not follow, from the fact that competent speakers may wonder whether some explication of a term is correct, that the explication is mistaken, let alone that the term cannot be analysed (Smith, 1995; 2004; Pettit and Jackson, 1995; Jackson, 1998). By the second strategy, it is no wonder that attempts at analyses of normative terms will result in open questions, because reference of such terms is not fixed by their conceptual content (Boyd, 1988). Instead, following Saul Kripke’s (1980) and Hilary Putnam’s (1985) views of the reference of natural kind terms, this *synthetic* naturalist account holds that a moral term such as “right” refers to some natural property even if competent speakers are not aware of this; the analogy is to the way in which competent speakers for a long time were unaware that “water” refers to H<sub>2</sub>O. Both strategies thus admit the motivating premise of the Open Question Argument, the

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<sup>1</sup> Russ Shafer-Landau (2003), one of the few contemporary champions of meta-ethical non-naturalism, has attempted to address these concerns. He maintains that normative properties are constituted by, or supervene on, descriptive properties, which are the causally efficacious properties studied by the (social and natural) sciences, and that our knowledge of such normative properties is based on a number of self-evident truths about them which we may track by reliable methods of moral thought. But even if the sort of supervenience suggested by Shafer-Landau were a fruitful approach to normative properties, we still seem to be no further ahead in grasping what those properties are supposed to be “like”. The second claim is even more tenuous: reliance on ultimately self-evident (or self-justifying) moral beliefs and “reliable” methods of arriving at such beliefs looks simply implausible when contrasted with entrenched (first-order) disagreements about morality and moral procedure.

intuition that open questions about normative terms are bound to arise, but insist that this do not imply that the cognitivist project is doomed.

Neither of these two strategies is without problems. Their most formidable difficulty is due to the second challenge to cognitivism, which is to explain the role that normative claims and thought plays in our agency—a role which appears to differ in kind from that of non-normative claims and thought. A central phenomenon concerning normative judgments is their *practicality*, their action-guiding force, often discussed in terms of *moral motivation*: if someone judges that it is right, or good, to perform some action, he is (at least usually) motivated to perform that action (Smith, 2004, ch. 15; Blackburn 1998, 59–68). This constant connection between normative judgment and motivation seems to be a central feature of the particular “oughtness” that comes with normative judgment. But it has caused problems for the cognitivist view when coupled with the so-called Humean theory of motivation, which maintains that beliefs are not sufficient for motivation, but require the presence of other mental states, commonly called desires.<sup>2</sup>

Non-naturalists and synthetic naturalists have not managed to account for the strong connection between normative judgments and motivation: they have traditionally been externalists, holding that the connection between normative judgment and motivation is contingent (Shafer-Landau, 2003; Boyd 1988). Intuitions about moral motivation are, I think, the reason why the Moral Twin Earth counterexample due to Terrence Horgan and Mark Timmons (Timmons, 1990; Horgan and Timmons, 1992a; 1992b) has been taken to cast the synthetic naturalist approach into serious doubt. Assume that our use of the concept “right” is causally regulated by the natural property *N*, and that on a Moral Twin Earth, the inhabitants’ use of the concept “right” is causally regulated by the natural property *M*. If the synthetic naturalist view were correct, Horgan and Timmons point out, we and the twin-earthlings, when calling actions “right”, are talking about different things, as is the case in Putnam’s (1985) famous Twin Earth example. But according to Horgan and Timmons, in the Moral Twin Earth scenario, there is a genuine disagreement about what is right (cf. van Roojen, 2006, 168). It is interesting to note that such disagreement seems to

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<sup>2</sup> The Humean account has considerable appeal: it seems plausible that two agents may be quite differently motivated despite sharing the exact same beliefs. In the jargon of these debates, motivational judgment internalists, who have argued that the connection between normative judgment and motivation is a necessary one, have an upper hand in the debate with the respective externalist view, which maintains that this connection is at bottom contingent.

plausibly exist only when the twin-earthlings are quite consistently motivated to do what they claim is right (as the thought example stipulates): if this occurred only occasionally, the intuition that we disagree with them would likely evaporate.<sup>3</sup>

Naturalists of the analytic sort have attempted to accommodate internalist intuitions. A common approach has been to maintain that normative judgments express beliefs *about* motivation.<sup>4</sup> According to speaker subjectivism, normative claims are the speaker's descriptions of his or her own desires: to say that murder is wrong is for the speaker to say that he or she does not desire to murder (see Dreier, 1990). However, as it does not appear plausible that normative claims are such simple reports of actual desires but, rather, claims concerning what it would be (in some manner) *correct* to desire, cognitivists have offered more refined accounts. Perhaps the most plausible such account is Michael Smith's (1995; 2004) view that our claims about what it is right for us to do (under some circumstances) are claims about what fully rational agents would converge to desire us to do (in those circumstances). But it remains unclear whether we can give any unequivocally *naturalist* content to the (ideal) circumstances of full rationality, or whether the conceptual buck is simply being pushed back.

Indeed, the more plausible an account the cognitivists offer of the properties and facts that normative terms and claims refer to, the less plausible it seems that such properties and facts can be studied within a naturalist framework or made sense of in any unequivocally descriptive terms, fuelling scepticism about the normative. The non-cognitivist alternative avoids these difficulties with a simple and elegant response. It holds that moral (or more broadly normative) statements do not express beliefs but, rather, non-cognitive states such as emotions or desires. The cognitivist project is futile as normative claims do not describe the world. Instead, they express such functional states that play the relevant practical role of setting the ends or purposes of action; thus internalist intuitions are

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<sup>3</sup> Indeed, by and large the "Moral Twin Earth" scenario is really just a rerun of R.M. Hare's (1952) famous "missionaries and cannibals" argument. Hare argues that, faced with an unknown language, we would not translate words used to refer to things we commonly consider good, right, and so on, with our normative vocabulary. Rather, we would reserve normative vocabulary for terms that appear to play the relevant action-guiding role for the speakers.

<sup>4</sup> This approach thus attempts to secure a *conceptual* (and *hence* necessary) connection between normative claims and motivation. Accounts of this sort in which the import of a central term is made at least in part dependent on the responses of agents are often called *response-dependent* views about their meaning (Pettit, 1995; Jackson, 1998).

readily accounted for. These features have made the non-cognitivist view attractive to many in contemporary meta-ethics.

### 3. Expressivism and non-representationalism

Non-cognitivism will however need to deal with a set of issues of its own. Traditional non-cognitivism as proposed by Stevenson (1944) and Ayer (1952) held that, as expressions of non-cognitive states, normative claims or statements—in contrast to non-normative ones—have no truth-values. But this appears not to do justice to several realist-seeming features of moral thought and talk. Firstly, it appears that moral claims, unlike, say, commands or cheers, are truth-apt: we can say that it is *true* that murder is wrong. Secondly, it seems that moral claims, unlike questions or boos, incur ontological commitments. Thirdly, moral claims do not appear to express non-cognitive states in embedded contexts, such as “she believes that murder is wrong” or “if murder is wrong, stealing is wrong”. As a variant of this last issue, the early non-cognitivist view was met by a criticism by Peter Geach (1965) and John Searle (1962), who argued, on Fregean grounds, that the non-cognitivist has no plausible account of how statements expressing non-cognitive attitudes enter into logical relations such as those involved in deductive inferences. For a while such difficulties, especially the Frege-Geach-Searle objection, were held to be a decisive refutation of non-cognitivism.

Simon Blackburn’s (1998) quasi-realist approach sets out to make sense of the realist-seeming features of normative claims, non-cognitivistically understood. Rather than attempting to give an account of the conceptual content of “true”, the deflationary view on truth concentrates on the use and function of the truth predicate. Expressivists argue that “true” in “it is true that murder is wrong” adds nothing semantically robust to the claim, “murder is wrong”. By the same token, claims such as “*it is a fact that* murder is wrong” incur no difficulties to the expressivist view: the italicized words add nothing ontologically robust to the initial claim (that murder is wrong).

Huw Price (1997; 2007; 2011b) picks up the expressivist’s deflationary attitude towards key semantic terms and argues that this approach is to be globalized. In Price’s non-representationalist view, there is no interesting philosophical theory to be given about truth or reference, or “aboutness” in a semantic sense, for any domain of language. The result is a pluralistic picture of the function of language. Different assertoric practices

are taken to incur differing but equally “deflated” ontological commitments. Instead of *object naturalism*, the attempt to give an account of the reference of a language and address the resulting ontological questions over the existence of the referents, the philosophical study of language is to take the form of *subject naturalism*, an (anthropological) inquiry into its function which does not assume its ontological commitments. Consequently, global expressivism does without any contrast between normative and non-normative statements (thoughts, beliefs) in representationalist (semantic or ontological) terms. The differences between these thoughts or commitments are functional rather than representational by nature.

The ontological commitments of the meta-language in which this inquiry is conducted—that of science, or more specifically the sort of (philosophically inclined) anthropology Price suggests—should not be taken to be more than perspectival, something that appears privileged from its own point of view. While for those already working in a scientific framework, scientific ontological commitments appear to have a privilege over the commitments made in other, non-scientific discourses, there is no non-circular justification of why the ontological commitments of *science* should be taken as primary, or understand all first-order ontological commitment as scientific ontological commitment (Price, 2007).

This is Price’s anti-metaphysical stance: there is no place for a specifically metaphysical inquiry over and above the “deflated” ontological commitments made in our assertoric practice. Price (1997) follows Carnap (1950) in arguing that there is no room for ontological questions external to a theory (questions about whether things “really are” as that theory has them from a perspective “outside” of that theory) but only “pragmatic” external questions of the choice of linguistic framework.<sup>5</sup>

Even when globalized, however, the deflationary approach does not immediately address the third issue (see Dreier, 1996). As of yet there

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<sup>5</sup> In Price’s view, even if Quine’s (1953) criticism of the analytic-synthetic distinction blurs the distinction between “pragmatic” and (empirical) internal questions, it does not leave room for external ontological questions. Instead, Price (2007) argues for what we could call a Quinean monistic attitude towards existence combined with a Carnapian pluralism about linguistic function: a single existential quantifier is applied in a variety of discourses which have their differing linguistic uses and purposes. My proposal here aligns with this picture: it resists the idea of (non-pragmatic) external questions and can well incorporate a “deflationary” attitude towards existential quantification. But taking advantage of the notion of pluralism of use and function, it also emphasizes the difference between a (linguistic) practice in which meeting an external standard is considered a norm, and other practices where no such norm is present.

is no generally accepted response to the Frege-Geach problem. Earlier expressivist responses maintain inconsistent normative claims express incompatible *attitudes* of, say, approval and disapproval (Blackburn, 1988). But this has the awkward implication of indefinitely expanding the number of differing relations of (in)compatibility between different claims and attitudes. In Allan Gibbard's (1990; 2003) view, non-normative statements are expressions of belief-like states instead of descriptions of the world. Despite its initial appeal, Gibbard's approach still does not yet yield us an account of how a normative claim and its negation are (logically) inconsistent (Unwin, 1999; 2001). Mark Schroeder's (2008) insight is to conceive of normative claims as expressing a single attitude towards *contents* which in turn may be compatible or incompatible. But this approach, as Schroeder then shows, will lead to insurmountable difficulties when applied to inferences mixing normative and non-normative premises (or conclusions).<sup>6</sup>

Recent research gives some good reason for optimism about expressivism's prospects, however. In accordance with the initial phrasing of the non-cognitivist view—that normative claims express attitudes—most extant solutions to the Frege-Geach problem maintain that the expressivist's logic must be a logic of attitudes. But the expressivist can point out that his basic position about the function of normative claims (as a thesis in its *pragmatics*) may turn out compatible with a variety of accounts of the semantics of such claims; in particular, that there is no need to view the *semantic values* of such claims simply in terms of the attitudes they express. The expressivist view may be supplemented, for example, by a suitably modified deontic logic, following Gibbard's initial ideas (see Yalcin, 2012; Charlow, *forthcoming*).

Another, more radical alternative to escape the clutches of the Frege-Geach-Searle objection is to note that the proposed solutions all set out with the received view that conceptual and propositional *contents* enter into logical relations such as that of deductive validity, and (certain) mental states are attitudes towards such contents. But rather than starting out with this picture of content, the global expressivist could take his reversal of the traditional picture to cut deeper.

The most prominent suggestion along these lines is Robert Brandom's (1994; 2000) inferentialist semantics. According to Brandom, logical language makes explicit material inferential relations, rather than vice versa.

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<sup>6</sup> In distinction to the *global* expressivist view that will be explored below, I have called Gibbard's and Schroeder's attitudes-towards-contents view *regional* expressivism (Rydenfelt, 2014b).

The goodness of a material inference depends on the contents of the claims inferred from and to, and not, as in a formal inference, on an explicitly formulated rule of inference applicable independently of the content of the inference. Within the Brandomian framework, the traditional embedding problem need not even arise. The inferences which the objection challenges the expressivist to explain—and which everyone thinks must be valid—depend on material inferential relations; the whole problem appears only when we take an inference already articulated with the aid of logical vocabulary and *then* attempt to find the suitable contents (and attitudes) that would secure deductive validity.

#### 4. Objectivity and relativism

The global expressivist position has, in my view, good prospects of tackling the technical issues faced by traditional non-cognitivism. The most central difficulty of the expressivist picture is rather its unsettling implication that there is nothing to back our views beyond the preferences we merely happen to have—a form of *relativism* that this position appears to result in.

Briefly put, the problem is this. Proponents of expressivism have themselves drawn attention to the demand of intersubjective agreement in many of our discourses (Price, 1998; 2003; Gibbard, 2003, ch. 4; see Brandom 2000, ch. 6). In particular, debates over normative issues count among them: differences in moral opinion certainly invite disagreement to be resolved. Moreover, we commonly think that at least some moral truths do not depend on the opinions we, our groups and societies happen to have. However, if our preferences or approvals and disapprovals—the stances that our normative claims express—are simply the products of the contingent development of ourselves and our societies, what are our hopes of attaining a lasting agreement over normative opinion?

Here it is needful to be more precise about the central notions at hand. Consider objectivity first. An aspect of the concept of truth as used in our assertoric practices that Price (1998; 2003) has drawn attention to is its function as a “convenient friction”. The response “that’s not true” points towards a disagreement to be resolved at least in many of our discourses. This “friction” between speakers points, first, towards a *standard beyond one’s opinion*: it draws a distinction between how things are and how the speaker thinks they are. Second, conversational friction demands of others to *share* our opinion, or *intersubjectivity*. Why disagreement matters

in many of our assertoric practices is because we aim to coordinate the underlying behavioural commitments (Price, 2011a).

Relativism is a broad notion; for the purposes of this discussion, it is useful to distinguish at least three different variants. A first variant might be called *conceptual* relativism. It maintains that truth is conceptually or indexically tied up to the opinion of some individual or group of individuals: to call some claim true is to say that the claim is believed by the speaker, his group, his culture, and so forth. Such relativism has not gained much popularity, but it has an analogue in speaker subjectivism, the meta-ethical position which maintains that usage of key normative terms is pegged to the speaker's own attitudes or desires. To be sure, the expressivist position is not a form of conceptual relativism: it precisely contests the view that normative claims or terms refer to the conative states of those who make such claims (cf. Horgan and Timmons, 2006).

A second variant we might call *factual* relativism, which argues that the world itself, or the "facts", are different for different individuals (groups, cultures) and hence truth, too, is relative. But again, expressivism hardly results in this form of relativism. The expressivist view of normative language does not imply that any normative view is as good as any other: this would amount to a normative stance of its own right, and arguably a very strange one at that (cf. Blackburn, 1998, 296).

A third and far more interesting form of relativism is the *historicist* position advanced by Richard Rorty. Global expressivism is akin to Rorty's (1979; 1982) *anti-representationalism*, which abandons the idea that there is something like "the world" which would constrain our opinion in a rational fashion.<sup>7</sup> All that remains, in Rorty's "Darwinian" story, are the *causal* connections that we, including our opinions, have with "facts". Following Donald Davidson, Rorty attempts to show that the idea of "the world", and of truth as correspondence with the world, have fuelled both realism and relativism alike. The upshot, Rorty argues, is that there is no hope for truth and objectivity in a sense that would exceed the approval of one's peers. There is no privileged language game or, in Rorty's terms, "final vocabulary"—there is only the game that prevails.

For Rorty's unabashedly ethnocentrist "Western liberal intellectual", there is "nothing to be said about either truth or rationality apart from de-

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<sup>7</sup> In distinction to Rorty's anti-representationalist position, Price takes seriously Paul Boghossian's (1990) argument that we cannot coherently formulate an irrealist view of semantic terms, and takes care not to overstep his subject naturalist position. Instead of saying that our statements do *not* represent or our terms do *not* refer, he emphasizes that the whole question does not appear in the subject naturalist framework as he conceives of it.

scriptions of the familiar procedures of justification which a given society—*ours*—uses in one or another area of inquiry” (2010, 229), admitting as he does that “we must, in practice, privilege our own group, even though there can be no non-circular justification for doing so” (2010, 335). In Rorty’s slogan, intersubjective agreement should be grounded in “solidarity” rather than (fact-based) “objectivity”. While we may hope to bring others under the same fold, our success is a sheer historical fact. Rorty does not think that his view amounts to a form of relativism deserving of the name. But as neither of the two other variants of relativism just listed have received much serious support, it is Rorty’s historicism that can seriously be advanced as a philosophically interesting relativist position.

It is this historicist form of relativism that expressivism risks collapsing into. In the expressivist’s own view of assertoric practices, as we saw, some discourses entail a demand of intersubjective agreement. But again, how is any lasting agreement to be achieved, if there is nothing beyond our contingent views to settle our common opinion? Moreover, in the global expressivist view, this is the case with *non*-normative opinion as well.<sup>8</sup> The problem is that while intersubjective agreement is obviously possible and achievable, there is nothing to back up such an agreement: our discourses lack full-blown objectivity. While Rorty would be unhinged by such a demand, ready to abandon the whole notion of objectivity in favour of “solidarity”, many others have tried to meet the demand. Securing objectivity has been a central motivation of *realist* views, which attempt to show that our opinions are answerable to something beyond the views of any (group of ) individuals.<sup>9</sup>

To be fair, contemporary pragmatists have begun to give just such accounts. Brandom has emphasized that assertions are subject to two kinds of normative assessment: aside asking whether an assertion was correct in light of the speaker’s commitments and entitlements, it may be assessed

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<sup>8</sup> A particular issue of interest concerns the global expressivist’s own view of language. Subject naturalism as presented by Price is the study of language from an anthropological perspective. Presumably, it does not equal global expressivism: competing subject naturalist accounts may offer a differing picture of the function of language. Indeed, some of these competing views might even validate object naturalism. I have previously argued that, without recourse to some normative notions to back his specific subject naturalist account, Price appears to face a choice between an internal realism (based on his particular subject naturalist account) and simply assuming a certain ontology of language-users as primary (Rydenfelt, 2011b).

<sup>9</sup> As is familiar, Rorty abandons the whole idea of the possibility of such an account, and would not be budged by such demands. In what follows I am trying to develop an account for those of us who still feel that such demands should be met.

in terms of “whether the assertion is correct in the sense of being true, in the sense that things are as it claims they are” (2000, 187). Brandom takes it to be a “basic criterion of adequacy of a semantic theory that it explain this [latter] dimension of normative assessment” (2000, 187) and accordingly, attempts to show that his account of assertion incorporates this normative status. No discourse is taken as privileged in such an assessment; instead, the normative status is operative in any point of view: “What is shared by all discursive perspectives is *that* there is a difference between what is objectively correct in the way of concept application and what is merely taken to be so, not *what* it is—the structure, not the content” (1994, 600). Brandom thus attempts to account for this type of objectivity as a normative standard of our assertoric practices rather than by (for the most part) invoking traditional realist notions.

Whether Brandom’s account succeeds in securing the features of objectivity required while avoiding the problems of historicism is however debatable, and cannot concern us here. Instead, I will now turn to an exploration of the views of the classical pragmatists—Charles S. Peirce in particular—and argue that these views can be used to complement the expressivist position in a way that enables us to avoid the problems of relativism: it allows us to develop a notion of realism that goes along with (semantic) non-representationalism.

## 5. Pragmatism and the aim of inquiry

Philosophical perspectives already explored in the foregoing could well be called pragmatic or pragmatist. One is the expressivist view that our assertions express functional states or dispositions which in turn have consequences in our conduct. Another is the way in which views on central philosophical notions—such as that of objectivity—have been articulated by drawing from the features of our assertoric practices. The particular notion of pragmatism that I intend to advance, however, is its more traditional version, a distinctive approach to *truth* in terms of the *aim of inquiry* (see Rydenfelt, 2011a; 2014b).

In the contemporary philosophical debate over truth, there are two main contenders: the correspondence theory and a variety of deflationary or minimalist accounts. The former maintains that truth is a fit between a truth-bearer (idea, proposition, belief) and a truth-making reality. This account is often presented as an *analysis* of the predicate “true”. Instead of setting about to uncover the meaning of truth, the deflationary view gives

an account of the *use* of the truth predicate in our assertoric practices, an account that the deflationist argues is exhaustive of the predicate itself (Horwich, 1990). A somewhat less popular third alternative is a variety of epistemic accounts of truth, which attempt to analyse the concept of truth in terms of other notions such as justification, warrant and belief.

The pragmatist perspective on truth should not be simply identified with any of these alternatives; rather, it amounts to an independent approach. Traditionally pragmatists have viewed the correspondence account critically by raising the suspicion that “correspondence” will, in practice, either turn out to be meaningless or mean too many things to be helpful as an account of what it is for a claim or thought to be “true”. However, the pragmatists did not offer a competing analysis, participating in the analytic project.<sup>10</sup> In turn, drawing from notions such as *use* and *practices* has led many to assimilate the deflationary position with the pragmatist one. But while the classical pragmatists would likely have no objections to the deflationary accounts of the use of the truth-predicate, they would not agree with the deflationist that such an account leaves no important philosophical work undone. From their point of view, the most interesting questions about truth are those concerning its relation to other concepts and practices, especially inquiry and belief (see Misak, 2000, 57–66; Misak, 2007).

Indeed, rather than focusing on the conceptual content or the use of the truth predicate, the pragmatists approached truth in terms of the sort of *beliefs* that we should have. In James’s dictum, truth is just the “good in the way of belief”. The pragmatist perspective on truth is in one sense deeply epistemic: its notion of truth is indistinguishable from the notion of inquiry: truth is the *aim* of inquiry or belief (see Rydenfelt, 2009). During the past decades, the pragmatist perspective has been sometimes assimilated to the epistemic conception of truth largely due to the influence of Hilary Putnam (1981; 1990). Unlike with many contemporary epistemic accounts, however, the pragmatist does not attempt to analyse truth in terms of any particular aim of inquiry.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> James’s (1907; 1909) elucidations of truth in terms of what would be useful to believe have been used to ridicule the pragmatist position, as if James had aspired to uncover the conceptual content of the truth-predicate. The starting point of such reception of James is in Russell’s harsh criticism (see e.g. Russell, 1966 [1910]). In part, James himself is to be blamed for the confusion. For some reason, he decided to title his 1909 collection of articles on the topic *The Meaning of Truth*.

<sup>11</sup> Because of Putnam’s one-time proposal of such a view, pragmatists are often considered to have advanced an epistemic account of truth in terms of idealized justification. But the

Importantly, the perspective on truth as the aim of inquiry entails that the pragmatist is not wedded to the standard representationalist picture. Instead of attempting to explicate what it means for our thoughts or claims to "match" an independent reality, the pragmatist entertains no such assumption of correspondence. As I will now proceed to suggest, the pragmatist account ultimately does lead to a particular view of truth that entails realist assumptions: the account of truth codified in Peirce's *scientific method*. But this is not a reversal to the idea that our claims or thoughts "represent" an independent reality. For the pragmatist, realism does not fall out of a representationalist picture; it is the outcome of a substantial development of the aim of inquiry.

The founding pragmatist text on truth is Peirce's classic piece, "The Fixation of Belief" (1877), where Peirce's starting point is the pragmatist notion of *inquiry* as the move from the unsettling state of doubt to the settlement of opinion, or belief.<sup>12</sup> "Fixation" then discusses four aims of inquiry, or methods of settling opinion, in effect four different notions of truth from the pragmatist perspective. The first of the methods is tenacity, the steadfast clinging to one's opinion. However, under the influence of what Peirce calls the social impulse, this method is bound to fail. The disagreement of others begins to matter, and the question becomes how to fix beliefs for *everyone*.

The three latter methods Peirce discusses are ones attempting to reach such a shared opinion across believers. By the method of authority, a power such as that of the state forces a single opinion upon everyone, by brute force if required. However, a "wider sort of social feeling" will show that the opinions dictated by the authority are mostly arbitrary (Peirce,

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story of the development of Putnam's views and his reception of the classics of pragmatism is famously complex. In the 1980s Putnam advanced the view that truth is to be identified with idealized justification (e.g. Putnam 1981; 1990, 41, 114–5). Later, however, he criticized the classical pragmatists for a suggestion along these lines and argued that truth cannot be *defined* in terms of verification (Putnam, 1995, 11). However, it would be a mistake to think that the classical pragmatists attempted to simply define truth in terms of (or identify truth with) any epistemic notions.

<sup>12</sup> Peirce points out that we might think this is not enough but insist that "we seek, not merely an opinion, but a true opinion". However, this "fancy" is immediately dispelled: "we think each one of our beliefs to be true, and, indeed, it is mere tautology to say so" (1877, 115). This remark can be taken as anticipating the deflationary account of truth (cf. Short, 2007, 332–3). The "tautology" Peirce would have in mind would be that to assert or to believe that *p* is to assert or believe that *p* is true simply because this is how "true" operates as a linguistic or grammatical device. This operation of the truth predicate as a *linguistic device* has no implications on what the aim of inquiry is or should be (see Rydenfelt, *forthcoming*).

1877, 118). The third, *a priori* method attempts to rectify this problem by demanding that opinion is to be settled, under conditions of liberty, by what is agreeable to joint human reason. However, this method “makes of inquiry something similar to the development of taste; but taste, unfortunately, is always more or less a matter of fashion” (1877, 119). It is required to develop a method which does not make our belief dependent of our subjective opinions and tastes altogether, “by which our beliefs may be determined by nothing human, but by some external permanency” (1877, 120). This method is the scientific one. Truth, from its point of view, is the opinion which accords with a reality independent of our opinions of it. The hypothesis that underlies the scientific method is that there is an independent reality which “affects, or might affect, every man” (1877, 120). This assumption of *hypothetical realism*, as I will call it, finally makes intelligible the attainment of a single answer to any question across inquirers.

Peirce’s discussion of the different methods reflects our lessons so far. The move from tenacity to the notion of truth as *public* incorporates the aspects of objectivity that expressivists have later reflected upon. The “social impulse” points to a standard beyond one’s own opinion and demands that opinion is to be shared by inquirers. The three latter methods attempt to settle such a shared opinion by offering criteria by which opinion is to be fixed for all. The affinities between Rortian historicism and the third, *a priori* method are evident (see Rydenfelt, 2013b). This method relies on the notion of a node of consensus common to all inquirers, such as a common human reason. But eventually this method is not sustainable: it leads to no lasting results.

The scientific method solves this problem by rendering that our opinions answerable to an independent reality. However, the account of truth entailed in the scientific method is not a naïve correspondence view insisting that we should somehow be able to compare our beliefs with reality. Neither is it an explication of how an in-built fit between our beliefs and the world can be achieved or recognized. Rather, what it practically speaking *means* for our opinions to accord with an independent reality is itself to be worked out in a concrete fashion. Here epistemic notions are employed, although truth is not identified with any set of such notions.

The preceding remarks enable us to respond to two traditional objections to the Peircean approach. The first is that truth again becomes mystical correspondence, an idea which has in turn been the subject of much well-rehearsed philosophical criticism. The second, *converse* objection is that this method identifies truth with justification at an idealized end of

inquiry, which will not satisfy our intuitions: we may imagine something being ideally justified, but still untrue (cf. Price, 2003). Against the first objection, Peirce maintains that "correspondence" is merely the "nominal definition" of truth (for scientific inquiry). What it means for our opinions to accord with an independent reality is to be worked out in a practical fashion. The second objection is substantially answered by the same token. Peirce nowhere *identifies* truth with justification, no matter how ideal. This objection confuses Peirce's notion of truth with what he took to be its hallmark in practice.

As a first approximation, Peirce suggested that truths are those opinions that would continue to withstand doubt were scientific inquiry pursued indefinitely (1878, 139). However, scientific inquiry is not just *any* investigation that would bring about an agreement, but one that has finding out how things are independently of us as its aim. While the aim of meeting an external standard is (unavoidably) internal to this practice, the standard itself remains external. Instead of a *consensus* which may be arbitrarily or contingently formed among inquirers, it is hoped that scientific inquiry will lead to a *convergence* of opinion due to the influence of an independent reality.<sup>13</sup>

Accordingly, *hypothetical* realism does not entail a commitment to any particular ontological picture: it is not a realism about the results of science, past, contemporary or future. Rather than defining what there *is* in terms of science, it is the science that is defined in terms of reality.<sup>14</sup> The hypothesis underlying science is that there is a reality independent of our opinions.

Pragmatism as presented here does not rely on the received notion of truth as correspondence with reality; instead, it approaches truth in terms of the aim of inquiry. And despite its realist underpinnings, the scientific method as suggested by Peirce does not hinge on the idea that our claims or thoughts "mirror" an independent reality. Instead, that method is to

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<sup>13</sup> A further objection maintains that it is impossible to grasp what it would be for an opinion to withstand all future inquiry. This objection, however, rests on a confusion between the abstract and the particular. It is not inherently difficult to abstractly conceive of what it would mean for an opinion to be sustained even at the end of inquiry pushed indefinitely. On the other hand, however, there is no way for us to tell that we have, on any particular question, reached the end. But this is only to be expected: the scientific method implies a thoroughlygoing *fallibilist* attitude towards any hypothesis. The scientific method *unfixes* our opinion: as James put it in describing the empiricist's attitude, "no bell in us tolls to let us know for certain when truth is in our grasp" (James, 1897).

<sup>14</sup> This Peircean direction of understanding scientific realism is not prevalent today, but has its staunch defenders (e.g. Niiniluoto, 2002).

be seen as the practice of settling opinion defined by the aim of meeting such an external standard. This aim cannot be elucidated in conceptual or representational terms; rather, what suggests that this standard is being met is up to the norms of science developed within its practice. Indeed, if Peirce relied on the idea that beliefs or claims “represent” an independent reality and it is *hence* that the scientific method is successful, his discussion of the different methods of fixing belief would be moot: science would win as if by default.

## 6. Normative science and the norms of science

Why, then, is the scientific method successful? Many pragmatists have attempted to devise (based on Peirce’s texts or otherwise) arguments that would show that belief is to be fixed by the scientific method. Cheryl Misak (1991; 2000) and Robert B. Talisse (2007; 2010) have used Peirce’s discussion of the scientific method as a key conceptual node for a defence of democracy. Their arguments involve two main steps. The first is that, due to the nature of belief, inquiry must be conducted, or at least is best conducted, in a scientific fashion. The second is that a democratic setting is required or at least the best societal framework for such an inquiry.

In Talisse’s view, democratic processes and institutions are required for beliefs to be tested against the full range of reasons, arguments and evidence. Misak, in turn, argues (more specifically) that our moral opinions are sensitive to the experience and argument of others, and consequently inquiry into moral questions can be most successfully pursued in a framework of liberal democracy. In order to justify the first step, both Misak and Talisse rely (not on an analysis of the concept of truth but) on an account of the concept of *belief*. They argue that belief is by its nature responsive to reasons, evidence and experience—that belief “aims at truth”. In particular, Talisse maintains that as epistemic agents or believers we are (at least implicitly) committed to the scientific method; for Misak, beliefs are sensitive to reasons, including the experience of others.

This line of argument however turns on an equivocation of its central terms (see Rydenfelt, 2011a; Rydenfelt *forthcoming*). Merely arguing that belief is always sensitive to evidence, reasons and argument (or “experience”) will not suffice to distinguish between the different methods Peirce discusses: what counts as evidence (or the relevant kind of “experience”) depends on the particular method or aim of inquiry that the believing individual or group follows. If the scope of the central terms—“evidence”,

“reasons”, “argument” and “experience”—is in no way defined or restricted, this is just the trivial claim that our beliefs are sensitive to whatever our beliefs are sensitive to. If however the aim of truth is understood more narrowly as it is by the scientific method, the notion of belief proposed is implausible. Certainly there are those whose beliefs are not (at least always) sensitive to *scientific* reasons, such as the followers of Peirce’s method of authority—say, religious fundamentalists.<sup>15</sup>

The pragmatist should not resort to such conceptual maneuvers; indeed, Peirce nowhere suggests that the opinions fixed by methods other than the scientific one are less than genuine beliefs. There is no non-circular argument available for the method of science: the choice of the method—the choice of what counts as the relevant kind of evidence or argument—is itself a substantial normative issue, which allows for no such simple resolution. But the defender of the scientific method is not left completely empty-handed: he may argue that the scientific method—its normative principles concerning the fixation of opinion—are those imposed upon us by reality itself.

Equipped with the representationalist picture, the traditional cognitivist has been looking for a match between normative claims (or their conceptual contents) and the objects or “facts” of the naturalist worldview. The problems of this project have been prone to fuel scepticism. The cognitivists have not managed to supply a plausible account of the conceptual content of normative claims and terms, and the “facts” our normative claims are “about” seem to fall out the scope of the scientific image of reality.

Pragmatism as presented here is able to escape these difficulties by eschewing representationalism. But it also evades the most formidable problem of expressivism, that of historicist relativism. Pragmatism may exploit global expressivism in bringing normative and non-normative claims under the same fold: the difference between these claims and thoughts con-

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<sup>15</sup> We might of course argue that such non-scientific opinions amount to something other or less than full-fledged beliefs; indeed, this is exactly what Misak and Talisse at points suggest. However, then the conclusion that beliefs are sensitive to evidence as understood by the scientific method follows simply because we have *defined* beliefs as just such opinions. Such a stipulation seems too restrictive; in any case, it will not be a viable argument against those who do not follow the scientific method to simply insist that their opinions are not genuine beliefs. Indeed, here the argument for democracy turns out to be an application of the *a priori* method. It maintains that a certain notion of evidence and argument—a certain notion of what counts for or against an opinion—would be shared by all believing agents. When concrete examples of fixing opinion cast this view into doubt, these pragmatists can only rely on an artificially restricted notion of belief (see Rydenfelt, 2013b).

cerns their functions in discourse and action rather than in their “representational” capacities. Neither is by its very nature more “cognitive”: by adopting the scientific method, *both* kinds of opinions may be settled to accord with an independent reality.

The pragmatist notion of science supplies a view of how our thoughts and claims can be made answerable to an independent reality by way of scientific practice instead of the conceptual terms of representationalism. In this way, the pragmatist approach can accommodate the objectivity of normative claims. It both makes intelligible the hope of a lasting agreement over normative ideas and makes good on our intuitions that such claims are responsible to something independent of what we may or may not think. Consequently, there is no principled barrier to a scientific study of normativity; indeed, to deny this is to block an avenue of inquiry. It is not coincidentally that Peirce (1903) coined the term normative science.

Among the benefits of this perspective is that it enables us to fit normative inquiry in a broadly speaking naturalist framework, where science is conceived of not merely in terms of its current image but in the broad terms of the inquiry into an independent reality. The pragmatist does not assume an ontology based on our current conception of science: at the outset, no domain of inquiry can be disclosed from the purview of scientific inquiry.

A particularly interesting application of such inquiry leads to a novel understanding of philosophical naturalism. The scientific method itself cannot be defended on *a priori* grounds: the choice of the method is a substantial normative issue. Normative science enables us to inquire and defend the norms, aims and methods of science *by* scientific inquiry.<sup>16</sup> Normative science is not a “first philosophy” that attempts to lay a foundation for science that is, in Quine’s phrase, “firmer than the scientific method itself”. This picture is circular, but not viciously so (see Rydenfelt, 2011b).

Abandoning the representationalist assumptions while reconceptualizing realism, pragmatism may then give rise to a newly conceived normative realism. Although for the purposes of the argument developed here the mere possibility of hypothetical realism concerning normativity will suffice, the pragmatist will inevitably be asked for an account of the sort of reality that our normative opinions can be made to accord with, and

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<sup>16</sup> The fact that scientific practice is inevitably norm-laden is a partial motivation to Putnam’s criticism of what he calls the “fact/value dichotomy” (Putnam, 2002, 30–31; see Pihlström, 2005).

how that reality may affect us as inquirers. While both scientific discovery and (philosophical) conceptual work will be required to outline hypothetical realism concerning normativity, the beginnings of such an account are fortunately at hand in Peirce's later views, which have been further developed and elaborated by T. L. Short (2007).

According to Short, Peirce recognized that teleology had been reintroduced to modern science in that some forms of statistical explanation are not reducible to mechanistic causation.<sup>17</sup> As an extension of this naturalistic view of final causation, he suggested that certain ideas (or ideals) themselves may have the tendency of becoming more powerful by gaining more ground: that there is an irreversible tendency toward affirming certain ends instead of others. Such tendencies are the natural "facts" that our normative opinions may be settled to accord with, independent of but affecting our particular inclinations and desires. While this picture may seem outlandish, the historical development and spreading of certain ideals—say, concerning human rights and the freedom of opinion—may be taken as evidence of the power of certain ideals gaining more ground, of progress rather than mere change. As Short (2012) construes Peirce's later semiotic view, these ideals can affect us through experience by eliciting feelings of approval and disapproval, satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Experience may correct our feelings, and eventually force convergence among inquirers.

Of the methods (and norms) of *normative* science, very little can (as of yet) be said. It seems plausible that normative claims, unlike some other claims, cannot be tested based on evidence constituted by their predictive power and success. But perhaps this is due to a lack of scientific (and philosophical) imagination in this area.<sup>18</sup> Here as elsewhere, normative science may be simply less developed than other branches of science and common sense.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> More specifically, Short (2007, chs. 4–5) argues that there is a class of statistical explanation which is not mechanistic: the explanations of anisotropic processes of (practically irreversible) evolution of systems toward final states, which encompass a part of statistical mechanics and natural selection in biology.

<sup>18</sup> Indeed, an extension of this sort of Quinean holism and thus empirical testability to normative claims by moral feelings or emotions has been proposed by Morton White (1981; 2002) in his hitherto largely neglected work. For discussion, see Pihlström (2011) and Short (2012).

<sup>19</sup> That is, perhaps we can learn to understand the predictive power of normative ideas (in terms of feelings such as those of approval and disapproval) in a manner analogous to the development of other fields of science. To disclose this alternative at the outset would be against the thoroughgoing *fallibilism* that is part and parcel of the scientific method. A Peircean fal-

## 7. Conclusion

Traditionally, normative realism is assumed to entail the semantic view that normative (or moral) judgments are fact-stating, or describe ways things are. This cognitivist stance however faces major difficulties in accounting for the conceptual content of normative terms as well as for the phenomenon of moral motivation. Initially conceived of as non-cognitivism, contemporary expressivism contests the idea that our thoughts and claims attempt to describe or "fit" something in the world. When extended to all of assertoric language, the result is a global expressivism (or non-representationalism). The most difficult problem of this view is the unsettling implication of a form of relativism, historicism.

The views of the classical pragmatists, especially Charles S. Peirce's account of the scientific method and its commitment to realism, are not derived from a representationalist picture or other *conceptual* considerations. The scientific method is the outcome of a substantial development of *criteria* for the sort of opinions we should have. It assumes *hypothetical realism* about an independent reality which our claims may accord with. Such realism is not committed to any particular ontological picture: rather than defining reality in terms of science, science is defined in terms of reality. Hypothetical realism is thus compatible with the non-representationalist view: it is a realism without representationalism. This pragmatist approach enables us to reconceptualize normative realism. Once we have adopted the global expressivist perspective, there is no principled, "representational" difference between normative and non-normative claims or opinions. The pragmatist may argue that both kinds of opinion are to be fixed by the same—scientific—means. This is the possibility of a normative science.

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libilist maintains that (in principle) any of our theories may turn out to be wrong; this fallibilism extends to all particular methods applied in scientific inquiry.

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# Naturalism and Normativity in Pragmatism

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## 1. Introduction

Norms and values are often considered as a serious problem for naturalism. This is, among other things, due to a misleading dichotomy of nature and culture. This dichotomy suggests that human reason and language is the distinguishing feature of human beings that raises us over and above nature. Especially morality, values and norms arise only in human society. Nature is the realm of pure causality where norms simply do not exist. So norms cannot be naturalized. The same holds for goals and purposes. "There are no purposes in nature; physics has ruled them out, and Darwin has explained them away" (Rosenberg, 2014, 25).

It is true that evolution does not have goals, but it does not follow that individual subjects and groups of them do not have goals. Obviously, they do. The problem is how to explain it in naturalistic terms. In order to see how this can be done we have to look closer on what is the character of philosophical naturalism. Naturalism is most often based on an appeal to natural science. This can be called *hard naturalism* because of this appeal to "hard" natural science. However, there is an alternative to this. According to John Dewey culture is a product of nature, a system developed by natural creatures that does not cease to be natural creatures, biological organisms, after having evolved to cultural beings. This type of naturalism can be called *soft naturalism* (Määttänen 2006).

Instead of the appeal to natural science and its methods one can adopt Dewey's view of science as problem solving. Note that Dewey developed this view on the ground of an analysis of the development of the sci-

ence of physics from Isaac Newton to Albert Einstein and nuclear physics. On Dewey's view any method can be used if it can be expected to produce information that can be used in solving the problems encountered. Instead of appealing to the natural scientific methods one can define naturalism with the simple principle that nature is causally closed.

According to Jaegwon Kim the naturalistic principle of causal closure can be interpreted to entail that "no causal chain involving a physical event will ever cross the boundary of the physical into the non-physical" and "to explain the occurrence of a physical event we never need to go outside the physical domain" (Kim, 1996, 147). The first part of this characterization is obviously correct if it means that no supernatural forces can have an effect on causal processes and that there is no room for Cartesian dualism of two distinct substances. The latter part concerning the explanation of physical events cannot be accepted if it entails reductionism in the sense that all events "are in principle explainable in physical terms" (Melnyk, 2003, 215). Everything that happens in nature is realized through physical causal processes but this leaves room for "complex structures and configurations of physical particles" that can "exhibit properties that are not reducible to 'lower-level' physical properties" (Kim, 1996, 212). The task is to make explicit what these complex structures and configurations are. The claim is, then, that by finding the correct structures and configurations we can introduce normativity to naturalism without violating the principle of causal closure. For this we need to reject hard naturalism with its commitment to natural scientific methods and find the correct unit of analysis, find out what the causal processes involved are.

## 2. The unit of analysis

It is a widespread presumption that the relation between mental and physical is really a relation between the mind and the brain. According to Andrew Melnyk both dualists and physicalists can agree that an accurate characterization of the mind is the following. "The mind of an organism receives information about its environment from its sense organs, stores and modifies this information, and then causes movement in the organism's bodily parts" (Melnyk, 2003, 281). According to Kim "it seems beyond doubt that mental events occur as a result of physical/neural processes" (Kim, 1996, 8). When discussing the problem of extrinsic mental properties he maintains that if an organism's relationship to various external environmental and historical factors is involved, then we face a serious

problem because "we expect the causative properties of behavior to be intrinsic and internal" (Kim, 2000, 37). This kind of internalism is precisely the stand that should be seriously questioned.

The brain as the unit of analysis surely makes it hard to see how normativity could be naturalized. Neural processes as such as well as processes studied by nuclear physics have nothing to do with norms and values. However, it is not a conceptual truth that the brain processes are the only physical processes that can be considered as realizing mentality and cognition. The concrete organism/environment interaction is also realized through physical processes, and the relevance of this interaction has been considered for a long time by approaches like enactivism and dynamical systems theory. The present version of the analysis of organism/environment interaction is based on the pragmatism of Charles Peirce and John Dewey. It is the organism as an acting agent that has values and goals. The normativity involved can be analysed in terms of this interaction if the unit of analysis is chosen differently, and the problem about the relationship between normativity and neural processes as such does not even arise.

As Maxwell Bennett and Peter Hacker point out, the talk about the brain alone as realizing mental activities is crypto-Cartesianism: what René Descartes said about the soul, is said about the brain (Bennett & Hacker, 2003). This mind/brain talk seems to be based on a presumption adopted from classical philosophy. Mind is considered to be something internal (soul or brain) as opposed to the so-called external world. However, it is not a conceptual necessity that the brain processes are the only causal processes realizing cognition. The concrete interaction between living organisms and their (natural and cultural) environment is also realized by physical causal processes. John Dewey already pointed to this direction when he criticized the concept of reflex arc. The problem with the reflex arc concerns its too narrow scope. It is realized entirely within the body. It starts from sensory processes and ends to motor responses. Dewey suggested that the notion of sensorimotor circuit is better (Dewey, 1975, 97). The point is that the elements of the environment are included in the circuit. Or in other words, the objects of environment belong "to the functional organization of mind" (Määttänen, 1993, 105).

The brain, the body and the environment form the system, which as a whole is required in the analysis of mind. This unit of analysis opens the door for external environmental and historical factors in explaining the relationship between mental and physical, which is not a relationship

between mental and neural properties or processes. Neither is it a relationship between mental causation and physical/neural causation. The notion of habit of action (see below) makes it possible that external environmental and historical factors form the basis of anticipation of action and its consequences, and the physical factors involved in mental causation consist of internal needs of an organism, internal anticipatory mechanisms and external things that function together (Määttänen, 2015b, ch. 5).

Organism/environment interaction consists of perception and action, and both are realized through physical causal processes. They cannot be separated by cutting them off from each other in the manner of the classical faculty psychology. Perception and action take place simultaneously and function together as recent research shows (Noë, 2004). Charles Peirce distinguished between them by saying that in action "our modification of other things is more prominent than their reaction on us" while in perception "their effect on us is overwhelmingly greater than our effect on them" (CP 1.324). Generally speaking the flow of causal influence follows a loop: from an organism to the environment in action and back to the agent in perception. Interaction with the world proceeds as an ongoing loop of action and perception. It starts when we are born and stops when we eventually die.

This loop of perception and action can be considered as a mental loop. Causal processes realizing cognition are the ongoing processes of this loop. From this viewpoint mind is not a property of the brain or even the body. Mind is a property of organism/environment interaction (Määttänen, 2015b, ch. 5). If a living organism is isolated from its interaction (or the brain put in a vat) mental predicates become problematic. As Bennett and Hacker (2003) point out, mental predicates are attributed to behaving persons, not to the brain or parts of the brain. If one drops the loop, then one loses mentality out of sight. The mental loop also helps to analyze the central concept that is needed in introducing normativity in naturalism: habit of action.

### 3. Habit of action as a teleological notion

One of Peirce's characterizations of habit is the following where he explains how habits differ from dispositions:

Habits differ from dispositions in having been acquired as consequences of the principle, virtually well-known even to those whose powers of reflexion are insufficient to its formulation, that multiple

reiterated behaviour of the same kind, under similar combinations of percepts and fancies, produces a tendency—the habit—actually to behave in a similar way under similar circumstances in the future

CP 5.487

The formation of a habit depends on the acting agent and on the circumstances to which action is accommodated. The role of the circumstances is neglected if one considers habits merely as bodily states. Peirce operates, in effect, with the unit of analysis given above, although he does not explicitly say so.

The important point to note here is the tendency to behave in a similar way under similar circumstances in the future. Similar circumstances and past experience during habit formation give the possibility to anticipate what the probable outcome of similar activities will be. In practical experience habits get accommodated to objective conditions of action, or to “laws or habitudes of nature”, to use Peirce’s expression (CP 5.587). Habits can be characterized as structured schemes of action (Määttänen, 2015b, ch. 3). The structure of a habit fits the structure of the objective conditions of action, and in this sense habits are beliefs about these conditions.

Habits are also meanings. Peirce says, “what a thing means is simply what habits it involves” (CP 5.400). This can be applied to any perceived object. If an object involves a habit, then to think with that habit is to anticipate what consequences habitual action probably has. The perceived object is a sign-vehicle that refers to these consequences. Habits establish meaning relations that are based on the anticipation of habitual action. It turns out, that the capacity to anticipate is an essential element of normativity in nature.

Meanings and beliefs are supposed to be general entities if they are to fulfill their function as vehicles of cognition. Peirce approached this question by asking *when* do habits exist? There are three obvious possibilities, past, present and future. Peirce writes:

For every habit has, or is, a general law. Whatever is truly general refers to the indefinite future; for the past contains only a certain collection of such cases that have occurred. The past is actual fact. But a general (fact) cannot be fully realized. It is a potentiality; and its mode of being is *esse in futuro*. The future is potential, not actual. What particularly distinguishes a general belief, or opinion, such as is an inferential conclusion, from other habits, is that it is active in the imagination.

CP 2.148

In the past there has been only a certain finite number of instances of any habit. No genuine generality can be involved here. The same holds for the present. The only alternative is the future. This has the interesting consequence that habits can only be objects of thought. But nothing Cartesian follows because habitual action is always performed by biological organisms in this material world. For short, cognition is anticipation of action, and habits as meanings and beliefs are vehicles of cognition (Määttänen, 2010).

Habits are meanings by virtue of the capacity to anticipate, and this ability has the consequence that habit of action is a teleological concept. Future can indeed have an effect on the present (CP 2.86). Peirce talks about final causation in this context, but this is slightly misleading because it may be understood as some peculiar sort of causation. The notion of mental loop described above helps to see how anticipatory mechanisms are formed during practical experience through causal processes. When similar behavior is repeated in similar circumstances the course of action becomes habitual and is imprinted into memory by virtue of the pragmatist law of association (Määttänen, 2010). This law says that sensory inputs, which are relevant for successful action, are associated with each other and with the sequence of motor responses. When similar situation is encountered again, this chain of associations is activated as an internal process, and past experiences of the outcomes of habitual behavior are remembered. This anticipated future has an effect on the present choices of what course of action is performed next. No backwards causation is involved here. The only thing that is required is that the acting agent and the circumstances remain relatively stable. According to Peirce this is the "special uniformity" of nature required for habit formation and inductive reasoning (CP 2.775). Actually this uniformity is not only a prerequisite of habit formation. It is a necessary condition of our existence as embodied beings and thus a precondition of all mental phenomena.

#### 4. Facts and values of an acting agent

David Hume famously claimed that morality is not an object of science. It consists not in any matter of fact that can be discovered by the understanding. This is because if, for example, one considers a willful murder, one cannot find any matter of fact or real existence, which can be called vice. David Hume presents the principle according to which one cannot derive *ought* from *is*. (Hume, 1978, 468–469). This is the so-called Humean

guillotine that cuts values off from the world of facts with a sharp and heavy blade. The character of values and their mode of existence becomes a serious philosophical problem.

Hume's philosophical framework is typical for classical philosophy since Descartes. Internal mind has experience of the so-called external world through sense organs. Experience consists of sense perception, and the object of knowledge consists of the hidden causes of perceptions. And as Hilary Putnam notes, Hume entertains pictorial semantics (Putnam, 2004, 15). If one is to know that something is a fact, one must literally perceive it. This view of the structure of experience and the object of knowledge is based on presumptions that can be rejected. These notions are defined differently in pragmatism.

As is well known, Peirce wanted to broaden the concept of experience (CP 1.336). Action, effort and resistance must be included in that notion. This leads to a different conception of the structure of experience and the object of knowledge. The world is experienced as possibilities of action, not as perceived individual objects, their properties and mutual relations. Indeed we perceive objects, but "any object that is overt is charged with possible consequences that are hidden" (Dewey, 1981, 28). In this view, the object of knowledge is a relation between two situations, the one in which an acting agent is situated and the second situation, which is the outcome of some habitual action or controlled operations. To know is to know what to do. This definition of the object of knowledge entails that the knowing subject and its action belong to the object of knowledge. The knowing subject lives in the midst of the interactions going on in the world, and what can be known is the joint outcome these interactions and the activity of the subject. (Määttänen, 2015b, ch. 2.) The notion of habit is teleological, and goal-oriented activity is always involved in the object of knowledge.

This revision of the object of knowledge has consequences for the notion of a matter of fact. Hume's notion of fact consists of what one can literally perceive here and now. A matter of fact in pragmatism is defined on the ground of how the object of knowledge is defined. Accordingly, a matter of fact in pragmatism consists of a *factual* relation between two situations mediated by habitual action or controlled operations. Facts happen, and a fact is known if a course of events can be anticipated correctly. Of course, processes in nature proceed by themselves but this not relevant for the problem of the relation between facts and values. This problem concerns the world as experienced. The facts that happen due to the activ-

ity of a knowing subject are known if the outcome of activity is anticipated correctly. The difference between Hume and pragmatism becomes clear in the following quotation. "We perceive objects brought before us; but that which we especially experience—the kind of thing to which the word 'experience' is more particularly applied—is an event" (CP 1.336). Experienced facts are events, and this notion of a matter of fact leads to a very different view about the relation between facts and values.

The world is experienced as possibilities of action. There are always a large number of possibilities in every situation one encounters. It is impossible to act according to all the possibilities at the same time. Thus one necessarily has to choose between the various possibilities. And to choose is, in effect, to value. Valuation is based on the anticipated consequences of habitual action. Positive consequences are valued highly, negative consequences are not. The necessity of choice implies that there is no action without valuation based on past practical experience. In other words, the facts and values of an acting agent are necessarily intertwined in experience. Hume's guillotine is in deep rust. It holds only as a logical principle according to which one cannot infer value statements if there are no value statements in the premises. This is true, but why should we preclude value statements from the premises. As we shall see in the next section, acts of valuation are objective facts in nature. Why close the eyes in front of them?

Valuation in action is typically not based on conscious moral deliberation. Many if not most practical choices are made subconsciously. But this does not mean that choices are determined by blind causation. That which proceeds by virtue of subconscious habits now has been acquired with valuation of the outcomes of action during habit formation. The development of skills proceeds in this manner. A beginning piano student thinks very carefully on what key she puts her finger next. The basic value is to pick the right key. A skillful pianist does not think about fingers. They find their way to correct keys subconsciously. The conscious values concern the character of the melody and other features of a piece of music as a whole. In a certain sense the development of skills reaches down to the history of evolution. Sense organs are kind of crystallized habits of perceiving features that are relevant for action. Of course, the evolution of sense organs is not based on conscious decisions, but natural selection functions to the effect that those courses of action that have positive value for survival are favoured. Generally speaking subconscious habitual skills form the major body of the resources for living the life.

Conscious decision is only a top layer on all this. We do things without knowing the reasons. "One of the main jobs of consciousness is to weave our lives together in a story that makes sense to us and is consistent with our self-conception" (Franks, 2010, 70–1).

## 5. Values as natural properties

The critics of naturalism sometimes claim that it is a fallacy, the so-called naturalistic fallacy, to take a natural property as a definition of morally good. This is a fallacy because for any natural property it is always possible to ask: But is it good? So one is asking is good good, and this does not make sense. This accusation of fallacy is, however, based on an aprioristic fallacy, on the assumption that philosophical concepts like that of good have an exact definition, that the meaning of good is precise, independent of experience and applies to all cases when something is experienced as good. This conception is based on the presumptions of classical philosophy, mainly on the idea that reason with its content (concepts, meanings) can be separated from experience.

The pragmatist notion of meaning is different. According to Peirce, what a thing means is simply what habits it involves. This principle can be applied to any object of perception: doors, windows, apples and words of a language (see Määttä, 2005). Words gain meaning when they are used in the context of other practices. The use (the meaning) of the word "good" is not independent of the practical context where it is used. It gains a slightly different meaning when used in different contexts. It is perfectly possible to ask whether something recognized as good in the context of one set of practices is good from the viewpoint of some other set of practices.

The pragmatist notion of meaning also gives the explanation of how natural properties are related to values. Meanings are attached to observed things like apples, and an apple as a sign-vehicle refers to the anticipated consequences of habitual action that apples involve. A hungry person attaches a positive value to a perceived apple, but strictly speaking the valued thing is not the apple but the consequence of eating the apple, the anticipated satisfaction of hunger. So it is correct, literally speaking, to say that the natural properties of the apple as such are not value properties. The status of the apple as a valued thing is based on its role in the life activity of apple-eating animals. This is not to reject naturalism because the satisfaction of hunger is a natural property of some living creatures. This kind of value is not a reserved for cultural beings.

The goal of a hungry person is the satisfaction of hunger, and the apple is a means for attaining that goal. This is technical normativity. The goal determines the means; it gives a norm what to do, not only to human beings. It is a simple and objective fact in nature, based on bare observation, that living creatures tend to live their lives until they eventually die. Once born, a creature must live the life to the end. There is no choice in this. The life can be long or short, but it has a beginning and an end. Bare observation tells also that most creatures strive to live as long as possible. This is something programmed by natural evolution. Evolution does not have goals, but it would not proceed without this one goal of living organisms. This goal also gives norms what to do. It depends, of course, on the character of an organism what it has to do, but human beings (amongst many other species) have to breathe, drink, eat, get shelter and so on in order to stay alive. This is given by biology, and the normativity in question can be called *biotechnical normativity* (Määttänen, 2009, 131–133). Recall that a matter of fact is here defined as a relation between two situations mediated by action. It is an objective fact in nature that a large number of developed living creatures eat food in order to get rid of hunger, and satisfaction of hunger as value is accordingly an objective fact in nature. It is something that living creatures strive for.

Human beings are organisms that live in nature and experience it as its natural elements. They experience events as facts, and for this one must necessarily choose between various courses of anticipated action. Valuation is thus an objective feature in nature.

## 6. Values and emotions

David Hume could not perceive—in a literal sense—values, and hence ended up with the view that values are quite peculiar things. But something can still be said of them, according to Hume. Valuation is based on some kind of moral sentiment or feeling (Hume, 1978, 470). Just like in the separation of facts and values, here, too, the exact opposite holds. Emotions are based on values.

Antonio Damasio (1996) has put forth a hypothesis that he calls the somatic marker hypothesis. According to it emotions are signs of values. Negative emotions are associated with things that are related to negative experiences and positive emotions with experiences related to positive experiences. Emotions help us make decisions about what to do. Negative emotions advise us to avoid situations that seem to be harmful. Positive

emotions tell us to think closer how to get the possible positive experience. For Damasio emotions are heuristic aids of rational thought. They help us to make decisions about how to act. This help is expressed as emotions and is based on the evaluation of the experiential value of the anticipated courses of action. The anticipated future has an effect on the present (but not on the past) by virtue of reminding what sorts of experiences are about to follow.

Accumulated experience produces an emotional attitude expressing the summary of the values of the possible experiences the environment affords. "The attitude is precisely that which was a complete activity once, but is no longer so. The activity of seizing prey or attacking an enemy, a movement having its meaning in itself, is now reduced or aborted; it is an attitude simply" (Dewey, 1971, 183). Dewey uses the German word *Gefühlston* (tone of feeling) to express emotional attitudes that have become thoroughly habitual and hereditary (ibid., 188).

Dewey applies these ideas in his philosophy of art. Paintings are expressive because, among other things, lines and relations of lines "have become subconsciously charged with all the values that result from what they have done in our experience in our every contact with the world about us" (Dewey, 1987, 107). Paintings as a whole and even single qualities have this emotional property, *Gefühlston*, which explains why a painting is emotionally expressive. This idea applies more generally to any work of art. The subconscious working of tacit meanings explains the emotional power of aesthetic experiences. The explanation of the emotionally expressive power of art is based on the fact that single qualities, their mutual relations and the work of art as a whole do refer, albeit subconsciously, to all the previous experience our species has had during the long biological and cultural evolution (Määtänen, 2015a).

## 7. The multi-layered system of values

Human beings are not only natural creatures, they are also cultural beings. Not all values are based on biology. This is more than obvious. The point is, however, that these values are basic in the sense that there is no culture without human beings as living organisms. This justifies a bottom-up strategy in developing a value theory. Cultural diversity is built on top of biotechnical normativity. The result is a multi-layered system of values, which is not necessarily so coherent. Human history of wars and ideo-

logical fights shows that one of the basic values, respect of life, is often neglected in the name of more abstract ideological values.

The structure of the value system is closely related to the structure of the system of meanings. This is because habits as meanings play a central role in valuation in practice. Basically there are two kind of meanings: tacit (non-linguistic) meanings of objects like tools, doors, windows *et cetera* and linguistic meanings. Similarly basic values are related to bodily behavior and preservation of life. The practical functioning of values does not necessarily involve human consciousness and language use. These values function in practice also in the life form of other developed animals. Cultural values are discussed and formulated in some language and are related to the social and cultural world.

The pragmatist notion of meaning entails that meanings are context dependent, and the same holds for values. The context of different practices ties meanings and values to a viewpoint. Hopeless relativism does not follow because the physical viewpoint determined by embodiment is objective in the sense that the body is an objective element in nature and no one can detach herself from that (except in imagination). Physical viewpoint must be distinguished from conceptual viewpoint, which allows of more flexibility and pluralism. But even linguistic meanings are tied to the practical context. For a naturalist there are no abstract immaterial meanings in some realm of mental entities for reason to catch. Similarly values cannot be derived from moral Mount Sinai or out of the *a priori* blue, to use Dewey's expression (Dewey, 1988, 219).

The role of values is to direct behavior, and this is fulfilled only if they have a relation to practices. If intrinsic values are defined as values that have no relation to other things, then they are not worth considering. Their only possible value is in arousing emotional states. Values that have no relation to practices are practically worthless. John Dewey emphasized the connection of means and ends and introduced the notion of end-in-view in order to make this point. The real value of ethical theory is in its relation to problems of life. The complex nature of social relations and context dependence of values directing different practices entails that a multitude of viewpoints is inevitable. Instead of searching for one precise definition of moral good or set of moral rules we should find ways to discuss what is good or bad for whom, where and when and develop a value system suitable for modern developed society. On this ground it might be possible to decrease the amount of bad and increase the amount of good.

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PART III

RELIGION

# A Skeptical Pragmatic Engagement with Skeptical Theism

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## 1. Introduction

Evil and suffering present some of the most pressing existential problems of human life, and they are also considered prominent stumbling-blocks for belief in the God of the classical theistic traditions Judaism, Christianity and Islam (e.g. K ung 2001). Accordingly, the tradition of *theodicy*—which seeks to account for the reasons a good and powerful God has for permitting all the suffering and evil of the world—has a long and distinguished history.

Over the last decades, though, theodicies have fallen somewhat out of fashion, and at least in Anglo-American mainstream philosophy of religion, they have more and more come to be replaced by the *skeptical theist* response to the problem of evil. This response is not, as the name might suggest, skeptical towards theism, or belief in God, but towards our ability to be in a position to ever determine what states of affairs that are overall good or bad, and, not least, how good and bad states of affairs are related to one another. Once we draw this ability into doubt, skeptical theists argue, it becomes rather presumptuous to claim that the problem of evil shows that the god of the classical theistic traditions does not exist, and the same problem applies to theodicies which claim to be able to guess God’s motives—both strategies make unwarranted assumptions about our position vis-à-vis God.

Skeptical theism thus seeks to achieve more or less the same goal as theodicies—that is, to neutralize all arguments from evil and suffering against belief in the existence of God—but with substantially less philo-

sophical baggage: we can retain a religious commitment and at the same time be agnostic with regard to questions about the point of particular instances of evil and suffering and/or the point of evil and suffering in general.<sup>1</sup>

### 1.1 Purpose and outline

The purpose of this paper is to approach and evaluate skeptical theism from the perspective of a pragmatic philosophy of religion outlined below. Concretely, this means that I offer a pragmatic reading of skeptical theism as an attempt to preserve the goods naturally generated in religious believers' interaction with the environment in the face of the problem of evil, and ask whether this attempt looks promising. Second, I will develop a pragmatic philosophical approach to religion that connects it closely to life orientations, and third, I use that approach to identify three problems that pragmatism, in the version developed here, has with skeptical theism. First, that skeptical theism separates between *belief* that God exists and the settings where talk about God as real rather than an illusion, or as existent rather than non-existent, gets its meaning (and pragmatic justification). Related to that is a second problem, namely, that there is a significant risk that skeptical theism might work *too well*, in the sense that it robs us of resources to criticize, for instance, elements of religious traditions that we judge to be sexist or homophobic.

A third problem is that skeptical theism helps reify the religion/atheism-distinction as a central element of philosophy of religion as well as of the Western intellectual climate. Here I will, in relation to a discussion of a pragmatic approach to the problem of evil, suggest that pragmatism's mediating ambition can open up new ways of understanding and communicating about the problem of evil. On this account, evil and suffering undermine the vitally important belief that what we do makes

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<sup>1</sup> I will not discuss the tricky question of whether God's goodness requires of God that God makes sure that each person's suffering is somehow compensated for, or whether it is rather the total amount of goodness that needs to outweigh the total amount of evil. I will also not delve very deeply into the details of different kinds of evil, such as natural and moral evil. The interesting point for my purposes concerns the logical role played by the "skepticism"—part of skeptical theism, and to deal with that, I can, I believe, get along with a rather rough and everyday understanding of the problem of evil. In what follows, I will primarily speak of the problem of the huge amount of evil and suffering in the world (though I retain, for simplicity's sake, the established phrase "the problem of evil"), and hence, I save more detailed discussions of, for instance, the fact that *homo homini lupus*—that is, that there is so much moral evil that human beings cause each other—for some other occasion.

a difference, that the world's fate is open and partially under our influence, a threat that both believers and non-believers can feel the force of, and to which shared understanding and communication that transcends even the religion/atheism debate should be considered a possible and attractive response.

The *modest* conclusion of this paper is then that pragmatists ought not to adopt skeptical theism. The *less modest* conclusion is that a pragmatic philosophical approach may offer resources that make us better at preserving the valuable elements of religious traditions (such as the confidence in the concrete guidance offered by what I will call *paradigmatic responses*) and this amounts, I will suggest, to a meta-philosophical argument for the pragmatic value of pragmatic philosophy of religion. Although this will certainly not convince everybody, it suggests a possible way in which exchange between different philosophical approaches can take place.

## 2. Background: The problem of evil and the skeptical theist approach

### 2.1 The problem of evil in contemporary Anglo-American philosophy

In Anglo-American philosophy of religion, the problem of evil has often been discussed in two versions, the logical and the evidential, where the former concerns the question whether belief in God is really consistent with other propositions that we all accept (such as that "there is much suffering in the world"), and the latter whether belief in the existence of God can be rationally defensible in view of the massive suffering in the world (Mackie, 1955; Plantinga, 1975; W. Rowe, 1992). Of course, some sufferings are intimately connected to greater goods that would otherwise be unattainable, such as when I study a boring topic hard in order to obtain a degree that will give me a stimulating occupation. Plenty of suffering does not, however, seem to serve any such greater good, so that strategy does not allow the theist to explain away very much suffering. It is on the latter kind of suffering that both debates focus. In what follows, I concentrate on the evidential argument, since that is the argument skeptical theists address.

Evidential arguments from evil such as William Rowe's (1992) deal with evil and suffering that serve no discernible higher purposes, and suggest that such suffering should count as *evidence* against belief in the

existence of an omnipotent, omniscient and perfectly good being. Theodicies respond to evidential arguments by offering a kind of counterarguments that seek to supply what critics claim cannot be supplied, namely, a plausible explanation of a perfectly good and omnipotent God's reasons for tolerating the evils and sufferings of our world. If, for instance, genuine free will among human beings is a very great good, then the fact that many people use that freedom to harm one another may be a consequence that we have to learn to live with, to take an often used version of theodicies. (Hick, 2004; Swinburne, 2004). The point is to show that God is not, contrary to appearances, morally blameworthy despite the fact that God can, in principle, prevent suffering whenever and wherever it occurs.

The main difficulties for theodicies lie, of course, in showing that the explanations are *plausible* given the amount of suffering in this world, and the problem becomes even more tantalizing once we accept a point already made by David Hume, namely, that most goods that we experience seem petty compared to the invasive character of suffering (Hume, 1990). The question arises: was it not *possible* for an omnipotent God to accomplish important purposes with less suffering, and not least less suffering for those who cannot even be said to deserve it, such as children? And if not, was it really worth it? This is one of the points Dostoevsky has Ivan Karamazov make in *The Brothers Karamazov*, and even a defender of theodicy such as Hick agrees that the vastness and uneven distribution of human suffering remains a major stumbling-block for any theodicy.<sup>2</sup>

## 2.2 Skeptical theism's approach

Enter skeptical theism. Compared to the rather contentious metaphysical and axiological claims theodicies are forced to make, skeptical theism promises to get away with a much lighter philosophical baggage, and its strategy is to cast doubt on the entire business of judging that there are, or that there are no, good reasons for an omnipotent being to allow the vast amounts of suffering that we see around us. Distinctions such as the ones between suffering that serves some greater good and sufferings that do not are, after all, always made from a human—all too human, skeptical theists would add—perspective.

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<sup>2</sup> In a sense, then, I think it is fair to say that even defenders of theodicy have to make at least *some* appeal to skeptical theism-like stances as a fallback-position.

Skeptical theism differs from the response of someone like Ivan Karamazov by suggesting that the main problem with theodicies is not that they look cynical and indifferent to the sufferings of beings of flesh and blood, but that they portray the human epistemic position with regard to God and God's values as much stronger than we have reason to think that it is. Rather than returning the ticket to a redeemed creation, as Ivan Karamazov would have us do, skeptical theists suggest that we should stop judging God from the point of view of our limited human perspective. Both rejections and defenses of God thus commit the same mistake by taking *our* perspective to be sufficient for resolving questions of this kind.

Among the chief advocates of skeptical theism-approaches in contemporary philosophy are Michael Bergmann, Michael Rea, Justin McBrayer and Stephen Wykstra (Bergmann & Rea, 2005; Bergmann, 2001 & 2012; McBrayer, 2012; Wykstra, 1996). Bergmann fleshes out skeptical theism in four theses:

- st1: We have no good reason for thinking that the possible goods we know of are representative of the possible goods there are.
  - st2: We have no good reason for thinking that the possible evils we know of are representative of the possible evils there are
  - st3: We have no good reasons for thinking that the entailment relations we know of between possible goods and the permission of possible evils are representative of the entailment relations there are between possible goods and the permission of possible evils
  - st4: We have no good reason for thinking that the total moral value or disvalue we perceive in certain complex states of affairs accurately reflects the total moral value or disvalue they really have
- Bergmann, 2012, 11–12; cf. Bergmann 2001, 279

Taken together, these theses suggest that evidence-based atheistic arguments such as Rowe's above draw unwarranted conclusions from what *seems* to be the case (i.e. that there *seems* to be no good that would justify God's permitting these atrocities to happen) to what *actually is* the case (most likely, or quite probably, there *are* no goods that would justify God's permitting these atrocities to happen; hence, it is likely that God, at least as described by theists, does not exist). Elaborating on an idea of Wykstra's, Yujin Nagasawa and Nick Trakakis call this a *noseeum-assumption*: if we can see no acceptable reasons for God's permitting the vast amounts of suffering there are, then probably, there are no acceptable reasons either (Trakakis & Nagasawa, 2004).

Skeptical theism rejects the application of noseum-assumptions to the problem of evil because of their tendency to presuppose that we are perfectly capable of taking a God's eye view with regard to good and evil. One common analogy here is to compare the cognitive situation of human beings vis-à-vis God to that of a child's situation vis-à-vis its parents: children are often incapable of understanding why parents let them suffer various things that they take to be evils (such as medicines with painful side-effects), and skeptical theists are prone to ask why we should think that we are in a better position than the child with regard to God's motives for permitting suffering (Wykstra, 1996, 143). This means that the road of theodicy is closed for the skeptical theist, because the goods that theodicies typically appeal to are, after all, only good from *our* point of view. Hence, theodicies display a similar, if not larger, degree of hubris than atheistic arguments do. From a religious perspective, this is, however, no cause for concern, since the evidential argument loses its force once we adopt skeptical theism (which, of course, is different from saying that the problem of evil loses all its force).

What is interesting about the skeptical theist form of agnosticism about goods and evils at work in, for instance, the quote from Bergmann above, is its categorical tone: we have *no* good reasons to feel confident about our judgments about the overall value of some state of affairs, because there may be goods that we do not (as yet) know of, or complex relations to evils that we are not aware of, and so on. Skeptical theists do not, however, take it upon themselves to tell us what those goods are. Hence, we can say that they offer a *defense* rather than a *justification* of belief in God.

This sets skeptical theism apart from the kind of antiskeptical fallibilism typically advocated by pragmatists. First, because on such accounts, agnosticism, too, needs to be argued for: doubt/agnosticism is *not* the default position, but a stance that needs just as much grounding as firm belief to become acceptable. Second, because pragmatism combines fallibilism with the conviction that it is possible to make *progress* through intelligently undertaken inquiry. Such progress suggests that we are not, in fact, groping in the dark with regard to values such as good and bad: we can see what kind of attitudes and behaviors that have typically caused harm and suffering in the past, and also ways in which harm and suffering can be relieved.

And it does not stop there: experience allows us, fortunately, to extrapolate in such a manner that we need not commit all individual possible mistakes there are to be able to make progress. For instance, we have

learned that imposition of dogmatically held doctrines or principles very often cause more harm than good, and that we, overall, tend to cause more suffering when we act in an unempathic and paternalistic manner, resort to sexism and homophobia, and so on and so forth. If we would take the skeptical theist agnosticism at face value, it is far from clear how we could know that we have actually made *progress* when we stop treating homosexuals as pariah—at least not if we take ‘progress’ to be related to the overall (moral) state of the world. In short, we know, a pragmatist would say, quite a lot about how to cause suffering and how to do good, and how we should typically act to make the world a better place.

If we still hold that we should doubt that the goods that we have thus come to embrace are *really* representative of the (possible) goods there are and that we cannot really know much about the overall value or disvalue of any given situation, then this is not a modest, but in fact a very presumptuous claim. The burden of proof does not automatically fall on the one who makes certain positive claims here: it falls equally on agnostics and skeptics.

In what follows, I will develop a pragmatic alternative that, in my view, manages to preserve our confidence in our moral judgments without jeopardizing the goods naturally generated in religious human beings’ interactions with the environment, or, to put it more bluntly, to show a way in which a religious commitment can be retained without having to accept the problems generated by skeptical theism. First, though, I will look at some criticisms of skeptical theism, and a couple of skeptical theist responses that I will engage with later on.

### 2.3 Two objections to skeptical theism

I will now turn to two standard objections to skeptical theism that you find in the literature. First, an objection specifically directed against the parent-analogy. The parent-analogy seems to presuppose, a critic such as Trent Dougherty points out, that if the ways of the adult world are complex for children, then how much more complex should not the ways of God’s world be, given the enormous cognitive distance between finite human minds and God’s omniscient mind? That presupposition is, however, Dougherty argues, flawed, because it overlooks the fact that with increasing abilities to create and manage complex states of affairs, we should also expect increasing abilities to make those states of affairs *transparent* to less advanced beings such as us. Hence, rather than conclude that the parent-

analogy strengthens the skeptical theist case, Dougherty argues that it weakens it (Dougherty, 2012). In a similar vein, Rowe argues, parents are certainly forced to let their children suffer from time to time, but then, they still do all they can to comfort them, rather than retain the distance that suffering human beings often feel with regard to God (Rowe, 2006).

Another family of objections resembles the pragmatic approach sketched above in that it sets focus on skeptical theism's pessimistic stance towards our cognitive abilities, but it moves in a slightly different direction. Rowe argues that skeptical theism undermines the *theism*-part of "skeptical theism" to such an extent that we should be skeptical of any grounds we may have for endorsing theism (Rowe, 2006). Others concentrate more directly on moral skepticism: if skeptical theism is right, then we cannot really tell whether the situations that we judge to be bad are actually good: they might serve some higher purpose that we cannot know of. Then why should we feel obliged to do something about them, and risk making things *worse*? (Almeida & Oppy, 2003)

There are several skeptical theist responses to this objection. Here, I will note just one that I return to later. It is true, most skeptical theists seem to agree, that skeptical theism rests on a form of skepticism about our cognitive and moral abilities. This would, Bergmann and Rea admit, lead to a serious moral skepticism *unless religious believers that accept ST1–ST4 can find other reasons for having confidence in the adequacy of their moral judgments*. But, Bergmann and Rea claim, they *do* have other reasons; namely that these judgments are in accordance with God's revealed commands. Moral skepticism is, however, a genuine problem, they suggest, for *non-believers*, who cannot draw on such independent sources to justify their moral stances, but they pose no serious threat to skeptical theism, according to them (Bergmann & Rea, 2005, 244–5).

The debate over the viability of skeptical theism should not, I would argue, be taken as some intellectual exercise or merely as a question about whether one is epistemically entitled to hold certain religious beliefs. Rather, I take it to be an ongoing serious discussion about whether, and to what extent, religious ways of thinking and acting in the world—which a substantial amount of people value highly—can be retained in the face of evil and suffering. This means that there are what I, inspired by Dewey, would call *goods naturally generated in human interaction with the environment* that are at stake here (Dewey, 1981, ch. 10). Let us see which resources a pragmatic philosophy of religion may offer those who wish to preserve those goods.

### 3. Pragmatic philosophy of religion

#### 3.1 Pragmatism as a mediating philosophy

Pragmatists are generally critical of dualisms because of their tendency to reify distinctions made for certain practical purposes, and James famously described pragmatism as a mediating philosophy (James, 1975, 23ff; Pihlström, 2013). One aspect of such mediation is that pragmatists typically seek to find middle ground that can allow us to transcend entrenched debates and warring positions in order to preserve important goods valued on each side. One such entrenched debate that we should seek to transcend is, I will suggest towards the end of the paper, the religion/atheism-debate, and I will try to show how that is related to my skeptical response to skeptical theism in the following sections.

Dewey points out that philosophy does not, in and of itself, contain the necessary resources to determine which of the goods generated in human interaction with the world that are genuinely good and which that are not—such judgments can only be made in relation to factual and normative conceptions of a good human life that are generated within the many practices we find ourselves engaged in, and they are always made in response to concrete problems, like when clashes between goods generated in different human practices occur, whether at a subjective or an intersubjective level. Such clashes cause insecurity about what to do to reconcile the conflict, and here, philosophy can offer a space where we can think through and evaluate the wider consequences of different possible ways of reconciling those conflicting goods. This means that the authority of philosophy stems from its ability to function as a kind of metapractice where we can negotiate conflicts and clashes by drawing on normative and factual insights made across a range of practices, and where the measure of success is whether the proposed solutions that philosophers come up with can actually be brought back to the problematic situations and, when applied, make us better at handling them (Dewey, 1981, 305).

#### 3.2 Approaching religion from a pragmatic perspective

From the point of view of a pragmatic philosophical anthropology, human beings are constantly engaged in exchanges with the environment, exchanges that aim to create and maintain a kind of equilibrium with the environment. Problems emerge and inquiry is instituted when equilibrium is disrupted, and equilibrium is restored once we find a way of solving the problem, or at least a way to handle the situation relatively well.

It is essential, many pragmatists insist, that we understand that what is sought for here is primarily a kind of equilibrium in *praxis*—that is, our habits of thought and action are seen as an integrated whole where equilibrium shows itself in the relative absence of problematic situations, and thus of conflicting impulses to act that threatens to paralyze us entirely (James, 1979, 57–8).

Human beings are, unlike at least almost all other animals, not only concerned about equilibrium with regard to the physical aspects of our existence. Moral and existential concerns and problems also arise and affect our behavior in many ways, causing us to wonder about the rightness and wrongness as well as the meaningfulness and meaninglessness of events and states of affairs, perhaps even of life as a whole. Human goods and evils are not just enjoyed or suffered; they are also *perceived* as goods and evils and this triggers reflection on how they may be preserved/avoided in the future (Dewey, 1981, 298).

Through such reflection, we learn that many of the things that we care most about, such as love, friendship, health, and so on, are typically *fragile goods*, by which I mean that although we can do much to safeguard them, they can never be brought completely under our control, and that it is hence not entirely up to us to decide whether those goods will obtain or not. (A parallel point holds for evils, I would claim.) In other words, we do not only need habits of thought and action that enable us to *obtain* certain goods or protect ourselves from various evils; we also need habits of thought and action that can help us account for why life is this way, enable us to respond appropriately both when we accomplish and fail to accomplish our goals, and also give expression to the human existential situation with its finiteness and fragile character. Of course, all of these habits of thought and action also work back, in a number of ways, on our views of which goods we should pursue in the first place.

I will refer to these habits of thought and action as a person's *life orientation*. A life orientation helps us come to terms with existential questions about what it is like to be a human being living in a world of fragile goods, what to consider proper attitudes to both success and failure in such a world, and which goods we should strive for. This means that life orientations have an inherently normative dimension: they aim to be *adequate* in the sense of doing justice to human life, our experiences of living as human beings in the tensions between love and hate, life and death, success and failure, and so on. Hence, Eberhard Herrmann suggests that we understand life orientations as *conceptions of human flourishing* that paint

a picture of what human life is like at its best, and help us respond to and come to terms with the fact that the present condition is so far from perfect (Herrmann, 2004).

What, then, is the relation between life orientations and religion? I would suggest that *religious* life orientations' conceptions of human flourishing typically draw on one or several religious traditions' rites, symbols, myths and stories, and hence that a religious person's habits of thought and action relating to the human condition of fragility are typically affected by those rites, symbols, myths and stories in recognizable ways.

"Affected" implies that at least for some people, the rites, symbols, myths and stories of a religious tradition have a strong appeal. Whence this appeal? Here, I think it would be a mistake to fall in the philosophical trap to suggest that they appeal to us because we think that the God they bear witness to is *real*, or *exists*, so that the appeal would somehow be external to the rites, symbols, myths and stories. I want to propose, instead, that it is the very appeal of these rites, symbols, myths and stories that gives content to, and justifies, our talk about God as real and not an illusion. This appeal is also, I would hold, inextricably linked to the way they help us attain a form of existential equilibrium with the environment. That is, the adoption of a religious life orientation drives us towards belief in God, rather than vice versa.

Let me elaborate here. The different rites, symbols, myths and stories found in some religious tradition can be seen, I would suggest, as transmitting to us a set of *paradigmatic responses* to life's existential conditions (cf. Davies, 2011, 42–3). To call them paradigmatic is to say that although they are not directly applicable to all life's situations, they offer certain exemplary patterns of response that we can strive to integrate in our habits of thought and action and thus make, to some extent at least, our own. Occasionally, paradigmatic responses are transmitted in the form of direct commands, but more often, they are transmitted as the exemplary behavior of some religious person. Responding thus is taken to be an integral part of what it is to lead a good human life.

Now I think we are in a better position than before to answer the question about the appeal of religious rites, symbols, myths and stories. In order to appeal to us, they need to resonate with, and, at the same time, challenge and transform our conception of human flourishing in such a way that we come to think, as James put it, that there is "something wrong" with us as we "naturally stand", and that this "wrong" can be overcome if we make "proper contact with the higher powers" (James, 1985, 400). I re-

peat, this is not a conclusion that we reach independently of these rites, symbols, myths and stories, and that we only later adopt to make "proper contact with the higher powers". It is a conclusion that we reach *through* them: what they suggest about the way I lead my life currently, and how I *should* live. In other words, our emotions and moral judgments play a pivotal role here: they help us discern the shortcomings of our current way of living and they motivate us to seek to integrate the paradigmatic responses of some religious tradition into our habits of thought and action.

Life orientations are thus built from below, and "light dawns gradually on the whole" in the sense that we can then, in retrospect, discern patterns and shared principles in the paradigmatic responses that we seek to integrate in our life orientations (Wittgenstein, 1972, § 141). Here, I want to make some tentative suggestions about a couple of such principles that I think we can discern in very many religious traditions and their various secular counterparts, such as ideologies and life philosophies.

First, that our accomplishments are not, strictly speaking, deserved by us, and correspondingly, that the failures that have cast other people in dire conditions cannot be entirely blamed on them either. This point is intimately related to the point I made above about the fragile character of the goods of human life, and it manifests itself in, among other things, paradigmatic responses that urge us not to revel in accomplishments, or look down on those who fare less well.

These paradigmatic responses are, in my view, closely related to another principle also transmitted via religious paradigmatic responses and that, initially, might seem to draw in a very different direction: that *what* we do, and do not do, matters enormously, and that we thus are under a moral obligation to help those less fortunate than us—not out of altruism, but simply because we are no more deserving of a good life than they are.

The ability of religious traditions to speak to us is, then, a function of the way they manage to engage us emotionally by offering rites, symbols, myths and stories that together help reconstruct our life orientations in a direction which enables us to respond more adequately to the human existential condition. We should not, though, be tempted to adopt the conclusion that a religious person adopts *everything* transmitted as paradigmatic responses: sometimes, we fail to adopt even elements that we find appealing (like when the demands are very high). Here, religious traditions typically also offer ways of coping with such shortcomings, such as rites of penance and forgiveness. And sometimes, I will suggest below,

we may *reject* certain paradigmatic responses as sexist, for instance, and refuse to integrate them in our life orientations on those grounds. There is thus an interesting reciprocal relation between religious traditions and life orientations, where each part stands in judgment of the other, and where different strategies to negotiate tensions and clashes have evolved. It is hence a mistake, a pragmatist would hold, to see a religious tradition as a monolithic entity immune to critique from other sources than its own: its mission to appeal to us can bring about even rather radical reconstructions, although they are rarely *presented* as such.

The picture I have sketched here comes rather close, I would say, to the Jamesian idea that the proper way to evaluate religion has nothing to do with, for instance, its origins, but concerns its ability to help us lead lives that take into full account the character of the environment in which we find ourselves. According to James, this also means that various religious and existential approaches need to be assessed via what he calls “spiritual judgments” (James, 1985, 13). These are no crass judgments about what enables us to feel well, but concern rather directly whether a religious commitment enables us to direct our energies in constructive ways—where “constructive ways” cannot be defined independently of our life orientation. Let us see, now, what happens when we bring this approach to bear on skeptical theism.

#### 4. Returning to skeptical theism

I have already pointed out that one interesting non-pragmatic feature of skeptical theism is that skeptical theists treat belief in God as generated and in principle possible to uphold independently of our confidence in whether the paradigmatic responses that a religious tradition transmits via rites, symbols, myths and stories make the world a better place (which we must, according to skeptical theism, remain skeptical of). What makes this move unpragmatic is that from a pragmatic point of view, it is the very insight that the paradigmatic responses transmitted in the rites, symbols, myths and stories actually make me a better person—one that aspires (and occasionally manages) to do less evil and more good than before, thus making the world a better place – that gives substance to talk of God as real rather than an illusion. Unless we think that judgments such as these *are* in fact representative in the sense that we think that the good in the world is promoted better if we adopt religious belief with its implications for the way we behave, compared to if we remain focused on, for

instance, our own well-being, then why adopt religious belief in the first place, and why seek to integrate the paradigmatic responses transmitted in rites, symbols, myths and stories in my life orientation? In practice, the kind of moral agnosticism advocated by skeptical theists seems pretty hard to uphold.

One possible response that the skeptical theist may adopt is to take recourse to the alleged complexity of God's world compared to ours, and hold that whatever progress we may make here on Earth, such progress is relative to the context of the human point of view, and since things may always look quite different from *God's* point of view, we should take any such claims about progress with more than a pinch of salt. Now, I think such strong divisions between our and God's point of view leads to counterintuitive results. To show why, we can return to Dougherty's critique of the parent-analogy: with increasing ability to manage complexity, we should expect an increasing ability to make the goods of the universe, and their relations to sufferings, clearer to us. In a parallel fashion: we should expect that along with an increasing ability to manage complex states of affairs, we should also expect an increasing ability to arrange states of affairs in such a way that *our* judgments about good and bad are by and large the same as God's. In the absence of such a parallel, the possibility of a yawning gap between God's and man's projects opens up, a possibility that threatens to undermine the deeply religious sense that what *we* do makes a difference, that we are not just spectators of some cosmic drama, but agents with a stake in the struggle to redeem the world.

Let me illustrate. Consider the scenario jokingly presented by Robert Nozick: the purpose of the human race is to function as a living supply of food for a superior form of creatures set on an intergalactic journey (Nozick, 1981, 586). In order to maximize the supplies for the superior creatures and assure that we have a reasonably good life while we await the final slaughter, God has instilled various properties in us that will make us able to prosper and multiply, including a moral sense. This moral sense will cause us to judge the superior creatures immoral, because they use us merely as means and not as ends in any way, but given *God's* purposes, this is a mistaken judgment. Nowhere would the skeptical theist reminder that we do not have full overview prove to be more prophetic than in a scenario like this.

The point of the above example is this: once we begin to stress the size of the gap between our and God's perspectives along skeptical theist lines, it seems that these kinds of examples become more than bizarre

fantasies, consistent as they are with the evidence we possess. But would this scenario satisfy our deeply religious sense that we are partaking in a redemptive struggle? Would we still feel a strong urge to integrate the paradigmatic responses of some religious tradition in our life orientations? Would this be a being that we would still call 'God'? Intuitions may differ here, but I think the answer to these questions is 'no', and I am pretty sure that the skeptical theist would agree. The professed agnosticism has, I take it, rather definitive limits, such as that the goods that we do *not* know of should still be goods *for us*. But why expect or demand *that*? Is that not much too presumptuous, given the limited human perspective that skeptical theism does so much of?

A defender of skeptical theism could, at this point, respond that I have forgotten about the strongest reply to this kind of objections, namely, to appeal to revelation. Let us look closer at the credentials of that response.

#### 4.1 Skeptical theism, revelation and the risk of proving too much

Bergmann and Rea suggest that in the absence of reasons to trust our moral abilities, religious believers' confidence in the adequacy of their tradition's paradigmatic responses can be traced to their status as being commanded by God. (Bergmann & Rea, 2005). From a pragmatic point of view, that response will not work, because it puts, again, the cart before the horse by suggesting that trust in revelation comes *before* confidence in the paradigmatic responses which would ground talk of revelation as genuine rather than illusory. More importantly, I also believe that appeal to revelation helps us discern another problem that pragmatists have with skeptical theism.

Far from settling a debate, appeals to God's commands typically tend to involve us in a tangle of questions about which criteria we should use to determine when we have a genuine instance of revelation and when not. This problem sticks rather deep, because if the skeptical theist defense would prove successful, we may well wonder whether it might not function as a defense of more than many (most? all?) religious believers would ever bargain for. After all, most of us are familiar with religious conservatives' claim that their opposition to, for instance, gay rights, equality between the sexes, and so on, is not a matter of opinion, but of God's revealed commandments, and that hence, we should not trust our all too human perspective on these things and be fooled to fight for things like equality between the sexes or between people of different sexual orientations.

In cases like these, we see that appeals to revelation or commandments, besides the fact that they tend to function as "conversation stoppers", to borrow a famous expression from Richard Rorty (1999, 168–74), inevitably involve us in reflection about further validation, revision, or perhaps even rejection of claims that something was revealed: which hermeneutical principles of interpretation were used to reach this conclusion? Why adopt *those* principles and not others? And on it goes. James argues that in these cases, there is simply no way around appeals to spiritual judgments. It seems more or less impossible to make a case for viewing something *as* a revelation from God without pointing to its fruits by way of how it causes us to think and act in less wicked ways than before, and such appeals presuppose, in turn, a solid and settled background of judgments about goods and evils that we do *not* doubt.

Now, I am not accusing skeptical theists of being religiously conservative (and some would, most likely, not see this an accusation either); I am just pointing out that it is far from clear that skeptical theism offers much guidance with regard to, for instance, how we may criticize outmoded sexist, homophobic, and so on, religious practices and/or commandments. At least a substantial number of religious believers would consider the lack of such resources to be highly problematic. Pragmatism claims that a key to developing such resources is to uphold the distinction between paradigmatic responses and life orientations, and see that just as paradigmatic responses can appeal to us, they can also come to seem highly problematic, and even impossible to integrate in our life orientation. This opens for critical reflection and negotiations between elements within our life orientation and various proposed paradigmatic responses.

From the pragmatic point of view adopted here, the strategy of skeptical theism is ultimately unconvincing because in order to make its case, it separates belief in God from our confidence in our ability to evaluate the paradigmatic responses which, on my analysis, grounds religious life orientations. Then, it casts the latter in doubt in order to fend off arguments against the former. To repeat: *from a pragmatic point of view*, this is tantamount to sawing off the branch on which you are sitting.

I will soon return to the third problem that pragmatism sees with skeptical theism. First, though, I want to return to the question of whence philosophy derives its authority. The pragmatic perspective rests, like all philosophical perspectives, on certain presuppositions that are far from obviously correct or true (whatever we take those terms to mean). Pragmatism, we saw above, suggests that one way to contrast different philo-

sophical perspectives could be to take their different proposals back to the problematic situations that triggered inquiry in the first place, so we can see whether they offer resources to handle those situations better than before. Hence, I need to say something about whether pragmatism offers a more promising way to preserve the goods that skeptical theists seek to preserve, in order to spell out the pragmatic case fully.

## 5. Pragmatism and the problem of responding to evil

Most opponents of skeptical theism either advocate the need for theodicies (which leads to the problems already mentioned) or atheism. On the pragmatic approach, it is important to remember that atheism is no live option for most religious believers: they find themselves believing in God, and this is because they find the paradigmatic responses suggested by the religious tradition's myths, stories and narratives *adequate*, a judgment that involves not just our intellect, but our emotions as well. Atheist critics of skeptical theism, such as Rowe, hence fail to present working solutions because they forget that for many people "God is real because He produces real effects", as James perceptively puts it (James, 1985, 407).

The paradigmatic responses transmitted in the rites, symbols, myths and stories of some religious tradition show us, then, that one central aspect of the problem of evil is the *practical problem* of how to respond adequately to evil and suffering. The religious 'promise' is that adequate responses to evil and suffering are not alien or *external* constraints on our behavior, that we need commandments from God or something similar to discover. Ideally, they arise within us, when we take life's fragile character into account. A dedication to the promotion of good and resistance towards evil is not a means to a good life; *is* a truly good life. As James stresses in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, for religion, "in its strong and fully developed manifestations, the service of the highest [is never] felt as a yoke" (James, 1985, 41)

To take the Christian tradition, with which I am most familiar, a believer might thus respond to the evidential argument from evil that contrary to what the critic claims, God actually does a lot to battle evil. Via the rites, symbols, myths and stories transmitted in the Christian tradition, we learn how evil can be resisted and even overcome. The evidential argument operates, on such an account, with a rather crude analysis of what it would be for a being such as God to battle evil—but so do many of the thinkers they criticize as well. From the pragmatic point of view, God is

real in the sense that God acts on us, and to stipulate that besides this, God can *also* battle evil in an even more direct way, namely, through performing actions that somehow violate or bypass the laws of nature, but chooses not to, or does it only in a patchy manner, risks making God very, very distant from, and apparently indifferent to, our human endeavors. Pragmatists doubt that this is the kind of God that could really transform our lives in such a way that we see the struggle against suffering as an integral part of a flourishing human life rather than some externally imposed duty. On this perspective, theodicies become understandable yet ultimately very problematic attempts to bring the distant God somewhat closer to us.

I started this paper with the claim that the problem of evil is perhaps the most pressing of all existential problems. Now, a critic may object, it looks as if it is simply a matter of making a Jamesian choice as outlined in "The Will to Believe" and then the problem is solved once and for all. Such a resolution of the problem of evil would be a Pyrrhic victory for a philosophy which prides itself on taking human experience as the starting- and end-point of sound philosophy. Surely, there is more to the problem of evil than the practical dimension?

I think pragmatism is perfectly capable of responding affirmatively here and of capturing the equally important existential dimension of the problem of evil. Recall that a bearing idea of many religious traditions and their secular counterparts is that what *we* do makes a genuine difference—and that a struggle against evil and suffering will thus not be in vain. I think the evidence can sometimes cause a form of despair, despair that offers an important clue, I would say, to understanding the existential aspect of the problem of evil: we begin to seriously doubt whether there is really any *point* in fighting evil and suffering, and hence, the striving to integrate that ambition in our conception of human flourishing comes under strain.

The kind of doubt that presses itself upon us is hence, ultimately, doubt about whether it is worthwhile to strive for such integration, or whether we should accept that it is impossible to keep evil and suffering at bay, and thus go our own way and hope that we and our dear ones will turn out to be among the lucky ones that can lead relatively affluent lives even without much support from others. Note, though, that I do not take this doubt, and the strain it puts us under, to be particularly pressing for people who endorse *religious* life orientations—the doubt that what we do actually makes a positive difference is equally pressing for any life orientations that stress the importance of human agency.

Here, finally, we come to a third pragmatic problem with skeptical theism, and to grasp it, we need to keep pragmatism's ambition to be a mediating philosophy in mind. Skeptical theism claims that we should be agnostic about the adequacy of our ability of distinguishing right from wrong, and seeks, instead, to found confidence in the paradigmatic responses in, for instance, revelation (a strategy that, I have sought to show, does not work). Here, I want to draw attention to another consequence of the strategy to appeal to revelation and other tradition-specific sources of knowledge: namely, that this kind of strategies ignores important similarities in the way that believers and non-believers respond to evil and suffering, and hence overemphasizes the importance of the religion/atheism-divide. This is well illustrated by, for instance, the way that Bergmann and Rea hold that moral skepticism may result for *non-believers*, but not for *believers*—because the latter, unlike the former, have firm grounds for being confident about the adequacy of their moral judgments (Bergmann & Rea, 2005).

Rather than reifying this distinction and even seek to use the threatening skepticism to gain the upper hand over non-religious life orientations, pragmatism urges us to note that the paradigmatic responses transmitted via religious rites, symbols, myths and stories are actually very similar to the paradigmatic responses transmitted in analogous ways in very many different non-religious ideologies and humanistic outlooks. Sami Pihlström thus suggests that it is actually possible to see religious believers and atheists as fellow inquirers, and in my terms, we can see those inquirers as engaged in a shared struggle against the apathy that threatens to come over us when we begin to think that what *we* do makes no positive difference after all (Pihlström, 2013). Compared to the skeptical theist approach, pragmatism thus seeks to move focus to the differences that really matter in practice, and to the many overlaps and similarities that can function as a platform for joint discussion and communication. In a pragmatic sense, the theism/atheism-debate may, rather often, turn out to be, pragmatically speaking, rather unimportant and counter-productive.

## 6. Concluding remarks

Pragmatic philosophy, including pragmatic philosophy of religion, thus seeks ways to help us preserve the kind of goods generated in human experience as a natural function of ways of interacting with the environment. It is from this vantage point that skeptical theism falls short, partly

by undermining our confidence in our ability to evaluate the value of various paradigmatic responses to suffering, partly by proving too much, and partly by contributing to the reification of the distinction between religion and atheism. Thus, it risks concealing important similarities between different life orientations' responses to suffering and the problem of evil.

Pragmatism seeks middle ground here by retaining the possibility of doubt while setting such doubt within a context of confidence, a strategy that gives piecemeal criticism of all human practices, including religious practices, pride of place. Such fallibilism requires confidence in the human perspective and also confidence that the human endeavor is worthwhile: that the improvements that we accomplish are *genuine* improvements (and that when they are not, we are capable of detecting this, at least in due time).

The modest conclusion is hence that pragmatists should not adopt skeptical theism. The less modest conclusion is that pragmatic philosophy of religion promises a more fruitful way of approaching the question of the way in which we may, from a philosophical point of view, understand, articulate and preserve important goods residing in religious practices without either rejecting religion entirely or constructing a defense of religious practices that pits religious believers and non-believers against one another. As regards questions about the appropriate response to evil and suffering, I would suggest that in practice, the paradigmatic responses of many religious and non-religious people are often so similar that we will discover that differences within each group are as, or more, significant than differences between these groups. That suggests that we should, *pace* skeptical theists, be wary of approaches that make the religion/atheism divide a central element of their strategy to preserve the goods residing in religious practices. Like all distinctions, the religion/atheism distinction is useful in certain contexts, but not in others. Pragmatism suggests that this may be one of the contexts where it becomes counterproductive, and also indicates why and how further inquiry may, and ought to, take a different direction.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> I am grateful to Francis Jonbäck and an anonymous reviewer for helpful comments on a previous version of this paper.

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# Objectivity in Pragmatist Philosophy of Religion

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## 1. Introduction

In this paper I offer some critical remarks on why pragmatism is an increasingly important philosophical approach today—and, possibly, tomorrow—not only in philosophy generally but in a specific field such as the philosophy of religion in particular. I will try to provide *an* answer to this question by considering, as a case study, the special promise I see pragmatism as making in the study of religion, especially regarding the complex issues concerning the *objectivity* of religious belief, which are obviously entangled with questions concerning the *rationality* of religious belief. My discussion will be partly based on my recent book defending a broadly Jamesian pragmatic pluralism in the philosophy of religion, with due recognition not only of the value of other pragmatists' (including John Dewey's and the neopragmatists') contributions to this field but also of the crucial Kantian background of pragmatism (Pihlström 2013a). Indeed, if one views pragmatism through Kantian spectacles, as I think we should, the topic of objectivity will become urgent; Kant, after all, was one of the key modern philosophers examining this notion, and we presumably owe more to him than we often are able to admit.

In a follow-up paper summarizing some of the key ideas of my above-mentioned book (Pihlström 2013b),<sup>1</sup> I identified two key "promises" of

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<sup>1</sup> I borrow (but revise) here some formulations from that essay; the present paper is a somewhat more comprehensive attempt to sketch a balanced pragmatist philosophy of religion capable of accommodating both pragmatic objectivity and existential significance. I have also incorporated some material from talks delivered in a symposium on rationality

pragmatism in the philosophy of religion. These are based on *two different philosophical interests in the study of religion*, which can be labeled the "epistemic interest" and the "existential interest". The topic of objectivity is crucial with regard to both. Philosophy of religion could even be considered a test case for pragmatist views on objectivity, because religion is often taken to be too "subjective" to be taken seriously by scientifically-minded thinkers pursuing objectivity. Pragmatists themselves are not innocent to this: as we recall, in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James (1985 [1902]) proposed to study the subjective, experiential phenomena that people go through individually, thus arguably neglecting the more social dimensions of religious experience that Dewey emphasized in *A Common Faith* (Dewey 1991 [1934]).

## 2. Objectivity and the "philosophical interests" in the study of religion

First, it is extremely important, for a thinking person in a modern (or "post-postmodern")<sup>2</sup> society largely based on scientific research and its various applications, to examine the perennial *epistemic* problem of *the rationality (or irrationality) of religious belief*. This epistemic problem arises from the—real or apparent—conflicts between science and religion, or reason and faith, in particular. It is obvious that this problem, or set of problems, *crucially involves the notion of objectivity*: religious faith is regarded as subjective, whereas scientific research and theory-construction are objective. Therefore, typically, scientific atheists would criticize religion for its lack of objective grounding, while defenders of religion might try to counter this critique by suggesting either that religious beliefs do have objective credentials, after all (e.g., traditionally and rather notoriously, in terms of the "proofs" of God's existence, which would allegedly be objective enough for any rational being to endorse), or that science is also "subjective" in some specific sense, or at least more subjective than standard scientific realists would admit (e.g., as argued in various defenses of relativism or social constructivism). The notions of objectivity and rationality are of course distinct, but they are closely related in this area of

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and religion at the University of Utrecht, The Netherlands, in December 2012, and at the Templeton Summer School, *Philosophical Perspectives on Theological Realism*, in Mainz, Germany, in September 2013. For a published version of the latter, see Pihlström (2014).

<sup>2</sup> Larry Hickman's discussion of Dewey as a "post-postmodernist" is also highly relevant to the topic of objectivity: see Hickman (2007).

inquiry in particular. It is precisely because of its pursuit of objectivity that the scientific method is generally regarded as "rational", whereas religious ways of thinking might seem to be irrational because of their lack of objective testability (or may seem to be needing such testability in order to be accepted as rational).<sup>3</sup>

Here pragmatism can offer us a very interesting middle ground. As James argued in *Pragmatism* (1975 [1907]: Lectures I–II) and elsewhere, pragmatism is often a middle path option for those who do not want to give up either their "objective" scientific worldview or their possible (and possibly "subjective") religious sensibilities. Defending the pragmatist option here does not entail that one actually defends or embraces any particular religious views; what is at issue is the *potential philosophical legitimacy* of such views, which leaves room for either embracement or, ultimately, rejection. Thus, pragmatism clearly avoids both fundamentalist religious views and equally fundamentalist and dogmatic (and anti-philosophical) versions of "New Atheism", both of which seek a kind of "super-objectivity" that is not within our human reach. By so doing, pragmatism in my view does not simply argue for the simplified idea that the "rationality" of religious thought (if there is such a thing) might be some kind of practical rationality instead of theoretical rationality comparable to the rationality of scientific inquiry (because, allegedly, only the former would be available as the latter more objective kind of rationality would be lacking). On the contrary, pragmatism seeks to reconceptualize the very idea of rationality in terms of practice, and thereby it reconceptualizes the very idea of objectivity as well. Both objectivity and rationality are then understood as deeply practice-embedded: far from being neutral to human practices, they emerge through our reflective engagements in our practices.

We may formulate these suggestions in a manner familiar from the mainstream debates of contemporary philosophy of religion by saying that pragmatism proposes a middle path not just between reason and faith (or, analogously, objectivity and subjectivity) but between the positions known as *evidentialism* and *fideism*: according to my pragmatist proposal, we should not simply assess religious beliefs and ideas on the basis of religiously neutral, allegedly fully "objective" evidence (in the way we would at least attempt to assess our beliefs in science and in everyday life),

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<sup>3</sup> The concepts of objectivity and rationality cannot be defined here with any technical precision. Rather, what I hope to do is to shed some light on how these concepts could be used within a pragmatist philosophy of religion.

because we do need to understand religion as a special set of engagements in purposive, interest-driven human practices and/or language-games; on the other hand, nor should we, when rejecting the simplifying evidentialist categorization of religion as little more than poor science, step on a slippery slope ending at the other extreme of fideism, which advances faith in the absence of evidence or reason and consequently in the end hardly leaves any room for a critical rational discussion of religion at all—or any objectivity worth talking about.

We might say that pragmatism advances a liberal form of evidentialism, proposing to broaden the scope of evidence from the relatively narrowly conceived scientific evidence (which is something that religious beliefs generally, rather obviously, lack) to a richer conception of evidence as something that can be had, or may be lacking, in the “laboratory of life”—to use Putnam’s apt expression (cf. also Brunsveld, 2012, ch. 3). Thereby it also *broadens the scope of objectivity*: when speaking about objectivity in the science vs. religion debate, we cannot take the objectivity of the laboratory sciences as our paradigm. Different human practices may have their different standards for evidence, rationality, and objectivity. Pragmatism hence resurrects a reasonable—extended and enriched—form of evidentialism from the extremely implausible, or even ridiculous, form it takes in strongly evidentialist thinkers like Richard Swinburne, without succumbing to a pseudo-Wittgensteinian fideism, or “form of life” relativism. This is one way in which pragmatism seeks, or promises, to widen the concepts of rationality and objectivity themselves by taking seriously the embeddedness of all humanly possible reason-use and inquiry in practices or forms of life guided by various human interests. To take that seriously is to take seriously the suggestion that in some cases a religious way of thinking and living may amount to a “rational” response to certain life situations, even yielding a degree of practice-embedded objectivity.

It is extremely important to understand the extended notion of evidence (and, hence, rationality and objectivity) in a correct way here. What is crucial is a certain kind of *sensitivity to the practical contexts* within which it is (or is not) appropriate to ask for (objective) evidence for our beliefs. This must, furthermore, be connected with a pragmatist understanding of beliefs as *habits of action*: the relevant kind of evidence, as well as objectivity, is something based on our practices and hence inevitably interest-driven. Evidence, or the need to seek and find evidence, may play importantly different roles in these different contexts; ignoring such context-sensitivity only leads to inhuman pseudo-objectivity. Thus, the pragmatic

question must always be how (or even whether) evidential considerations *work* and/or satisfy our needs and interests within relevant contexts of inquiry. Insofar as such contextuality is not taken into account, the notions of objectivity and evidence are disconnected from any genuine inquiry. These notions, when pragmatically employed, always need to respond to specific problematic situations in order to play a role that makes a difference in our inquiries.<sup>4</sup>

In mediating between evidentialism and fideism and offering a liberalized version of evidentialism, pragmatism also, at its best, mediates between *realism and anti-realism*, another dichotomy troubling contemporary philosophy of religion and preventing constructive engagement with the topic of pragmatic objectivity. Here I cannot explore the realism issue in any detail, though (cf. Pihlström, 2014). Let me just note that just as there is a pragmatic version of objective evidence available, in a context-sensitive manner, there is also a version of realism (about religion and/or theology, as well as more generally) that the pragmatist can develop and defend. Hence, pragmatism, far from rejecting realism and objectivity, reinterprets them in its dynamic and practice-focusing manner.

Secondly, along with serving the epistemic interest in the philosophy of religion and the need to understand better the objectivity and rationality (vs. irrationality) of religious belief, it is at least equally important, or possibly even more important, to study the *existential* problem of how to live with (or without) religious views or a religious identity in a world in which there is so much evil and suffering. When dealing with this set of questions, we end up discussing serious and “negative” concepts such as evil, guilt, sin, and death (or mortality). Here, I see pragmatism as proposing a fruitful form of *meliorism* reducible neither to naively optimistic views according to which the good will ultimately inevitably prevail nor to dark pessimism according to which everything will finally go

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<sup>4</sup> It might be objected that, according to pragmatism, religious thought ought to remain *arational* rather than being either rational or irrational. For instance, some of Putnam’s views on religion might be understood in this Wittgensteinian fashion: see Putnam (2008). Certainly “Wittgensteinians” like D. Z. Phillips have often been read in this fashion. However, it seems to me that the distinction between arationality, on the one hand, and the rationality vs. irrationality dimension, on the other, is itself based on a prior non-pragmatist understanding of rationality (and, hence, irrationality). If we do not begin from such a non-pragmatist (purely theoretical) conception of rationality but, rather, view rationality itself as practice-involving and practice-embedded all the way from the start, I do not think that we need to resort to the account of religion as “arational”. On the contrary, we can understand religious responses to reality as potentially rational—and, therefore, also potentially irrational—in terms of the broader, practice-sensitive account of rationality that pragmatism cherishes.

down the road of destruction. It is as essential to mediate between these two unpromising extremes as it is to mediate between the epistemic extremes of evidentialism and fideism. And again, I would argue that such a project of mediation is rational (and, conversely, that it would therefore be pragmatically irrational to seek a fully "rational", or better, rationalizing or in Jamesian terms "viciously intellectualistic", response to the problem of evil). Accordingly, pragmatist meliorism must—as it certainly does in James's *Pragmatism*, for instance—take very seriously the irreducible reality of evil and (unnecessary) suffering. Pragmatism, in this sense, is a profoundly *anti-theodist* approach in the philosophy of religion: it is, or should be, sharply critical of all attempts to explain away the reality of evil, or to offer a rationalized theodicy allegedly justifying the presence of evil in the world. On the contrary, evil must be acknowledged, understood (if possible),<sup>5</sup> and fought against.

What does this have to do with objectivity? If the reality of evil must be acknowledged and understood for us to be able to take a serious ethical attitude to the suffering of other human beings, then we do need to carefully inquire into, for instance, the historical incidents of evil (e.g., genocides and other atrocities) as well as the human psychological capacities for evil. The important point here is that, from a pragmatist point of view, such inquiries serve a crucial ethical task even if their immediate purpose is to obtain objective scientific knowledge about the relevant phenomena. For example, the various historical descriptions and interpretations of the Holocaust may be as objective as possible, humanly speaking, and at the same time implicitly embody strong value judgments ("this must never happen again"). The "objective" psychological results concerning human beings' psychological capacities for performing atrocities, e.g., in conditions of extreme social pressure, can also embody a strong commitment to promote the development of psychological and social forces countering such capacities.

Pragmatists, then, should join those who find it morally unacceptable or even obscene to ask for God's reasons for "allowing", say, Auschwitz (whether or not they believe in God's reality). Pragmatism, when emphasizing the fight against evil instead of theodist speculations about the possible reasons God may have had for creating and maintaining a world in which there is evil, is also opposed to the currently fashionable skep-

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<sup>5</sup> I am not saying that evil actions and events (or people) can always be understood; nor am I saying, however, that evil necessarily escapes understanding. For a pragmatist account of the problem of evil, see Pihlström (2013a, ch. 5).

tical theism, according to which our cognitive capacities are insufficient to reach the hidden (“objective”) reasons for (“subjectively”) apparently avoidable evil. Such speculations about God’s possible reasons for allowing evil, or about evil being a necessary part of a completely rational objective system of creation and world-order, are, from the pragmatist perspective, as foreign to genuine religious practices as evidentialist arguments about, e.g., the a priori and a posteriori probabilities of theologically conceptualized events such as Christ’s resurrection.<sup>6</sup>

### 3. “Objectivity without objects”: pragmatism and Kant

When dealing with these two philosophical “interests” in the inquiry into religion—the epistemic one and the existential one—pragmatism should not claim to be an absolutely novel approach. On the contrary, pragmatists (who, in James’s memorable words, are offering a “new name for some old ways of thinking”) should acknowledge their historical predecessors. One of them is undoubtedly Immanuel Kant, whose great insight in the philosophy of religion was that the religious and theological questions must be considered primarily on the basis of “practical philosophy”, that is, ethics (Kant, 1788). I see pragmatism as sharing this basically Kantian approach while not denying the epistemic and metaphysical significance of the philosophical study of religion. Again, this yields a novel account of the peculiar kind of objectivity we are able to pursue in this field. We *are* still interested in the metaphysical (and epistemic) problems concerning the nature of reality, the possible existence or non-existence of the divinity, and our epistemic access to such matters—and these are clearly “objective” issues – but as human beings embedded in our habitual practices of life we are dealing with all this from an ethically loaded, value-laden (and hence partly “subjective”) standpoint. For us as the kind of creatures we are, there simply is no non-interested standpoint to occupy in such matters. To admit this, however, is not to collapse objective inquiry into mere subjective preferences.

Insofar as this Kantian-inspired *entanglement of ethics and metaphysics* is taken seriously, we may also say that pragmatism incorporates a modern version of Kantian *transcendental philosophy*. The philosophical issues of religion are examined by paying attention to the ethical context within

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<sup>6</sup> I am obviously again referring to Swinburne’s ideas here—ideas that for me come close to being a parody of genuine religiosity. But I am doing so only in passing, without any detailed study of either Swinburne’s or anyone else’s views.

which they are so much as possible as topics of philosophically interested study for beings like us. This is, in a way, transcendental philosophy "naturalized". Therefore, it also may be suggested that pragmatism simultaneously proposes a liberal form of naturalism, distinguishing between a narrow (or "hard") scientific naturalism from a more pluralistic (and "softer") form of naturalism according to which even religious qualities in experience can be humanly natural.<sup>7</sup> This liberalization of naturalism is parallel to the recognition that there are pragmatically embedded degrees of objectivity between the "full" rigorous objectivity often associated with natural science and complete subjectivity some people may associate with religious experiences.<sup>8</sup>

In brief, a Jamesian interpretation of pragmatic objectivity may be summarized by saying that there is no metaphysically objective "fact of the matter" regarding, for instance, metaphysical issues or questions (such as, paradigmatically, God's reality or human immortality) in abstraction from our ethical and more generally *weltanschaulichen* contributions; there are no fundamental objective metaphysically-realistic metaphysical truths in that sense. Rather, our ethical perspectives contribute to whatever metaphysical truths there are, and ever can be, for us.<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, when developing a (Jamesian) pragmatist account of religion, especially an account of the famous Kantian "transcendental ideas", viz., God, freedom, and immortality, as a pragmatically reinterpreted version of what Kant in the Second Critique called the "postulates of practical reason",<sup>10</sup> we arguably may, in addition to steering a middle course between objectivity and subjectivity generally, make a legitimate commit-

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<sup>7</sup> This comes close to the picture sketched by Dewey (1991 [1934]).

<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the two interests I have distinguished are not dichotomously separable but, rather, deeply entangled (just like ethics and metaphysics are). The pragmatist philosopher of religion, and the pragmatist philosopher more generally, can and should make distinctions wherever and whenever they serve useful pragmatic purposes; what s/he should avoid is turning those distinctions that really make a difference to our inquiries into essentialistic and ahistorically fixed structures and dichotomies, or dualisms that cannot possibly be bridged. Even so, there are problematic and even deeply wrong ways of entangling the two "interests" I have spoken about. For instance, when the problem of evil, which I have categorized under the "existential interest", is seen as a *purely* or even *primarily* epistemic and/or evidential issue having to do with the rationality of religious faith within an evidentialist context, as it is, e.g., in van Inwagen (2006), things go seriously wrong. The existential interest is then reduced to the epistemic one, and such non-pragmatic reductionism should be resisted.

<sup>9</sup> James's early paper, "The Sentiment of Rationality" (1879), in James (1979 [1897]), is highly relevant here.

<sup>10</sup> This is a Kantian rereading of James I propose in Pihlström (2013a, ch. 1). I must skip the details of this discussion here.

ment, from within our religious and ethical practices themselves, to a certain kind of transcendence (that is, the “transcendental ideas”).<sup>11</sup> The legitimacy or, perhaps, moral necessity of such a commitment might even be defended by means of a certain kind of (practice-involving, hence “naturalized”) transcendental argument: as James argued—though, of course, not explicitly transcendently—it may be necessary for us to embrace a religious view if we are seriously committed to a “morally strenuous” mood in life and seek to, or find it necessary to, maintain this commitment. However, we cannot employ this account of religion to develop a theory of any religious *objects*, because in the Kantian context only properly transcendental conditions, such as the categories (e.g., causality) and the forms of pure intuition (space and time), are necessary conditions for the possibility of the objects of experience in the sense that all empirical objects must conform to them; religious and/or theological ideas, such as the ideas of God, freedom, and immortality, do not play *this* objectifying and experience-enabling role, even if they can be argued to play a quasi-transcendental role as enablers of moral commitment. More precisely, while the categories, in Kant, are normative requirements of objecthood, this cannot be said about the postulates of practical reason, even if their status is also based on a transcendental argument.

Hence, although there can be a certain kind of pragmatic objectivity in religion and theology—or so my (real or imagined) Jamesian pragmatist would argue—there cannot be religious or theological objectivity in the sense of any legitimate rational postulation of religious objects, understood as an analogy to the postulation of, say, theoretical objects in science serving the purpose of explaining observed phenomena. Here, once again, the pragmatist must be firmly opposed to what is going on in mainstream Anglo-American philosophy of religion dominated by a strongly realist and evidentialist model of objectivity. Indeed, according to Kant himself, the key mistake of the traditional proofs of God’s existence was to overlook these restrictions and to treat God as a kind of transcendent object, instead of a mere idea whose human legitimacy can be derived only from moral action.<sup>12</sup> Now, we may see this (Jamesian) pragmatist understanding of religious and/or theological objectivity, analogous to the Kan-

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<sup>11</sup> The notion of “transcendence” is here used in a (broadly) Kantian sense: the transcendent is something that transcends the bounds of experience. It could include the supernatural (which is how the notion is often used in religious and theological contexts), but all Kantian “transcendental ideas” are transcendent in this sense.

<sup>12</sup> I am, of course, referring to Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/1787), the sections on “The Ideal of Pure Reason” in the “Transcendental Dialectic”.

tian postulates, as a version (or extension) of what Putnam (2002; 2004) calls "objectivity without objects". The examples Putnam provides primarily come from mathematics and ethics. We can, and should, he argues, understand the objectivity of these different practices – and the related fact-value entanglement in ethics—as something not requiring the postulation of mysterious (transcendent) objects out there, whether mathematical (numbers, functions) or ethical (values, moral facts). As Putnam has argued for a long time (since Putnam, 1981), there is no need to think of moral objectivity as needing any ontological commitments to "queer" objects, *contra* metaethical "error theorists" like J. L. Mackie (1977). We should now understand whatever "religious objectivity" or "theological objectivity" there is available along similar lines. The relevant kind of objectivity lies in our practices of engagement and commitment themselves, in our habits of action embodying certain ways of thinking about ourselves and the world in terms of religious notions such as God, freedom,<sup>13</sup> and immortality.

This conception of pragmatic objectivity in philosophy of religion (and, analogously, in ethics) is compatible not only with certain views on religion as a practice or form of life derived from the later Wittgenstein's writings (even though, as was pointed out above, I resist the fideist tones some Wittgensteinians resort to), but also with a transcendental position we find in the early Wittgenstein: God does not appear *in* the world; immortality is timelessness, or life in the present moment, instead of any infinite extension of temporal existence; and my will cannot change the facts of the world but "steps into the world" from the outside.<sup>14</sup> Accordingly, God is not an object of *any* kind, nothing—*no thing* whatsoever – that could "appear in the world". Nor can my freedom or possible immortality be conceptualized along such objectifying lines. The subject philosophy is concerned with—that is, the metaphysical or transcendental subject—is a "limit" of the world rather than any object in the world (Wittgenstein

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<sup>13</sup> The reason I include freedom in this list is of course the Kantian one: these three are Kant's postulates of practical reason. I am not saying that freedom is a religious concept; it is, however, part of the same set of concepts Kant famously saves from the point of view of practical reason after having rejected speculative attempts to ground their objectivity, or objects, in theoretical reason-use.

<sup>14</sup> For specific references, see the 6.5's of Wittgenstein (1974 [1921]). Also note the striking resemblance to Stoicism in Wittgenstein's comments on the will: freedom, and ethics, is about the subject's attitude to the world, whose facts s/he cannot change; the subject is, famously, a "limit" of the world.

1974 [1921], § 5.64).<sup>15</sup> This idea is not as foreign to pragmatism as it might seem; on the contrary, as soon as pragmatism is reconnected with its Kantian background, something like the Wittgensteinian conception of subjectivity, objectivity, and the world can also, in a rearticulated form, be seen as the core position of a transcendental-pragmatic account of objectivity and subjectivity.

#### 4. Pragmatism and recognition: toward a processual conception of objectivity

One way of cashing out the pragmatist promise I opened this paper with is by formulating the issues concerning the objectivity and rationality of religious belief and the appropriate reactions to the problem of evil in terms of the concept of (*mutual*) *recognition*, which must be rooted in not only the Hegelian discourse on *Anerkennung* but also (again) the underlying Kantian idea of there being limits or boundaries that shape human cognitive and ethical life and need to be recognized by people (and groups) engaging in common projects of inquiry, understanding, and moral deliberation. Developing pragmatist philosophy of religion into a pragmatic theory of relations of recognition will be a step toward a processual, hence properly pragmatic, account of objectivity. I cannot develop such a theory here, but I will offer a sketch.<sup>16</sup>

Since Hume and Kant, philosophers of religion have generally acknowledged that it is problematic, or even impossible, to ground theological and/or religious beliefs in rational demonstrations, such as the traditional "proofs". Kant, as was noted above, drew a particularly sharp boundary between our cognitive capacities (that is, human reason and understanding), on the one hand, and matters of religious faith, on the other. Yet, while attempts to demonstrate the reality of God inevitably fail, according to Kant, God's existence and the immortality of the soul must (along with the freedom of the will) be accepted as postulates of practical reason. Religious faith can only be grounded in what needs to be postulated in

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<sup>15</sup> It is from these remarks that the early Wittgenstein's peculiar form of solipsism emerges. In a sense, for the solipsistic subject of the *Tractatus*, all the objects in the world are "mine". But this transcendental solipsism no more sacrifices the objectivity of those objects than the transcendental idealism of Kant's First Critique, which is compatible with empirical realism.

<sup>16</sup> See Pihlström (2013b) for further details. While pragmatism and recognition theory have developed rather independently with little mutual contact, the concept of "pragmatic recognition" is actually employed (in the context of contemporary critical theory) in Decker (2012).

order to make sense of moral duty, not the other way round. Even so, theological issues are not beyond objectivity and rationality; they just require the *practical use* of reason, instead of theoretical or speculative use.

The concept of a *limit* is crucial for the entire post-Kantian paradigm in the philosophy of religion, and post-Kantian philosophy more generally, as Kantian transcendental philosophy examines the necessary conditions for the possibility of, and thereby also the limits of, cognitive experience. Concepts and beliefs reaching out for the transcendent do not fall within those limits. According to Kant's famous dictum, he had to limit the scope of knowledge in order to make room for faith. (Hence there can be no legitimately postulated objects of faith, because all objects would have to fall within the scope of possible cognitive experience.) This creates challenges for acts of recognition across boundaries constituted by the transcendental features of human capacities.

The central role played by notions such as limit, boundary, and reason opens up a number of fundamental issues in post-Kantian philosophy of religion (not only pragmatism) that can be approached in terms of theories of recognition. Most importantly, the boundary between religious belief and non-belief—believers and non-believers—marks an intellectual, cultural, and political division that needs to be examined from the perspective of (mutual) recognition. Such a practice-oriented examination may lead to novel ways of approaching the highly controversial issues of science vs. religion (or reason vs. faith) and thereby also the methodological debates within religious studies today.

The relevant issue of recognition here relates not only to the challenges of *recognizing different groups of people* (e.g., believers and non-believers) but also to the need to *recognize the relevant limits dividing them*, as well as the reasons why those limits are taken to be there. These are often based on whether (and how) the relevant groups are recognized, or denied recognition, *as* certain specific kinds of groups or in some specific capacity. Accordingly, examinations of the limits of reason are, or contribute to, specifications of the *content* of the relevant act(s) of recognition. One must understand how "the other"—a person or a group "on the other side of the boundary"—employs certain concepts, especially normative concepts such as reason and rationality, in order to engage in any acts of recognition at all. Furthermore, one must realize that different people or groups may, for various reasons, recognize the same limits (and each others' ways of recognizing them) or quite different limits. The possible differences here need not (and should not) be reduced to merely intellectual differences

among people (or groups); they are much more deeply embedded in our practices of life, including the existential dimensions of religious beliefs.<sup>17</sup>

For example, from the point of view of atheism, theists simply fail to recognize certain limitations of human reason, or intellectually responsible thought more generally: they postulate an immaterial spiritual being without having adequate objective evidence for its existence (and in many cases even without seeking or evaluating evidence in appropriate ways). As Kant argued, no rational demonstration of God's existence is possible, and as Hume and many others have noted, the traditional "design" argument is highly implausible as well (although it continues to flourish in contemporary "intelligent design" theories). Conversely, theists may accuse atheists for a failure to respect another kind of limitation or boundary: scientifically-oriented atheists may believe in the unrestricted capacities of scientific research, or human reason-use more generally, in providing explanations to all phenomena and thus solving the mysteries of the universe. Believers often find it important to acknowledge that there may be "more things between heaven and earth" than rationalizing philosophy—or science—can ever demonstrate. Accordingly, there is a very important boundary between these two groups—theists and atheists, or believers and non-believers, or their respective ways of thinking—and both groups emphasize certain humanly inevitable limits that according to them should not be overstepped.

Issues of recognition, then, are not restricted to the mutual recognition among persons or groups (e.g., representing different religious or non-religious outlooks) as being epistemically or rationally entitled to their (religious or non-religious) views, but extend to the need to recognize (from the perspective of certain intellectual and/or ethical outlooks) certain limitations or boundaries that define the proper sphere of human experience, cognition, or reason-use, and even to the need to recognize different groups and people as actual or potential "recognizers" of quite different boundaries. The diverging ways in which theists and atheists recognize something as a boundary limiting human capacities should themselves be recognized by both groups—in a way that not merely tolerates these different boundary-drawings but acknowledges that there may be legitimately different ways of drawing them, without simply agreeing with the other party, either.

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<sup>17</sup> I am grateful to an anonymous referee for a helpful suggestion here (and elsewhere).

Various acts of recognition across the boundary dividing believers and non-believers may have as their content at least the following different types of recognition: one party may recognize the other as (i) human beings (e.g., with certain inviolable human rights), as (ii) thinkers capable of formulating thoughts and/or judgments with intelligible content, as (iii) actual or potential participants in political discussion and deliberation, and/or as (iv) "fellow inquirers" (e.g., possibly, philosophers) seeking the truth about the matter at issue (e.g., about God's existence or non-existence). These different specifications and qualifications of the content of the act of recognition involve quite different factual and normative commitments and expectations. The acts of recognition at issue here also presuppose at least some kind of understanding of the ways in which the people or groups to be recognized (or requesting recognition) view life and its problems.

For example, recognizing someone as a (fellow) inquirer in the pursuit of truth yields expectations significantly stronger than "merely" recognizing the same person or group as (a) member(s) of the human species, or even as sharing a common humanity in some stronger sense invoking, say, fundamental human rights. The different contents of the relevant acts of recognition may be crucially related to the concept of rationality: we may recognize someone as rational (as an inquirer, etc.) while disagreeing with her/him on fundamental issues—but can we also consistently disagree about the criteria of rationality itself? And how about the criteria of objectivity?

A key meta-level issue in contemporary philosophy of religion is, thus, *the very possibility of critical discussion of religious beliefs*. In order for such discussion to be possible across the boundary dividing believers and non-believers, both groups must recognize each other *as members of the same intellectual (and, presumably, ethical) community*—as rational discussion partners pursuing objectivity—and must in a sense overcome or at least reconsider the boundaries dividing them. In order for such discussion to extend to ethical and political matters related to religion, the rival groups must also recognize each other as belonging to the same moral and political community. (However, again we should avoid drawing another sharp limit between intellectual matters, on the one side, and moral or political ones, on the other; this division plays only a heuristic role here.) The issues of recognition arising in this situation can be philosophically analyzed by means of the model of recognition developed by scholars of

recognition following Hegel, Axel Honneth, and others.<sup>18</sup> The pragmatist philosopher's job in this situation is to examine critically the conceptual presuppositions for the possibility of the relevant kind of mutual recognition acts. For a pragmatist, such presuppositions are inevitably practice-embedded—in short, habits of action.

Now, if Christian believers and "new atheists" are able to recognize each other ethically, politically, and/or intellectually, can they also recognize each other as belonging to the same community of inquirers (a community that is, arguably, *constituted* by mutual acts of recognition)? Can they recognize each other as "*fellow inquirers*" committed to the pursuit of objective truth? Could they do this even while maintaining very different normative conceptions of the role of reason, objectivity, and evidence in the evaluation of religious thought and beliefs, recognizing quite different (both factual and normative) limits for human thought and capacities? Examining these questions pragmatically, from the point of view of the theory of recognition, can be expected to lead to rearticulations of the traditional issues of, say, evidentialism vs. fideism. Thus, it will also be necessary to pragmatically re-evaluate the mainstream methods of contemporary philosophy of religion, seeking to critically transform the methodology of the field from the perspective of the theory of recognition enriched by pragmatism. The different ways in which objective evidence can and ought to be taken into account in the evaluation of the rationality of religious belief must themselves be subjected to a critical examination in terms of actual and potential structures of recognition: an evidentialist (or anti-evidentialist) methodology in the philosophy of religion must be grounded in (potential) acts of recognition across "post-Kantian" boundaries.

Moreover, emphasizing recognition in this manner contributes to articulating objectivity itself *dynamically* as a mutual process of different subjects' (people's, groups') recognizing each other as co-constructors and -interpreters of common normative standards, instead of simply recognizing some pre-given, allegedly fully objective standards. There is no royal road to recognizing the absolutely correct standards—that is not what it means to be committed to a project of inquiry. Rather, the notion of objectivity relevant to inquiry is itself constantly in the making, open

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<sup>18</sup> In addition to contemporary classics such as Honneth (2005 [1992]), recent works by scholars like Heikki Ikäheimo, Arto Laitinen, and Risto Saarinen should be consulted. See, e.g., Saarinen (2014). In this essay I cannot provide adequate references to this growing literature, but I do hope to address the relations between pragmatist philosophy of religion and theories of recognition on another occasion in more detail.

to creative construction and reconstruction—and, hence, recognition. Just as there are different kinds of acts of recognition, there are also different types and/or degrees of pragmatic objectivity.

## 5. Pragmatism and inquiry

We may now, equipped with a preliminary conception of recognition as a notion potentially useful in making sense of the dynamics of inquiry, pause to reflect on the way in which the notion of inquiry itself should be understood in pragmatist philosophy of religion.

How does, or how should, the pragmatist understand the concept of inquiry in general terms? We may begin answering this question by emphasizing the pragmatists' *anti-Cartesianism*. While Descartes, famously, started by doubting everything that can be doubted and arrived at the "Archimedean point" at which, allegedly, doubt is no longer possible—that is, the doubting subject's self-discovery, *cogito, ergo sum*—Charles S. Peirce's anti-Cartesian essays in the 1860–70s questioned the very possibility of this traditional approach to epistemology.<sup>19</sup> Skipping the details of Peirce's arguments, we may say that we can never begin from complete doubt; on the contrary, we always have to start our inquiries from the beliefs we already possess. There is no way of *living*—no way of "being-in-the-world", to use terminology well known in a very different philosophical tradition, that is, Heideggerian phenomenology—in the absence of *believing*, that is, holding certain beliefs to be true about the world, at least about one's more or less immediate surroundings with which one is in constant interaction. Doubt does play a role in inquiry, but it is subordinate to belief.

Moreover, beliefs themselves, as pointed out above, are *habits of action*. This is a key pragmatist point, also shared by those pragmatists that may not be as helpful as Peirce and Dewey in developing a general theory of inquiry, including James. Beliefs do not just give rise to habits of action, but quite literally *are* such habits. To believe something to be the case is always already to act in the world in a way or another, and not only to concretely act but also to be prepared to act in certain ways should certain types of situation arise. Pragmatism, thus, does not reduce beliefs to ac-

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<sup>19</sup> The most important reference here is Peirce's best-known essay, "The Fixation of Belief" (1877), available in, e.g., Peirce (1992). Also the important anti-Cartesian writings from the late 1860s can be found in the same volume.

tions but more generally rearticulates our notion of believing as a notion tied up with the notion of habitual action.<sup>20</sup>

In the emergence of inquiry, the crucial step is taken when a habit does *not* function smoothly, when our action is interrupted or yields a surprise. Then, and only then, does doubt come to the picture. The surprise leads to genuine doubt (instead of the Cartesian “paper doubt” that Peirce ridiculed), a state of doubt that is directed to the original belief(s) that gave rise to, or better *were*, the habit(s) of action that led to the surprise. The purpose of the inquiry that then naturally follows is to settle that doubt and to fix a new belief or set of beliefs that do not yield the same kind of surprising result that the original belief(s) and/or habit(s) of action did. Through this process of inquiry, the original belief(s) and/or habit(s) are either replaced by new and better ones or revised. The way Dewey describes inquiry as an intelligent response to problematic situations that need to be transformed into unproblematic ones is essentially similar, though by and large somewhat more naturalistically phrased, emphasizing inquiry as a continuous “transaction” between a living organism and its environment.

How, then, does an inquiry, pragmatically conceived, proceed in seeking to terminate doubt and fix (new) belief? Peirce’s examination of the “fixation of belief” is the pragmatist *locus classicus* here (though the term “pragmatism” does not yet appear in this 1877 essay). Famously, Peirce rejects the three methods of fixing belief he finds unsatisfactory for various reasons—the methods of tenacity and authority, as well as the “intuitive” method of what is “agreeable to reason”—and defends the *scientific method* as the only method capable of truly rational belief-fixation in the long run. The distinctive feature of the scientific method in comparison to the inferior methods is that it lets the “real things” that are independent of us—that is, independent of the inquirers and their beliefs or opinions<sup>21</sup>—to influence the way in which the new beliefs are fixed. Our beliefs must thus be responsive to our experiences of the objective world that is largely independent of us in order for them to be properly scientific.

Peirce’s theory of the progress of scientific inquiry is also well known: if the ideal community of rational inquirers (who need not be human)

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<sup>20</sup> This conception of habituality has also been emphasized by pragmatist social theorists, including most famously Hans Joas but also other scholars, e.g., in the Scandinavian context. See, for instance, papers by Erkki Kilpinen and Antti Gronow available at the website of the Nordic Pragmatism Network, [www.nordprag.org](http://www.nordprag.org).

<sup>21</sup> “Real things” in this Peircean sense could also be humanly created objects and structures, as of course is the case in social-scientific inquiry. This is not the place to inquire into the ways in which (Peircean) pragmatism can or cannot embrace scientific realism.

were able to engage in inquiry, using the scientific method, for an indefinitely long time, its beliefs regarding any given question would converge to an ideal "final opinion". This final opinion will, however, never be *actually* achieved; it is an ideal end, a "would" rather than a "will".

Now, how does the Peircean-Deweyan pragmatist conception of science and inquiry accommodate non-scientific inquiries, including religious ones? One way of approaching this question is by asking whether the pragmatist conception of inquiry is *monistic* or *pluralistic*. Does it, that is, seek to provide us with the *essence* of objective inquiry? These questions are difficult to answer unless we make the relevant terms clear. It is, I think, helpful to view inquiry as a "family-resemblance" notion in Wittgenstein's sense without any permanent and fixed essence. There are, as we know, quite different inquiries in different areas of life, from our everyday affairs to science as well as art, politics, ethics, and religion, and many other practices. There is no pragmatic need, or point, to force all these quite different modes of inquiry into the same model. In this sense, pragmatism definitely defends a pluralistic conception of inquiry. Hence, there is no reason to a priori exclude religious "inquiries" from the set of pragmatically acceptable forms of inquiry. However, it can simultaneously be maintained that all these quite different inquiries share a similar pragmatic method, that is, the "doubt-belief" method (as it has often been called) and the related scientific method (as distinguished from the inferior methods Peirce attacks) briefly sketched above. The movement from habits of action and beliefs through surprise and doubt to inquiry and new or revised beliefs and habits is general enough to allow an indefinite amount of contextual variation. A certain kind of *context-sensitivity* is, then, a crucial feature of pragmatism—not only of pragmatist theories of inquiry but of pragmatism more generally. Even if we can say that the "same" pragmatist account of inquiry can be applied to inquiries taking place in very different contexts, or different human practices (even practices we consider non-scientific), that is only the beginning of our inquiry into inquiry. The notion of inquiry will only be pragmatically clarified—its pragmatic meaning will be properly brought into view—when its local contexts are made clear.

Moreover, when those contexts *are* made clear, it no longer matters much whether we call the methods used "scientific" or not. This is mostly a terminological matter (though it is also important to keep in mind that terminological issues are often not at all trivial). We may, that is, employ Peirce's "scientific method" also when we are not pursuing science

literally speaking. Political discussion, for instance, may be “scientific” and “objective” in the relevant pragmatist sense if it is genuinely open to belief-revision in the face of recalcitrant experience, argument, and evidence, even if it does not aim at scientific-like results. If it is not open in this way, or if it is, rather, based on stubborn ideological opinions never to be changed no matter what happens, it is simply not a form of inquiry at all. And the same clearly holds for religion. It can be a form of inquiry if (and only if) it genuinely seeks to test and evaluate religious faith in the “laboratory of life” (to cite Putnam’s apt phrase).

However, I would like to suggest that we leave the concept of inquiry, quite deliberately, vague enough to cover inquiries that do not “pursue truth” in the sense in which scientific and more generally academic and/or scholarly inquiries can be regarded as pursuing the truth. We should of course admit that the pursuit of (objective, mind-independent) truth is a pervasive phenomenon in academic life, not only in the natural sciences but also in those areas of inquiry (say, literary criticism or religious studies) where truth itself is largely a matter of interpretation, or construction of new illuminating perspectives on certain historical documents, etc.<sup>22</sup> Again this directly applies to religious and theological reflections—or “inquiries”, insofar as this notion is appropriate in this context. But we should also admit that inquiry extends even to areas in which it no longer makes much sense to speak about the pursuit of truth. For instance, political discussion may take the form of an (objective) inquiry as long as the participants are responsive to one another’s possibly conflicting ideas and the evidence and other considerations brought to the picture by the discussants. Artistic inquiries, in turn, may very interestingly question our received views and conceptualizations of the world much more effectively than scientific theory-formation ever can. And even religious “inquiries” into one’s most fundamental ways of relating to the world and to one’s individual and communal life may deserve the honorific title of an inquiry even if they are never responsive to evidence in the way science is but are, rather, primarily responsive to the deeply personal existential needs of the subject and the satisfaction of those needs in that person’s concrete life situations.

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<sup>22</sup> It might, for instance, be extremely problematic to apply the Peircean “final opinion” account of truth to such areas of inquiry. Still we would hardly like to say that they have nothing at all to do with the concept of truth or that truth would simply be irrelevant in such fields. Here as elsewhere, pragmatism generally seeks to offer a balanced middle ground view.

A critic might argue that we are extending the concept of inquiry too far from its legitimate pragmatic meaning by seeking to accommodate religious inquiries under this concept. If inquiry must be truly objective—responding to Peircean “real things”—how can one’s personal struggle with religious faith, or with losing one’s faith, be an instance of inquiry? It could be suggested that especially by Peircean (and/or Deweyan) lights, inquiry aiming at the truth must be responsive to experience in a way that religious inquiry can never be. In particular, religious faith might be *defined* in such a manner that it *cannot* be responsive to experience in the relative sense (in order to be religious).<sup>23</sup> This would lead to fideism, according to which religious faith is simply not a rational matter, not a matter of inquiry. Now, needless to say, my pragmatist account of objectivity and inquiry is very different; as explained in the beginning of this paper, pragmatism seeks to transcend the received opposition between evidentialism and fideism by developing a form of religious inquiry that is responsive to experience in a relevant sense without thereby losing the distinctive character of religious thought in comparison to science. The key to this is the general pragmatist account of inquiry, enriched with the concept of recognition outlined above. Religious inquiry may be a genuine inquiry—and even genuinely “objective”—in the relevant pragmatic sense while being very different from standard scientific inquiries. It may still be responsive to experience and evidence drawn from the “laboratory of life”, to be distinguished from the scientific laboratory. There is no a priori reason why our *Weltanschauungen*, or views of life and its significance, shouldn’t be regarded as pragmatically testable.

Moreover, what if religious inquiry, in the pragmatic sense, is an attempt to *recognize* the different ways—one’s own and others’—of being responsive to experiences of different types (or more generally of being responsive to argument, criticism, and other considerations that might lead to revisions in one’s belief system)? The notion of recognition would thus be highly central in the pragmatic understanding of inquiry in general, and religious inquiry in particular. Such recognitions would never be “objective” in the sense of being based on a “God’s-Eye View” on the

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<sup>23</sup> In particular, at the empiricist extreme, the Vienna Circle logical empiricists famously regarded theistic (but also, symmetrically, atheistic) views as *meaningless* because they are neither verifiable nor falsifiable empirically. (Among the very few twentieth-century logical empiricists who also held religious ideas was Richard Braithwaite.) The standard reaction among scientifically and empiricistically oriented believers would be that religious faith is, precisely, beyond evidence and experience and that precisely for this reason it must not be confused with scientific inquiry at all.

world; on the contrary, they would always, inevitably, be *someone's* actions and perspectives, humanly situated and engaged acts in the social world in which we live in and in which our very identities may depend on our relations (including relations of recognition) to other socially engaged subjects.<sup>24</sup> This kind of inquiry would indeed *be* a species of recognition. From a pragmatist point of view, then, the notions of inquiry and recognition would not just be contingently related to one another but would actually be fundamentally linked, to the extent that for a pragmatist it may in the end be impossible to understand the relevant concept of inquiry without understanding what it is to recognize other inquirers. Nor would acts of recognition be possible without implying dynamic projects of inquiry into the shared world. The religious and theological significance of these ideas, left implicit here, may in fact be enormous.

## 6. Conclusion: science and religion (again)

What *is* it, then, to recognize someone or some group as belonging to the same intellectual community of inquirers? What does it mean to be committed to a membership in such a community? Is this ultimately a matter of recognizing certain *people* ("fellow inquirers") as rational (or attributing some other normative properties to them) or of recognizing certain *methodological norms or criteria* as objectively valid or binding?<sup>25</sup> Are these acts of recognition essentially different from the corresponding acts required for one's being able to live in a moral, political, and/or religious community? One research hypothesis that a pragmatist could examine further is that the structures of recognition at work in these various cases can be used to clarify and evaluate certain important cases of conflict, e.g., situations in which one's "objective" intellectual duties seem to run into conflict with one's "subjective" religious (or, possibly, ethical) commitments. The very notion of an intellectual duty, investigated in what is often called the "ethics of belief", could thereby also be analyzed and redefined.<sup>26</sup> It is clear that the notion of objectivity would have to be invoked here.

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<sup>24</sup> I would even go as far as to claim that the metaphysical relations of dependence among human persons are ultimately based on ethical relations of (mutual) recognition, and that metaphysics (especially the metaphysics of selves) is thus grounded in ethics, but that would be a longer story, possibly also defensible along pragmatist lines.

<sup>25</sup> Such as, e.g., Peirce's characterization of the scientific method in "The Fixation of Belief".

<sup>26</sup> For novel pragmatist contributions to the ethics of belief discussion, inspired by James, see Rydenfelt and Pihlström (2013).

Moreover, it may be asked why the relatively heterogeneous (yet allegedly objective) "scientific worldview" is usually regarded as a single and unified picture of the world maintained by a single, unified community of inquirers based on relations of mutual recognition, even though that worldview is itself undeniably full of tensions and disagreements (and so arguably *fails* to be a unified worldview at all). Why should, e.g., religious views be automatically excluded from such a worldview? This is again a question addressing our practices of recognition. It is not immediately obvious why, for instance, the different philosophical interpretations of basic ("objective") ontological structures of reality—regarding, e.g., universals (realism vs. nominalism) or modalities—would be any less dramatic conflicts of reason or rationality than the opposition between theism and atheism. Why do, say, realists and nominalists belong to the same community of rational inquirers committed to a scientific worldview and to the same rational methods of inquiry, while theists (according to new atheists, at least) do not? Analyzing these relations of recognition, or the lack thereof, is a key task for both pragmatists and non-pragmatists today, regarding both philosophy of religion and interdisciplinary religious studies.<sup>27</sup>

In cases of extreme intellectual conflict (between, say, conservative Christian fundamentalism and militant new atheism), there is little hope for mutual recognition or even tolerance. In some other cases, including the much narrower gap between liberal Christianity and, say, philosophical agnosticism based on some version of non-reductive naturalism rather than eliminative scientism, it is possible to aim not only at tolerance but at deep mutual respect grounded in acts of recognition. Even then, the somewhat conflicting accounts of reason and its role in religion and theology must be considered. It might be suggested that a kind of *intolerance* may already be built into the Enlightenment project of reason-use itself, if the latter is understood as being committed to the idea that the "objectively best argument" necessarily "wins" and that argumentative and/or intellectual considerations always ought to be followed "wherever they lead". Philosophical argumentation may itself have (e.g., ethical) limitations that again need to be duly recognized. The pragmatist will therefore also need

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<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, the challenges posed by "postmodern" trends in the philosophy of religion—e.g., attempts to "save" religion from "onto-theological" doctrines postulating divine reality beyond language—may also be re-examined from this perspective. How does the postmodern project of deliberately blurring all rational, normative, and other boundaries change this problem framework?

to consider models of recognition that can be employed in a self-critical examination of one's ethical limitations, and those of the groups and social practices one engages in: it should be possible to recognize (while disagreeing with) a perspective from which one's argumentation, however intellectually sound, leads to ethically problematic conclusions.<sup>28</sup>

I have in this essay emphasized pragmatism as a critical middle path between the implausible extremes of evidentialism and fideism. In conclusion, I should note that it would be an interesting further inquiry to reflect on this proposal to develop pragmatism as a *via media* by making a comparison to an apparently very different but on a closer look related position articulated and defended by Richard Kearney (2010), also intended as a middle ground option between traditional theisms and atheisms, and also offering an intriguing contribution to the issue of evil. I see Kearney's "anatheism" as analogous to the kind of pragmatism I am defending in relation to both the epistemic and the existential interest distinguished above. The anatheist, just like the pragmatist, rejects mainstream realisms and antirealisms, as well as mainstream conceptions of religious belief either as merely subjective or (alternatively) as objective in the sense presupposed in standard analytic evidentialist philosophy of religion. These conceptions of religion simply do not help us in making sense of the ways in which religion is a distinctive human practice or phenomenon that invites neither militant rejection nor anti-intellectual acceptance.

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<sup>28</sup> Religious believers may also maintain that the scientific and explanatory discourse manifested in, e.g., cognitive study of religion today fails to appreciate yet another kind of limit that must be recognized. This could be called *the limits of scientific explanation*. Religious practices or forms of life, some believers may argue, can only be adequately understood "from within"; to attempt to explain them causally and/or with reference to, e.g., evolutionary history from an external non-religious point of view sets a serious limitation for the adequate understanding of religious life *qua* religious. Here the critical discussion of the recently influential cognitive paradigm in religious studies could be connected with the Wittgensteinian orientation in the philosophy of religion, which emphasizes understanding rule-governed practices and/or forms of life from within them—and comes in that respect close to pragmatism. Again, the limits between these two groups—not identical to the groups of atheists and believers—may be crossed by means of mutual recognition. And again the same kind of questions arise: can, e.g., a cognitive scholar of religion and a Wittgensteinian philosopher emphasizing the fundamental differences between religious forms of life and scientific appeals to reason and evidence even recognize each other as members of the same intellectual community of inquirers committed to shared conceptions of reason, rationality, and science? Is religion a special case here, fundamentally different from science or everyday reasoning? Pragmatism may, by offering its middle path, facilitate such processes of mutual recognition among participants of these and other practices.

In brief, both the pragmatist (in my sense) and the atheist (in Kearney's sense) seek to move beyond the standard dichotomies between evidentialism and fideism, or theism and atheism; both reject received views of objectivity and realism (as contrasted to subjectivity and antirealism); and both also reject all rationalizing attempts to resolve the problem of evil as manifestations of "vicious intellectualism". Here, however, I only want to *recognize* Kearney's position as a potential discussion partner for pragmatist philosophers of religion pursuing practice-laden objectivity (and rationality). Future pragmatist studies of theological realism, objectivity, and religious inquiry would have to engage with the atheist alternative as seriously as they have hitherto engaged with the various received views that are now ready to be left aside as potential blocks to the road of inquiry.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> I have had the opportunity to discuss various aspects of the topic of this paper with Hanne Appelqvist, Niek Brunsveld, Dirk-Martin Grube, Logi Gunnarsson, Ana Honnacker, Simo Knuuttila, Timo Koistinen, Heikki J. Koskinen, Cheryl Misak, Philip Rossi, Henrik Rydenfelt, Risto Saarinen, Thomas Schmidt, Oliver Wiertz, and Ulf Zackariasson. I am also grateful to an anonymous referee.

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PART IV

ACTION AND HABIT

# Habit, Action, and Knowledge from the Pragmatist Perspective

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The word habit may seem twisted somewhat from its customary use when employed as we have been using it.

John Dewey, 1922, 40

The highest quality of mind involves a great readiness to take habits and a great readiness to lose them. [...] No room being left for the formation of new habits, intellectual life would come to a speedy end. C. S. Peirce, CP 6.613; 1892

## 1. Introduction: It's habit all the way down

"As a rule, all habits are objectionable," declared Immanuel Kant, while trying to make his social and moral philosophy more accessible, in the late-period work, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798/1974, 29). Habits are objectionable, he went on, because in them "the animal in man projects out of him too far [...] here he is led *instinctively* by the rule of habituation, like another (non-human) nature, and so risks falling into the same class as cattle" (Ibid, 28; Kant's emphasis). G.W.F. Hegel did not refer to cattle (as far as I know), but agreed that habit is an "ignoble" aspect in human action (as cited by Funke 1958, 9). The reason why 'habit' has had so bad press, throughout the history of philosophy (Funke, 1958; Camic, 1986), is apparently the following. David Hume may have put the prevailing idea best in words, by saying that "habit<sup>1</sup> operates before we have time for reflection." The reason why it operates so quickly is that it

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<sup>1</sup> Or "custom"—Hume used these terms interchangeably. See, e.g., (Hume, 1985, 134).

“proceeds from past repetition without any new reasoning or conclusion” (Hume 1739–40/1985, 153, 152). Thus, according to this still prevailing understanding, in habitual action our mind is not in charge, we are not in the driver’s seat—to use modern idiom. Instead, we follow slavishly the repetitive routine pattern of action. And this is worrisome, because our intentionality, rationality and moral responsibility, the most valuable aspects in our action, are then not able to play their proper role.

The first thing to be noted is that this is *not* the Pragmatist view on the matter. Classical Pragmatism<sup>2</sup> completely discarded the above understanding about ‘habit’ and its role in human action. It redefined this term, so that it hardly is an exaggeration to call it the basic concept in classical Pragmatism. Needless to say, the meaning of the term then undergoes a radical transformation. In its Pragmatist usage, it does *not* refer to the routine character, but instead to *the process character* of human action. For Pragmatism, action is an already ongoing process, not a series of instantaneous, discrete actions. Human intentionality, rationality and moral responsibility are not forgotten, but Pragmatism situates them *inside* the habitual process of action, not outside, as is the traditional understanding. In this paper I explain how this Pragmatist understanding of ‘habit’ can be defended, and suggest that philosophy and the human sciences would only gain by paying more attention to it. Pragmatism has not merely put forward a new philosophical view, but even changed the *empirical* perspective on action. This interpretation can thus be evaluated by scientific criteria. It stands such a test surprisingly well,—this is my second major point.

It is perhaps worthwhile to note that individual action(s) do remain at our disposal, even if we take the position of Pragmatism. We are free analytically, by means of abstraction, to separate some individual action(s) from the wider, already ongoing process (habit). In the title of this paper, I strive to capture this peculiar order of events. Habit, the *process* of action, logically precedes singular instantaneous actions, which need to be analysed in terms of it. Questions about knowledge, in turn, which traditionally have taken pride of place in philosophy, can only be discussed and answered in terms of both (general) habits and (singular) actions.

This order of themes is not only different, but diametrically opposite to the traditional order in philosophy. Both analytic philosophy and phe-

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<sup>2</sup> I use capital P about the original, classical version of Pragmatism, and lower case about those contemporary discussions that do not distinguish between the original and the neo-pragmatist variants.

nomenology, for example, tend to treat knowledge first, and the question of action as a derivative. (Details about what is most pertinent to knowledge differ between major approaches). As for habit, non-pragmatist philosophies either shun its treatment altogether, or treat it as a residual category in the analysis of action. Analytic philosophy and phenomenology might again disagree about details, but not about basic priorities. In contrast, Pragmatism is the first philosophy to take “human beings [as] creatures of habit,” and even so forcefully that “only a being with habits could have a mind like ours,” as Alva Noë, a philosopher of cognitive science, expresses the idea today (2009, 97–98; for comments, see Kilpinen, 2012).

At first sight, this seems to confirm many philosophers’ worst suspicions about pragmatism. Language theorist Jerry Fodor, for instance, takes pragmatism as “Cartesianism read from right to left; the genius of pragmatism is to get all explanatory priorities backward” (Fodor, 2008, 12). Accordingly, there can be no doubt that “Descartes was right” and pragmatism was, and still is, wrong. “Why, after all these years, does one still have to say these things?” concludes Fodor (2008, 14) his sermon. Someone more sympathetic to pragmatism might judge this verdict to be a bit hasty, but if s/he then learns that Pragmatism views human beings as “creatures of habit,” and that this concerns even our most cherished part—our mind—s/he, too, may take pragmatism to be a lost cause. The general view of habit does not seem to have changed very much from the views of Kant and others.<sup>3</sup>

Philosophy, however, should have changed its views here already at the time of classic Pragmatism, and it should do so today, at last, if it is to pay any attention to what modern cognitive science and the philosophy of mind that follows are telling us now. The idea that our unique kind of mind stems from the monitoring of our habits is no longer just a philosophical opinion but a finding of empirical research. Classic Pragmatism aspired to be and also managed to be an “empirically responsible philosophy,” as I have elsewhere called it (Kilpinen, 2013b; the saying is originally Lakoff’s and Johnson’s, 1999). Today, what is known as embod-

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<sup>3</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines habit “a thing a person does often and almost without thinking, especially something that is hard to stop doing.” *The Random House Dictionary* explains further that habit is “an acquired behaviour pattern regularly followed until it has become almost involuntary.” In recent empirical psychology, Neal, Wood and Quinn (2006) call habit “a repeat performance”. Ouellette and Wood (1998) assign habit and intention alternating roles, when “past behaviour explains future behaviour.” Bargh and Chartrand (1999) refer to habit poetically as “the unbearable automaticity of being.”

ied cognitive science, and the philosophy of mind building on it, represent, in my opinion, the same aspiration of empirical responsibility in the treatment of 'action' (on embodied cognitive science see Chemero, 2009). From a cognitive-cum-pragmatist viewpoint, to call human beings "creatures of habit" *does not at all* suggest a *slave of mindless repetitive routines*. Such a slave could certainly not have a mind like ours. The position of Pragmatism is rather the complete opposite. It does not by 'habit' refer to repetitive routines, but to "vehicles of cognition."<sup>4</sup>

But it is still a puzzle how habits can have anything to do with cognition, let alone serve as its "vehicles"? To get any clarity on the question, two traditional presuppositions need to be discarded. As already repeatedly said, classic Pragmatism does not relate habit to repetitive action, as other philosophies are prone to do. Secondly, and in a sense following from the former point, Pragmatists assume that the acting subject's mind *is* involved in the on-going action process, the phenomenon referred to (in Pragmatism) by the term 'habit'. Not only is mind present, but it is in charge of the whole affair. "Habits deprived of thought and thought which is futile are two sides of the same fact," was John Dewey's emphatic opinion (1922/2002, 67). He went on to specify the mutually constituting role of habit and thought as follows: "To laud habit as conservative while praising thought as the main spring of progress is to take the surest course to making thought abstruse and irrelevant and progress a matter of accident and catastrophe" (Ibid.). In brief, the Pragmatist position is that *intentionality without habituality is empty, habituality without intentionality is blind*. But if so, then we are entitled to repeat Fodor's (2008) above question, but now with different priorities and sympathies: Why, after all these years, does one still have to repeat these things when they actually jump out of the page if one reads the classics of Pragmatism at some length? The reason is probably that the Pragmatist understanding of 'habit' is so unusual and radical that most philosophers let the term pass as a mere colloquial expression, without imagining that serious philosophical issues might be involved here. I suggest, once more, that understanding 'habit' and the underlying idea correctly gives the key to understanding what Pragmatism is all about. Actually, even many thinkers known today as neo-pragmatists seem to have failed to grasp this radical pragmatic point.

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<sup>4</sup> A happy coinage by my compatriot, colleague, and friend Pentti Määttänen (2010).

## 2. Habit and action undergo a Copernican Revolution in Pragmatism

Classical Pragmatists drew two important conclusions from Darwin's revolution in the life sciences. One concerned action, the other concerned the world where the action is taking place. In the first place, (i) the question of how action originates ceased to be the central question while the *success* of action, or lack of success, began to assume importance. In other words, Pragmatists paid attention to the inherent *fallibility* of human action, so that the possibility of failure and error could be included in its treatment right from the beginning. In 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy, Karl Popper became famous for emphasising the fallibility of knowledge. Pragmatists went even further by highlighting the *inherent fallibility of action*.<sup>5</sup> They hinted at the position of the psychologist W. Ross Ashby in the 1940s, according to which "The whole function of the brain [or of the mind, if you like—E. K.] is summed up in: error correction" (as cited by Clark, 2013, 181). From this position, Popper's principle actually follows as a corollary. However, though action for Pragmatism is inherently fallible, from this premise stems also the fact that it is capable of self-correction, to a degree, in which it is also able to advance. Were this not true, we wouldn't be here. This fallibilist interpretation of action was included in Pragmatism from its genesis, in what is known as Charles Peirce's doubt/belief model of inquiry.<sup>6</sup>

Secondly (ii), after the Darwinian revolution some people began to see the world as undergoing continuous but irregular change. When Peirce, for example, said that "Darwin's view is near to mine" (EP 1, 222; 1884), he did not have biology in mind. He rather referred to the ontological conclusion that if living creatures are mutable, but yet adapting to their environment, as Darwin's theory proved, this suggests the further conclusion that the environment is mutable as well. It has undergone changes and all possible changes may not have yet appeared. In other words, Peirce's (and other Pragmatists') conclusion was that the *world (or reality, if you like) is a process*, though not necessarily linear, but more often

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<sup>5</sup> Popper of course did make the unintended consequences of intentional action a central theme in philosophy, but did not include them as necessary constituents of a complete action definition, they remained contingent phenomena. In this sense, Dewey's idea of reconstruction, for example, which is based on *continuous monitoring of the fallible action-process*, and takes both intended and unintended consequences into account, is a more advanced notion than Popper's.

<sup>6</sup> 1877–78; see EP 1, chap. 7–8; for a detailed action-theoretic interpretation of Peirce's principle, see (Kilpinen 2010).

than not with hitches and jumps. They advanced a *process ontology* based upon their acceptance of the theory of evolution (see further Kilpinen, 2009, 166f.; see also Rescher, 1996; 2000). Combine these two principles, (i) action taken as fallible, and (ii) the process character of the world (or reality), and you can conclude that *for Pragmatism, human action is a process as well, it is not a string of individual actions that take place one at a time.* However, though action is a continuous process, it is not linear but one that at irregular intervals ends up in crises.

One shouldn't need to argue for this conclusion; it ought to be part and parcel of all competent discussions about Pragmatism. However, I will assume the burden of proof here and try to offer textual evidence in its support. Whilst doing that, I also use the occasion to prove another of my previous points, namely, that habit, which refers to the *process-character* of action in Pragmatism, is, on the explanatory level, prior to action.

Hume, we recall, maintained that habit or custom "proceeds from past repetition without any new reasoning or conclusion" (1985, 152). Without mentioning Hume by name, but of course well aware of the emerging contradiction, Peirce instead insisted that "Habits are not for the most part formed by the mere slothful repetition of what has been done, but by the logical development of the potential germinal nature of the man, generally by an effort, the accident of having done this or that merely having an adjuvant effect" (NEM 4, 143, ca. 1898).

The reason why Hume defined 'habit' in terms of repetition was his conviction that "a habit can never be acquir'd by merely one instance" (1985, 154). According to Peirce, one instance may well suffice, or rather, no instance of repetition is needed at all, as he once says that he would "not hesitate to say [that] a common match has a *habit* of taking fire if its head is rubbed, although it never has done so yet and never will but once" (Peirce MS(s) 104, 13, n.d.; Peirce's emphasis). Thus, a radical transformation in the meaning of 'habit' has occurred while it has travelled from Hume to Peirce. The term 'habit' is indeed "twisted" in Pragmatism, as Dewey said (1922, 40). As is apparent at a first glance, by 'habit' Peirce means in the last passage the *disposition* of the doer, or of the thing in question, (a match is an instrument rather than doer). This is an essential part of his intended meaning as he discusses 'habit' elsewhere.

Peirce states the matter explicitly in one of his central articles, "Prolegomena to an Apology for Pragmaticism" (originally published in *The Monist*, 1906), where he gives one of his most detailed definitions of his three basic types of signs: icon, index and symbol. He writes about the

last type that a sign can be interpreted to refer to its object, "by more or less approximate certainty that it will be interpreted as denoting the object, in consequence of a habit (which term I use as including a natural disposition), when I call the sign a *Symbol*" (CP 4.531; 1906; Peirce's emphasis).<sup>7</sup>

Regarding disposition, however, we must not take it in an exclusively bodily sense, as Peirce also speaks about habits as constituents of our *intellectual* life (CP 6.613). Peirce's and other Pragmatists' aversion to the mind/body dualism is well known in the literature, and I believe that the double meaning that they give to habit (it is both mental and corporeal) is a case of their efforts to overcome it. However, as Peirce, Dewey and other classics consistently stick to the term 'habit', whilst aware that they have "twisted" its meaning, the conclusion also arises that they wish to express something special with this traditional, almost colloquial term, which they now have twisted. My conclusion thus is that they are referring to the *sui generis process character of action* with their newly-interpreted term 'habit'.

This conclusion is, of course, no news to those who have so much as opened Dewey's *Human Nature and Conduct* (1922). However, today, that book does not seem to be very well known, and my point is that the process interpretation of 'action', to which 'habit' refers, characterises the entire classical tradition of Pragmatism. I lack the space to go through the writings of all members of the classic quartet, Peirce, Dewey, William James and G.H. Mead.<sup>8</sup> For Pragmatism, habit is prior to an individual action. I also submitted that Pragmatists by 'habit' mean an action-process, and about processes we know that "for processes, to be is to be exemplified," as Nicholas Rescher, the leading process philosopher today, says (2000, 25). Accordingly, in the study of action, the order goes *from* larger totalities (habits) *onto* their briefer exemplifications, individual actions. Peirce proves my point, as he once states (CP 5.510; 1905) that "I need not repeat that I do not say that it is the single deeds that constitute the habit. It is the single ways, which are conditional propositions,

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<sup>7</sup> It is to be noted that Peirce consistently defines a Symbol by referring to a habit (in a sign's interpretation), both in the cited article (1906) and in his even more extensive discussion in the 1907 'Pragmatism' (EP 2, 398–433). He does not use philosophers' pet term 'rule' or social scientists' pet term 'convention'. Relating Peirce's 'symbol' to these latter notions is thus an intrusion by later scholars, not always to a happy effect. As habit is simultaneously a corporeal and mental mode of action, it can be *articulated* in the form of a rule or convention, but habit is the natural mode of symbol-mediated and symbol-mediating action, according to Peirce's doctrine.

<sup>8</sup> About Mead see Kilpinen, 2013b and some other new interpretations that appear in the same collective volume, edited by Burke & Skowronski (2013).

each general—that constitute the habit.” In classical philosophy, and in the mainstream of contemporary philosophy, it *is* the single deeds that by continuous repetition constitute the habit. In overcoming this view (whose roots lie in mind/body dualism), and changing the entire perspective on the theme, Pragmatism has performed its “Copernican Revolution” (Kilpinen, 2009).

Above, Peirce said that it is the “ways” of doing, each general, that constitute the habit. There remains a slight ambiguity here, so that a critical reader might still remain unconvinced whether he gives primacy to habit over and above individual actions or not. The former is the correct answer. Peirce does understand habit as the primary category and (an) action as secondary, as an exemplification of the former. In his unfinished long draft of 1907, entitled “Pragmatism”, Peirce (EP 2, 402) goes to great pains to argue that intellectual concepts (symbolic signs, if you like) refer beyond mere existential facts, “namely [to] the ‘*would-acts*’ of habitual behaviour; and no agglomeration of actual happenings [read: individual actions] can ever completely fill up the meaning of a ‘*would be.*’” Our interpretation of habit as disposition (corporeal as well as mental and intellectual) thus receives support from Peirce’s original words. Yet another item to the same effect is forthcoming from the formulation with which Peirce concludes his cited account: “Now after an examination of all variants of mental phenomena, the only ones I have been able to find that possess the requisite generality to interpret concepts and which fulfill the other conditions [of definition] are habits” (EP 2, 431; 1907).

How can I assert that this interpretation of habit as disposition characterises the entire Pragmatic movement (in its classical period)? I do not have enough space to consult all relevant individuals, but we can let Peirce pass the verdict. It is true that he did not unreservedly agree with all of the ideas held by his fellow-Pragmatists (as some non-pragmatist commentators like to point out), and sometimes he brought out his disagreements poignantly. However, the conclusion that Peirce, with his doctrine of pragmatism, wanted to dissociate himself from the entire Pragmatic movement, is only a positivist pipe-dream. In truth, Peirce defined pragmatism as a *sub-division* of Pragmatism. He did stick to the latter wider doctrine, throughout his life, and his way to characterise it pertains to the treatment of our subject. At the end of the penultimate article of his publishing career, “A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God” (1908), Peirce enumerates strengths and weaknesses of other Pragmatists, and brings out his dissatisfaction with their “angry hatred of strict logic,”

but finds also important points of agreement, such that in my opinion outweigh the disagreements. As he says:

Among such truths,—all of them old, of course, yet acknowledged by a few,—I reckon their [other Pragmatists’] denial of necessitarianism; their rejection of any “consciousness” different from a visceral or other external sensation; their acknowledgment that there are, in a Pragmaticist sense, Real habits (which really *would* produce effects), under circumstances that may not happen to get actualized, and are thus Real generals); and their insistence upon interpreting all hypostatic abstractions in terms of what they *would* or *might* (not actually *will*) come to in the concrete EP 2, 450; Peirce’s emphases

This passage is loaded by characteristically Pragmatist expressions, all the way from a denial of mind/body dualism (consciousness is based on sensation, visceral or external), via a notion of realist process ontology (all possible circumstances need not become actual), to the interpretation of habit as the basic mode of action, to be analysed in conditional terms. To sum up and draw a conclusion: for Pragmatism, action is a *relation* between the subject and his/her/its world, in which both sides have a say. To say that it is a relation is tantamount to saying that it cannot be reduced to either of its constituents, to the acting subject or to the world. Both kinds of reduction have been attempted. Let us treat the outside world first. The movement known as behaviourism in psychology did try to reduce action to the outside world, by putting its emphasis exclusively on stimuli. However, as a general approach to psychology, let alone philosophy, this project was soon found to lead to a dead end.

Everyone agrees that behaviourist psychology is reductive, even its leading champions, J. B. Watson and B. F. Skinner, never denied this.<sup>9</sup> How many people have realized that the other option that highlights the role of intention can be just as reductive? It is reductive in the sense that it seeks for determinants of action exclusively inside the subject, in his or her preferences, values, or—you name your favourite intentional term. If we concentrate exclusively on these, we lose contact with the outside world, and forget that all action takes place in some particular situation, whose conditions are more or less—but only rarely completely—objective. The classical understanding of action in philosophy ever since Aristotle,

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<sup>9</sup> For a just critique of Watson, see Mead (1934); for a just critique of Skinner, see Dennett (1978/1997). They are “just” in admitting that the behaviourists have got *one* point right, in emphasizing the inalienable role of the outside world, which other approaches too often neglect completely.

relying on mind first-explanations of action, reduces action to the subject of action. The lesson to be taken is that we cannot fight behaviourism by means of naïve intentionalism (to indulge in some sarcasm), nor can we do the opposite trick and reduce action to mere stimuli from the outside. Adopting the Pragmatist position allows us to have our cake and eat it too, to see some valuable aspects both in intentionalism and in behaviourism, without accepting either of them as the entire truth.

### 3. A Word about Empirical Relevance

I suggested above that the classic Pragmatist notion of action is not a mere philosophical hypothesis but one with empirical relevance. It thrives well in the light of more recent scientific knowledge, and now I will strive to prove my point.

In some previous publications (Kilpinen, 2012; 2013a; 2013b), I have shown how the original Pragmatist hypothesis (explicit in Mead, implicit in Peirce and Dewey) about the intersubjective constitution of the human mind receives ample support, not to say verification, from recent empirical findings. This corroborating evidence is due to the discovery of so-called "mirror neurons" in the human brain, the perhaps most thorough discussion of which is to be found in Rizzolatti's and Sinigaglia's monograph (2008). However, I just used a phrase that appears in the popular media but actually is misleading. In point of fact, brain scientists have not discovered any new neuron-types in the human brain. What they have found is a new *function* in and for such already known neurons that govern human visual and motor activities. This "mirroring function" gives credibility to the idea that G. H. Mead already developed a long way, namely that our mind is intersubjectively constituted, and that our individual subjectivity is based on this intersubjective foundation. We can read our own mind insofar as we can read other people's minds (Mead, 1925/1964, 292; cf. Franks, 2010; Kilpinen, 2013b).

However, this conclusion about the constitution of our mind, important though it is, does not yet exhaust what this brain-scientific finding has to teach us. Recall that we are dealing with neurons that guide our physical action, and the above psychological finding is accordingly founded on a presupposition concerning our action: It is an already ongoing action process that provides the foundation for those mental operations. Rizzolatti and Sinigaglia (2008, xi) find explicit faults with prevailing action-theoretic "explanations which tend to separate our intentional

acts from the pure physical movement required to execute them.” The lesson to be taken is that the separation of intention and execution can be made only as an analytic distinction. As an empirical description of our doings it is faulty for the reason that the execution is not a mere mechanical movement, but is precisely guided and monitored by the agent’s intention (see Rizzolatti & Sinigaglia, 2008, 35–36; Kilpinen, 2013b, 13–14). As the cited authors take this foundational action process as already ongoing, we are entitled to conclude that by this they mean, at least approximately, what classic Pragmatists already meant by the term ‘habit’. We are now in a position to see the point in Alva Noë’s (2009, 118) seemingly blatant assertion that “a habit-free existence would be robotic existence.”

A naïve reader might answer that the truth is just the opposite, a slave of habits rather behaves like a robot. The point, however, is precisely that we are not slaves of our habits, we are their masters! With this observation we also realize something about the role of intentionality and rationality. Contrary to what might come to mind, they are not neglected; their job description is considerably *enhanced*, if we follow Pragmatist premises. They now have to see the entire performance through, not only to send the acting subject on his way, as was the idea in the traditional understanding that separated intention and execution as two occurrences.

#### 4. How Can We Know with Our Habits?

A theme still remains untreated, namely the Pragmatist conception of knowledge, which I promised to take up. In the article “Prolegomena to an Apology of Pragmaticism” (1906), already cited, Peirce makes also an interesting aside about knowledge. As he writes:

[...] since symbols rest exclusively on habits already definitely formed but not furnishing any observation even of themselves, and since knowledge is habit, they do not enable us to add to our knowledge even so much as a necessary consequent, unless by means of a definite preformed habit

CP 4.531

Two points are involved in this brief passage. In the first place, Peirce says laconically—but for this very reason also enigmatically—that “knowledge is habit.” In addition he speaks about us adding to our knowledge, rather than, say, possessing some. These points are involved with each other, and they both highlight the Pragmatist position about epistemic questions. (1) Peirce’s laconic expression “knowledge is habit” lets us understand that he means by knowing a form of doing, rather than being

in a mental state. (Pragmatism assumes no ontological division between mental and material doing, we remember. In both of them, continuous habit is the basic mode.) (II) Peirce's phrase about adding to our knowledge gives a first hint about the Pragmatist principle that in matters epistemic, the basic question concerns knowledge-acquisition (in Pragmatist terms: *inquiry*), rather than the possession of knowledge. Let us take a closer look.

I have to be brief about Peirce's point that "knowledge is habit." Suffice it to note that it receives apt elucidation from Dewey (2002, 182–3), who argues that "The scientific man and the philosopher like the carpenter, the physician and politician know with their 'habits', not with their 'consciousness'. The latter is not a source [of the knowledge]." To some people it appears that Dewey here tries to reduce the principle "knowing that" to another, "knowing how," to use Gilbert Ryle's (1949/1970) terminology—this criticism has been presented many times against Ryle, Dewey, and other pragmatists. The criticism loses most of its thrust, if we keep consistently in mind that (I) Pragmatism allows no mind/body dualism, which is implicitly assumed, when "knowing how" and "knowing that" are *contrasted*. For another thing (II), we should remember Pragmatism's other principle that knowledge-acquisition (inquiry) is to be taken on a par with, or even as overriding the notion of knowledge-possession.

Classical Pragmatism understands 'inquiry' as an *epistemic* concept, a point too often neglected. This idea reflects the basic assumption in this philosophy that action is the way in which we exist in the world, in other words, it is not a contingent phenomenon. (The above phrase is originally by Hans Joas). The above ontological position of Pragmatism, process ontology, also pertains to this question. In a process world, *epistemic hunger* (to borrow Dennett's 1991 phrase) is the basic knowledge interest. From this principle—universal action in a process world—follows that *we are all inquirers*, though only a small minority of us are intellectual, scientific or philosophical inquirers.

Quite recently this principle has received new support from an unexpected angle. Although Jaakko Hintikka is a bona fide analytic philosopher by his background, he has occasionally expressed sympathy towards classical Pragmatism as well, and in his logical work he has reached conclusions that give some support to this tradition. As Hintikka says (2007a, 13), "The basic insight [for a new approach to epistemology] is that there is a link between the concept of knowledge and human action." That link is in the realization that we need knowledge to guide us in ac-

tion, and we obtain knowledge by conducting inquiries. A further reason and the reason why inquiry indeed should be taken as the basic notion in epistemic matters is given by Hintikka:

Surely the first order of business of any genuine theory of knowledge—the most important task both theoretically and practically—is how new [information is] acquired, not merely how previously obtained information can be evaluated. A theory of information (knowledge) acquisition is both philosophically and humanly much more important than a theory of whether or not already achieved information amounts to knowledge. Discovery is more important than the defence of what you already know  
Hintikka, 2007a, 17–18

The upshot of this formulation might be taken as “Peirce and Dewey updated” in the sense that Hintikka’s conception of inquiry (the Interrogative model, as he calls it), is founded on a more advanced logical foundation, but has just the same knowledge-interest as that of the classical Pragmatists (cf. Hintikka, 2007b). Hintikka’s conception pertains also to the question about the correct meaning of the Pragmatist habit-term, as he observes that his predecessor Peirce used this term almost as a down-right logical concept. Its closest equivalent in modern logic is the concept of ‘strategy’ that more recent logicians have borrowed from the theory of games. What is interesting from the viewpoint of the present paper, is that Hintikka draws an analogous conclusion concerning the position of individual action(s) in their surrounding totalities, that we drew above. He interprets Peirce’s theory of ampliative inference to indicate

a need of some notion such as strategy in his requirement that the aim of scientific abduction is to “recommend a course of action.” For such a recommendation can scarcely mean a preference for one particular action in one particular kind of situation, but presumably means a policy recommendation.  
Hintikka, 2007b, 47

The use of human reason in inquiry, in logical terms, in ampliative inference (of which abduction is one case), suggests as its result a *course* of action (policy), but not individual actions one by one. Above I concluded that in Pragmatism ongoing action-processes (habits) have priority over and above their briefer exemplifications (singular actions), and Hintikka’s interpretation (and further development) of Peirce’s logic gives support to this idea. The only thing to be added is that the above principle does not concern merely scientific abductions but as much those that are performed in everyday life. In both spheres, the basic interest is the advancement of knowledge rather than its justification. (Justification is important,

but its turn comes *after* the advancing step.) Let Hintikka formulate this knowledge interest one more time: "The criteria of knowledge concern the conditions on which the results of epistemological inquiry can be relied as a basis of action" (2007a, 30). This is classical Pragmatism vindicated, to speak solemnly.

However, it is not the same thing as to vindicate what today is known as neo-pragmatism.<sup>10</sup> I shall not go into the issues involved, concerning the assumed universality of language and its character as a window into the human mind. Nor shall I raise here the question whether,—and if yes, in what sense,—neo-pragmatism (an expression in fact used by Charles W. Morris already in 1928) goes in the footsteps of the original variant. Instead I wish to remind, by way of conclusion, about the untapped resources that still remain in the original tradition. In 1906, Peirce wrote that he had recently received "a shower of communications" thanking and congratulating him for the invention of pragmatism. This, he went on, "causes me to share the expectations that I find so many good judges are entertaining, that pragmatism is going to be the dominant philosophical opinion of the twentieth century" (CP 6.501). As everyone knows, the history of philosophy in the twentieth century did not turn out like that. But it may well be that Peirce was only excessively optimistic but not so wrong about what is pertinent to philosophy. My own opinion is that the last word about the classical tradition of Pragmatism has not yet been said. When it is said, keeping all the time in mind this philosophy's sense of "empirical responsibility" (i.e. sensitivity to research advances outside philosophy in the strict sense), it may well turn out that this tradition survives as a major tradition in the twenty-first century. I am among those who find such a development not only possible but desirable.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Hintikka has intimated this elsewhere, asserting that "there is no trace of actual pragmatists" in the ideas championed by neo-pragmatists (Hintikka 1997, xx).

<sup>11</sup> The first version of this paper was presented at the First European Pragmatism Conference in Rome, September 19–21, 2012. I thank all participants of the session for beneficial discussion on that version. For comments on the second version I thank an anonymous referee and the editors of this volume. Many first seeds for the ideas that are harvested here were sown during my Fellowship at the Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study (Uppsala 2009–10), which is gratefully remembered.

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# On the Concepts of Trans-action and Intra-action

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## 1. Introduction

Using the two concepts "trans-action" and "intra-action", I will outline a dynamic relationalist perspective, which aims not so much at reconciling realism and relativism, as at providing resources to transcend the realism-relativism debate. John Dewey uses the term trans-action predominantly in *Knowing and the Known*, written together with Arthur Bentley in 1949. The term intra-action is coined by the American feminist and physicist Karen Barad and is a key concept of her agential realism as developed in *Meeting the Universe Halfway* from 2007.

Relationalism challenges the very basis for the traditional debate between realism and relativism by cutting across the alleged divide between these two perspectives. In the relationalist perspective outlined, it is the relational intra-activity that constitutes reality and defines subject and object.

Is this, then, a way to understand reality, or is it (just) a way to understand our *understanding* of reality? That is: are we dealing with ontology or epistemology? Possibly the safest route would be to restrict the claim to the epistemological (like Dewey does in *Knowing and the Known*), but with the aid of Barad's thinking, presenting the key elements of her agential realism, I dare to make it into an *onto-epistemological* claim.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Barad uses the term "onto-epistemology" to mark "the inseparability of ontology and epistemology" (Barad, 2007, 409, n10). Although most often treated as separate concerns today, the understanding of ontology and epistemology as inseparable has prominent advocates in the history of philosophy (as Aristotle, Kant and Husserl). Barad radicalizes the

## 2. Stating the problem

Let us start with very briefly stating the problem to which a relationalist approach is a possible solution. In his *Pragmatism without Foundations—Reconciling Realism and Relativism*, Joseph Margolis sets out, as the subtitle tells us, to reconcile realism and relativism. What is needed, according to Margolis, to secure the possibility of objectivity and thereby the reliability of science, is an integration of ontic and epistemic internalism with an ontic *externalism*, according to which there is some mind-independent reality. Margolis calls his position “internal relativism” (Margolis, 1986, 289). This position has much in common with, but is also contrasted to Putnam’s internal *realism*.<sup>2</sup> Margolis presents Putnam’s position at length, describing it as “misleading”, but at the same time “helpful”, as it helps us to see “what more is required”. This search for a way to secure the possibility of objectivity seems to be the main goal for efforts like Margolis’ and Putnam’s, and it is also an often used argument against relativism and pragmatism that these rule out this possibility of objectivity. But there are ways of keeping the possibility of objectivity and the reliability of science without resorting to ontic externalism.

## 3. Dewey’s concept of trans-action

Another way of solving the problem of objectivity (although this is not what he explicitly sets out to do) is offered by John Dewey’s use of the concept of *trans-action*, which opens a possibility of ensuring a minimal scientific objectivity, without having to rely on the notion of ontic externalism. In Dewey’s trans-actional perspective there is no place for the idea of something mind-independent in the world of man, and still there is a possibility for knowledge and science.

Dewey contrasts the transactional perspective with the antique view of self-action and the inter-actional view of classical mechanics: *Self-action* means that an object is “viewed as acting under its own powers”; *inter-action* means that object is balanced against object “in causal interconnection”; while *trans-action* means that

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idea of this inseparability. For support of the idea of onto-epistemological inseparability in the context of modern physics, see for example Anton Zeilinger (2010).

<sup>2</sup> The concept is introduced by Hilary Putnam in (Putnam, 1981), and is later used by Putnam in, for example, *Representation and Reality* (1988, 114), where he also writes that he wish he had rather called his position “pragmatic realism”.

systems of description and naming are employed to deal with aspects and phases of action, without final attribution to 'elements' or other presumptively detachable or independent 'entities' [...] or realities.

Dewey, 1949, 132f

The fundamental difference is that in the *transactional* perspective, no radical separation is made between the subject and the object of knowledge, between the observer and that which is observed; the determination of objects as themselves is trans-actional. This means that knowing is cooperative, open and flexible in character, in a way that excludes assertions of fixity, and that knowledge is viewed as "itself inquiry as a goal *within* inquiry, not as a terminus outside or beyond inquiry" (Dewey, 1949, 97).

Dewey demands a treatment of all of man's "behaviors, including his most advanced knowings, as activities not of himself alone, nor even as *primarily* his, but as processes of the full situation of organism-environment". An "object" is to be seen as an "unfractured observation", which is neither existing separately apart from any observation, nor existing only in our head "in presumed independence of what is observed" (Dewey, 1949, 131).

The term "transaction" is used early by Dewey to better bring out the systems aspect than is possible using the alternative "interaction". It is introduced in the paper "Conduct and Experience" from 1930 (published in *Psychologies of 1930*), where he writes:

The structure of whatever is had by way of immediate qualitative presences is found in the recurrent modes of interaction taking place between what we term organism, on one side, and environment, on the other. This interaction is the primary fact, and it constitutes a trans-action. Only by analysis and selective abstraction can we differentiate the actual occurrence into two factors, one called organism and the other, environment.

Dewey, 1930, 411 <sup>3</sup>

It is not enough to consider the organism-as-a-whole, what is needed is to consider the organism-*in-environment*-as-a-whole. Dewey admits that the transactional point of view may be difficult to acquire at the start:

If we watch a hunter with his gun go into a field where he sees a small animal already known to him by name as a rabbit, then, within the framework of half an hour and an acre of land, it is easy—and for

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<sup>3</sup> Even if Dewey did not use the term by then, the necessity of a transactional seeing together of man-environment and stimulus-response was already a pivotal idea in his article "The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology" (Dewey, 1896).

immediate purposes satisfactory enough—to report the shooting that follows in an interactional form in which rabbit and hunter and gun enter as separates and come together by way of cause and effect. If, however, we take enough of the earth and enough thousands of years, and watch the identification of rabbit gradually taking place, arising first in the subnaming processes of gesture, cry, and attentive movement, wherein both rabbit and hunter participate, and continuing on various levels of description and naming, we shall soon see the transaction account as the one that best covers the ground.

Dewey 1949, 141f

According to Dewey, transaction represents a “level in inquiry in which observation and presentation could be carried on without attribution of the aspects and phases of action to independent self-actors, or to independently inter-acting elements or relations” (Dewey, 1949, 136). In a transactional perspective, Dewey stresses, there is

no basic differentiation of subject *vs.* object [...] no knower to confront what is known as if in a different realm of being [...] no ‘entities’ or ‘realities’ of any kind intruding as if from behind or beyond the knowing-known events [...] [no] constituent can be adequately specified as ‘fact’ *apart* from the specification of other constituents.

Dewey 1949, 136f

In *Knowing and the Known*, Dewey underlines physics increasing use of the transactional perspective and gives a brief sketch of the history of physics from Aristotle’s physics built around self-acting substances, via Galileo’s and later Newton’s inter-acting particles, to Einstein’s physics which brought time and space into the investigation, using the transactional approach, a seeing together of what earlier had been seen in separation—a physics in which “a particle by itself without the description of the whole experimental set-up is not a physical reality” (Dewey, 1949, 135)<sup>4</sup>

When it comes to the question of how we are to understand the concept of “physical reality”, Dewey refers to a discussion between Einstein and Bohr from the 1930s, and makes the remark that Einstein, “[i]n contrast with his transactional [...] treatment of *physical* phenomena [...] remained strongly self-actional [...] in his attitude towards man’s activity in scientific enterprise” (Dewey, 1949, 135). Dewey contrasts this position with Bohr’s “much freer view of the world that has man as an active component within it, rather than one with man by fixed dogma set over against it” (ibid). Dewey’s explicit preference for Bohr’s approach

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<sup>4</sup> Dewey quotes, with approval, from Philipp Frank’s *Foundations of Physics*.

makes it eligible to take a closer look at Bohr and his concept of "phenomena", which will eventually lead us to the second of the two key concepts of this paper: intra-action.

#### 4. Bohr's concept of the phenomenon

The Danish physicist Niels Bohr developed a philosophy-physics as a response to the enigmas accentuated by the developments in theoretical physics at the beginning of the 1920s. By then the wave-particle duality was an established quandary for physics not only concerning the nature of light, but also concerning the nature of matter (or even the nature of nature) showing that the nature of the observed phenomenon changes with corresponding changes in the experimental apparatus.

The wave-particle-dualism was solved in two different ways by Bohr and Heisenberg in 1927. Bohr's solution was the principle of complementarity, Heisenberg's was the uncertainty principle. The uncertainty principle is *epistemological* in character, focussing on what knowledge we, under specific circumstances, can have about a particle's properties; a question of being *uncertain* of a value, existing independently of, but rendered impossible to attain accurately due to, the measurement.

Bohr's principle of complementarity, in contrast, is *ontological* in character. To Bohr properties like "momentum" and "position" *have* no observer-independent physical reality, and "'wave' and 'particle' are classical descriptive concepts that refer to different mutually exclusive *phenomena*, not to independent physical objects" (Barad, 2007, 179).

A major point for Bohr, as for Dewey, is that we are ourselves *part* of the reality we are investigating, and that there is no definite and self-evident *cut* between ourselves as investigating subjects and the world as investigated object. According to Bohr the object and the agencies of observation constitute a whole, and he uses the term "phenomena" to denote these, what he calls, "particular instances of wholeness" (Barad, 2007, 119). The interaction between the object and the agencies of observation constitutes, according to Bohr, an inseparable part of the phenomenon, and it is to these phenomena that observations refer, not to "*objects in an independent reality*" (Barad, 2007, 170). This position is very similar to the one expressed by Dewey in "Conduct and Experience":

There is something in the *context* of the experiment which goes beyond the stimuli and responses directly found within it. There is for example, the *problem* which the experimenter has set and his *deliberate*

arrangement of apparatus and selection of conditions with a view to disclosure of facts that bear upon it. Dewey, 1930, 411f

Like Dewey, Bohr does not acknowledge any given distinction between the object and the agencies of observation; each measurement or observation implies a choice of the apparatuses of observation, made for the specific occasion, that provides a constructed cut, separating "the object" from "the agencies of observation". This specific cut is only applicable in a given context, it delimits and is part of a specific phenomenon. Thus, the idea of "externality" and "context-independence" is a chimera.

A property or a measurement value cannot be attributed to an observer-independent object, nor be seen as *created* by the measurement. What empirical properties refer to are *phenomena*, understood as "particular instances of wholeness", where the measurement interaction is part of the phenomenon. Bohr questioned Einstein's view of physical reality as something *separated* from the agencies of observation, and stressed that the agencies of observation "constitute an inherent element of the description of any phenomenon to which the term 'physical reality' can be properly attached" (Barad, 2007, 127, Bohr, 1935, 700).<sup>5</sup>

The Bohr-Einstein debate can be judged as a philosophical dispute concerning the truth of the intrinsic-properties theory; a theory that presupposes a clear-cut separation between the subject and the object of knowledge, that there are properties of an object there, in a fixed state, before and independently of the agencies of observation.

According to Bohr, we cannot speak of the reality of objects *apart* and *separated* from or *preceding* the interactions with the agencies of observation. Bohr renounces the idea of separateness, and holds that each object we observe is given the character it has by the phenomenon in which that object is observed.

Still, to Bohr, a phenomenon is "objective" in its being intersubjectively valid, since there is no explicit reference to any *individual* observer, *not* because it reveals a pre-existent intrinsic property of the object. This *relational-properties* theory holds properties to be *objective* but not absolute, that is, they are things-in-phenomena, not observer-independent things. Everything hinges on the question of separateness or relatedness. Einstein never abandoned his ontology of separateness, an ontology that is

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<sup>5</sup> This is Bohr's solution to the so called EPR-paradox, a challenge raised against Bohr's understanding of quantum mechanics by Einstein, Podolsky and Rosen, who were unwilling to let go of the separatist idea of a one-to-one correspondence between physical theory and pre-existing properties or entities of physical reality.

very difficult to reconcile with quantum physics. The choice of separateness or relatedness seems to be *the* basic ontological divide. The position outlined here is an onto-epistemology of relatedness.<sup>6</sup>

## 5. Barad's concept of intra-action

*Intra-action* is a neologism coined by Barad to underline the mutual constitution of subject and object, that is, that they are only *relationally* distinct and do not exist as ontologically separate individual elements. A suitable starting point for an effort to come to grips with the idea of intra-action is the first passage dealing with the concept in Barad's magnum opus *Meeting the Universe Halfway*:

The neologism 'intra-action' *signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies*. That is, in contrast to the usual 'interaction', which assumes that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction, the notion of intra-action recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action. It is important to note that the 'distinct' agencies are only distinct in a relational, not an absolute, sense, that is, *agencies are only distinct in relation to their mutual entanglement; they don't exist as individual elements*.

Barad, 2007, 33; Barad's emphasis

Of central importance for an understanding of her thinking are the two lines italicized by Barad, both expressing the idea of "the mutual constitution of entangled agencies", that is, that the constituents of the relation do not pre-exist as individual elements; they are distinct, but in a qualified meaning, only in a relational and not in an absolute sense. Or, more to the point, expressing both the relational and the active, agential aspect: they are made to emerge as distinct in the context of a specific phenomenon, through an "agential cut," a term Barad uses as a contrast to what she calls the "Cartesian cut", the latter signifying the idea that there is an inherent pre-existing cut separating subject and object. According to Barad

the agential cut enacts a resolution *within* the phenomenon of the inherent ontological (and semantic) indeterminacy. In other words, re-

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<sup>6</sup> There are, admittedly, different interpretations of quantum mechanics. I side with the relationalist interpretation, since I find it the most plausible (see for example Mermin, 1998 and Rovelli, 1996). Barad gives several examples of how this relationalist understanding has been corroborated by experiments that in Bohr's and Einstein's days had to be restricted to so called *Gedanken*-experiments, but today can be performed in the flesh, as it were (Barad, 2007, 289–317). To my mind the non-relationalist interpretations of quantum mechanics all have their root in the old separatist dogma.

lata do not preexist relations; rather, relata-within-phenomena emerge through specific intra-actions. Crucially, then, intra-actions enact *agential separability*—the condition of *exteriority-within-phenomena*.

Barad, 2007, 140; Barad's emphasis

Replacing the idea of ontological separateness with the idea of agential separability is a key factor of Barad's agential realism, on a par with, and intimately related to the replacement of interaction with intra-action:

The notion of agential separability is of fundamental importance, for in the absence of a classical ontological condition of exteriority between observer and observed, it provides an alternative ontological condition for the possibility of objectivity. ibid.

The view that we cannot have access to an observer-independent reality, means that we must accept that our thinking and knowing lack the kind of solid foundation searched for by philosophers like Plato and Descartes. But, according to Barad, scientific knowledge is no haphazard construction that is independent of what is "out there", since this is not separate from us, and given a specific set of constructed cuts, some descriptive scientific concepts are well defined and can be used to reach reproducible results. But: These results cannot be decontextualized. The possibility of objectivity does not hinge upon the belief in an observer-independent external reality. On the contrary, given that there *is* no observer-independent reality, holding on to the dogma that observer-independency and externality is a necessary prerequisite for objectivity is what threatens to undermine the possibility of objectivity.

## 6. A solution to the problem of objectivity

Barad's solution to the problem of objectivity lies in her view of referentiality that follows from the intra-active perspective, namely that the referent is not an observation-independent object, but a phenomenon; this Barad sees as "*a condition for objective knowledge*" (Barad, 2007, 198). The point, according to Barad, is that "phenomena are constitutive of reality", that is, reality in itself is material-discursive; it is not built by "things-in-themselves or things-behind-phenomena, but of things-in-phenomena". Science does not give us any information about an independent reality; it is the very fact "that scientific knowledge is socially constructed that leads to reliable knowledge and reproducible phenomena" (Barad, 2007, 140).

Barad's intra-active agential realism is a form of constructivism that is not relativist, but *relationalist*. It agrees with relativism in its repudi-

ation of absolutist conceptions of reality, truth, and knowledge, but rejects relativism's typical one-sided over-emphasis of the constitutive role of the human subject. Instead it shares and, through its post-humanist stance, radicalizes Dewey's trans-actional idea of the entanglement of the organism-in-environment-as-a-whole. Barad declares that "humanism is based on ontological and epistemological presuppositions that are challenged by the quantum theory," among these the idea that "the notion of the 'human' is a well-defined concept that refers to an individually determinate entity with inherent properties", prominent among which is her cognitive agency, through which she is held to "make the universe intelligible" (Barad, 2007, 352).

Barad's agential realism provides an alternative to the mainstream metaphysics of separateness, an intra-active relational metaphysics, according to which the ontological primary is not pre-existing ontologically separate things or objects, but agentially produced *phenomena*. A phenomenon is an entanglement of intra-acting 'agencies', marking the ontological non-separateness of observer and observed. Contrary to the pervasive individualism and atomism of mainstream metaphysics, with its obvious-matter-of-fact view of *relata* as prior to relations, the agential realist perspective is that "*phenomena are ontologically primitive relations, relations without pre-existing relata*" (2007, 139). An important consequence of this is that distinction presupposes relation (not vice versa as in the interactive perspective). This distinction-in-intra-active-relation Barad expresses by her understanding of the agential cut as a "cutting together-apart" (Barad, 2012, 7). Thus, Barad does not rule out difference and differentiation, but in her intra-active perspective "differentiating is not about othering or separating but on the contrary about making connections and commitments" (Barad, 2007, 392).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The relational perspective outlined here differs from the relationalism elaborated by the Indian philosopher Joseph Kaipayil. He maintains the supremacy of "the continuants (things)", and states that *relata* precede relations. This makes his relationalism interactive. According to Kaipayil, "there cannot be process without objects acting" (Kaipayil, 2009, 25). *Prima facie* this seems to be a sound argument, but it all depends on what you *mean* by the terms "objects", "process", and "action". Of course there cannot be process without action, because process *is* action, and action *is* process. But does action or process really require objects understood as entities existing separately before the action, or can the objects be understood as objects-in-phenomena? Kaipayil writes that "relationalism recognizes that events and relations cannot occur without some continuants (entities with some enduring existence and identity) as agents" (*ibid.*), and in his view continuants are *precursors* of events and relations. In the perspective outlined here the existence of objects is not denied, but they are not seen as precursors but as *perspects* of relations (cf. Oliver, 1981), that is, there

Important to notice, however, is that this rejection of ontological separateness does not mean that the binaries nature and culture, epistemology and ontology, etc., are conflated or collapsed. Nature and culture, epistemology and ontology, are still different, but intertwined and mutually co-constitutive, that is, intra-actively entangled. And the means to *make* a difference is the above-mentioned agential cut that “cut things together and apart” (Barad, 2007, 381).

The ontological non-separateness of the object from the phenomenon and the agencies of observation amounts to “a final renunciation of the classical ideal of causality, and a radical revision of our attitude towards the problem of physical reality” (Barad, 2007, 129; Bohr 1963, 59f). The ground for another way of looking at causality and reality lies in Dewey’s, Bohr’s and Barad’s denial of the usual assumption that there are separately existing entities preceding a causal relation, where the one pre-existing entity causes some effect to another pre-existing entity. The concepts of trans-action and intra-action, and the view of the “agencies of observation” as part of the phenomenon, rules out a pre-given subject-object distinction.

## 7. Measurement as actualization through perception

The notion of the agential cut enacting a resolution of an inherent indeterminacy is to be understood as a measurement that actualizes a possible aspect of reality. While Bohr focused on physical-conceptual agencies of observation and laboratory-style apparatuses, Barad uses the concept of agencies of observation and apparatuses more *generally*, to denote “open-ended and dynamic material-discursive practices through which specific ‘concepts’ and ‘things’ are articulated” (Barad, 2007, 334). This makes the concept of “measurement” in Barad’s agential realism applicable also outside the scientific laboratory - as Joseph Rouse has remarked: “Any causal intra-action is implicitly a measurement in Barad’s sense” (Rouse, 2004, 158, n8). This means that Barad’s theorizing about relations, relata, and phenomena has relevance also for extra-scientific intra-activity, and I suggest that all perceptions can be considered as measurements in this broad sense. The agential cut enacting a resolution of an inherent indeterminacy is to be understood as a measurement that actualizes a possible aspect of reality.

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are no enduring entities existing before and independently of the relational whole in which they partake.

The measurement (the perception) does not *create* the "object"; it is not the human subject that measures the world into existence. Heidegger's remark that "the actuality of what is perceptible as such does not lie in enactment of perception" points to the importance to discriminate between the actuality of perceptibility and the actualization through perception (Heidegger, 1995, 172). Through our perceptions/measurements we (and other forms of existence) actualize some of the World's possibilities. A measurement does not measure something non-existent into existence; it actualizes one of the existing possibilities of the perceptible.

To Barad, phenomena are "neither individual entities, nor mental impressions, but entangled material practices" (Barad, 2007, 55f), a position that comes close to Dewey's understanding of the object (referred to above) as an "unfractured observation", which is neither existing separately apart from any observation, nor existing only in our head "in presumed independence of what is observed" (Dewey, 1949, 131).

## 8. Getting the referent right

Barad means that the concept of phenomena makes it possible to "get the referent right"; the objective referent being the *phenomenon* (in the sense here explained), and not a pre-existing object. The relationality that the wave-particle-dualism bears witness to, does not concern a particular aspect or property of nature, but, in Barad's words: "the very nature of nature". It is a question of ontology:

nature's lack of a fixed essence is essential to what it is. That is [...] nature is an intra-active becoming (where 'intra-action' is not the classical comforting concept of 'interaction' but rather entails the very disruption of the metaphysics of individualism that holds that there are discrete objects with inherent characteristics).

Barad 2007, 422, n15

In a relational understanding of the concept of "phenomena", phenomena are ontologically primitive relations relations without pre-existing relata, thus the relata are not prior to the relation, they emerge through it, and they are *in* and simultaneous *with* the phenomena.

## 9. A viable alternative to combat absolutism

While Margolis stresses the need for an integration of ontic and epistemic internalism with an ontic externalism, according to which there is

some independent reality, this idea of independency (mind-independency and/or context-independency) has no place in a relationalist perspective. As stated by Bohr in his above mentioned answer to the challenge posed by Einstein, Podolsky and Rosen, there *are* no independent or separate pre-existing properties "out there", before or independently of its being intra-actively articulated in and through a phenomenon, of which the agencies of observation are an inseparable part. And it is only to phenomena thus engendered that "the term 'physical reality' can be properly attached" (Barad, 2007, 127; Bohr 1935, 700).

In my view Margolis' internal relativism is an interesting effort to reconcile realism and relativism, however, it is ultimately flawed by holding on to the dichotomy that Putnam once declared as "utterly indefensible", the one "between what the world is like independent of any local perspective and what is projected by us" (Putnam, 1990, 170). As I have tried to show above, Barad's stance is not tantamount to a relativist anti-realism. Her relational agential realism represents a viable alternative to combat absolutism without giving up the possibility of objectivity. It offers a relationalism that not so much reconciles as provides resources to transcend the realism-relativism-debate by renouncing the ideas of separateness and context-independency, using intra-action as its key concept.

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# Pragmatism as an attitude

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The preoccupation of experience with things which are coming (are now coming, not just to come) is obvious to any one whose interest in experience is empirical. Since we live forward; since we live in a world where changes are going on whose issue means our weal or woe; since every act of ours modifies these changes and hence is fraught with promise, or charged with hostile energies—what should experience be but a future implicated in a present!

John Dewey (1917, 49)

## 1. Introduction

When we speak of pragmatism as a philosophical doctrine, what sort of school of thought are we referring to? For Charles Sanders Peirce, the founding father of the tradition and the self-acclaimed coiner of the term itself, pragmatism was first and foremost a *theory* according to which, "the rational purport of a word or other expression, lies exclusively in its conceivable bearing upon the conduct of life" (Peirce, 1905b, 332). To understand fully the conception of any expression, we should thus strip it to all those experimental phenomena which the affirmation of the concept could imply, and understand that there is "*absolutely nothing more in it*" (Peirce, 1905b, 332). This way of analyzing the meaning of a concept was for Peirce what pragmatism was all about. Growing tired of the way the term he had introduced "gets abused in merciless ways", he even renamed this doctrine into 'pragmaticism' in order to save it from kidnappers (Peirce, 1905b, 334–335). If we follow Peirce, pragmatism is

thus “merely a method of ascertaining the meanings of hard words and of abstract concepts” (Peirce, 1907, 400)—and nothing else.

Accordingly, pragmatism is more often than not associated with its theory—or rather theories—of meaning and truth. Peirce’s maxim of pragmatism is traditionally viewed as the starting point of the pragmatist movement, and it inspired William James to formulate his famous argument according to which any idea “which we can ride”, which is useful for our purposes, is “true *instrumentally*” (James 1907, 28). Despite the significant differences between James’ and Peirce’s conceptions of meaning and truth, pragmatism is often viewed as primarily epistemological project that aims to reduce the meaning of a concept in one way or another into its practical consequences. This is especially true of the non-pragmatist philosophers who often are surprisingly unwilling to examine pragmatism anywhere beyond this point.

But there is also another way of viewing pragmatism that does not associate it with any specific theories about truth or the nature of reality but rather with a certain kind of attitude expressed in one’s philosophical inquiry. James, Dewey and even Peirce all express opinions according to which they see a certain attitude to be the essential element in pragmatist philosophy. In his lecture on *What pragmatism means*, James (1907) primarily speaks of pragmatism as an attitude, and as a method for settling philosophical disputes. For him pragmatism is first a method and only secondly “a genetic theory of what is meant by truth” (James, 1907, 32). And pragmatism as a method means “no particular results”, but “only an attitude of orientation” that lies “in the midst of our theories, like a corridor in a hotel” (James, 1907, 27). Whatever specific problems pragmatists are puzzling over or whatever theories they are supporting in their individual hotel rooms, they nevertheless must pass through the corridor of pragmatist attitude. According to James then, the attitude—and not any specific doctrine or theory—is what lies at the core of pragmatism and unites different pragmatists.

This reading of James finds support in Dewey, who takes this attitude, or “temper of mind”, to be the most essential element of pragmatism for James (Dewey, 1908, 85). And Dewey himself echoes James’ approach by regarding “pragmatism as primarily a method”, and treating “the account of ideas and their truth and of reality somewhat incidentally so far as the discussion of them serves to exemplify or enforce the method” (Dewey, 1908, 86). So Dewey also makes it clear that pragmatism for him is primarily a method or an attitude.

Also some secondary sources have come to suggest that it was a certain attitude that united different pragmatism. Louis Menand, in his book *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America*, argued that what the four pragmatists—Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., William James, Charles Peirce, and John Dewey—shared was a common attitude towards ideas (Menand, 2001, xi). Thus it seems that one possible way to conceive pragmatism is to look at it as an attitude. Accordingly, my purpose in this article is to make sense of this attitude that is said to be peculiar to pragmatism; to investigate what kind of attitude the pragmatists are referring to when they speak of *the pragmatist attitude*.

Before going to the actual content of this attitude I want to emphasize that I am not claiming that seeing pragmatism as an attitude is the only way to conceive pragmatism. The individual philosophers under the umbrella of pragmatism are so various and equipped with so different attitudes towards philosophy, humanity, nature of inquiry, and reality (see Haack, 2004), that it would be a futile task to try to convince my fellow colleagues that it is an attitude—and one specific attitude for that matter—that unites them all. As there seems to be as many pragmatisms as there are pragmatists<sup>1</sup> it is probable that there doesn't exist any necessary or sufficient group of criteria for pragmatism. Pragmatism might as well turn out to be a broad church of differing attitudes and theories that carry family resemblances (Wittgenstein, 1953), without there necessary being any single doctrine that all pragmatists would be willing to sign.

Nevertheless, I aim to formulate one version of what this attitude behind pragmatism could be based on my reading of some key texts of the pragmatist tradition. In particular, I have chosen to concentrate on four writings, which emerged at a time when pragmatism had just started to gain prominence, and which explicitly aim to define pragmatism: Peirce's (1905b) article *What pragmatism is*, James' (1907) chapter *What pragmatism means* in the book *Pragmatism—A new name for some old ways of thinking*, Dewey's (1908) essay *What does pragmatism mean by practical?*, and Schiller's (1907) article *The Definition of Pragmatism and Humanism* in the book *Studies in Humanism*. Schiller might be a less obvious choice than the other three, but since both Peirce and James approvingly refer to Schiller in their own treatments of pragmatism, he seems to be a thinker worth including in this debate. Together these four articles published in the span

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<sup>1</sup> The phrase originates from Max Meyer's (1908, p. 326) pen. Since then it has been used countless times to characterize the diversity of thinking labeled as pragmatism (see for example Haack, 1996; Pihlström, 1996, pp. 9–10).

of couple of years and partially in direct response to each other represent an important historical dialogue where what we have come to call the pragmatist tradition was carved out.

## 2. The pragmatism for pragmatists—Peirce, James, and Dewey

I'll start this endeavor with a short outline of how the classical pragmatists, Peirce, James, and Dewey, come to define pragmatism. This provides the basis upon which the subsequent discussion about pragmatist attitude is built.

Peirce, as already discussed in the introduction, sees pragmatism first and foremost as a theory about the meaning of concepts where the "complete definition of the concept" comes from "all the conceivable experimental phenomena which the affirmation or denial of a concept could imply" (Peirce, 1905b, 332). Even though the label *pragmatism* was not used in print at that time, the doctrine was according to Peirce (1905a 346) captured into a maxim already in 1878 (often referred to as the *maxim of pragmatism*):

Consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object.

Peirce, 1878, 132

However, although pragmatism as a doctrine is for Peirce explicitly tied up with his theory of meaning, this is not all there is to pragmatism (or pragmaticism as he comes to call it):

The bare definition of pragmaticism could convey no satisfactory comprehension of it to the most apprehensive of minds, but requires the commentary to be given below. Moreover, this definition takes no notice of one or two other doctrines without the previous acceptance (or virtual acceptance) of which pragmaticism itself would be a nullity.

Peirce, 1905b, 335

In other words, Peirce states that one can't adapt his doctrine of pragmaticism without already having accepted certain basic premises that can thus be seen in this sense as more fundamental than the doctrine itself. What then are these basic premises that Peirce refers to? He states that "they might all be included under the vague maxim, 'Dismiss make-believes.'" (Ibid., 335). This means that we should not accept any premises as given or puzzle ourselves with metaphysical 'truth.' Instead, "all you

have any dealings with are your doubts and beliefs, with the course of life that forces new beliefs upon you and gives you power to doubt old beliefs." (Ibid.,336). In other words, philosopher is in no position to step outside experiencing and be in contact with any eternal truths. Philosophical inquiry has to take place within one's situational life. Furthermore, the philosopher can't rely on any *a priori* givens that would provide a solid ground from which to set out on one's philosophical inquiry:

In truth, there is but one state of mind from which you can 'set out', namely, the very state of mind in which you actually find yourself at the time you do 'set out,'—a state in which you are laden with an immense mass of cognition already formed. Peirce, 1905b, 336

Furthermore, Peirce also tells us that before there was pragmatism as a theory, there was his "mind molded by his life in the laboratory", with led to the development of "the experimentalist's mind" (Peirce, 1905b, 331).<sup>2</sup> In generating pragmatism as a theory he was simply "endeavoring [...] to formulate what he so approved" (Ibid, 332). In other words, there was first the experimentalists way of thinking, which "the experimentalist himself can hardly be fully aware of" (Ibid, 331), which Peirce then attempted to formulate into a theory. So although Peirce wants to reserve the word pragmatism (or pragmaticism) for the theory, he is aware that there are certain attitudes or ways of thinking that underlie such theory.

William James, in turn, grants that Peirce's formulation of the maxim of pragmatism is the foundation for pragmatism (James, 1907, 23). He sees this as primarily "a method for settling metaphysical disputes": "The pragmatic method in such cases is to try to interpret each notion by tracing its respective practical consequences. What difference would it practically make to any one if this notion rather than that notion were true?" (Ibid, 23)

James acknowledges the double meaning of the word *pragmatism*. It has come to be used to refer to a certain theory of truth, but also to a certain attitude. The theory of truth is derived from the pragmatist method and sees truth as a process that is anchored in the concrete difference its being true makes in actual lives (Ibid., 88–9). However, here we concentrate on James' other dimension of pragmatism, where it is seen as a "familiar attitude in philosophy" that "does not stand for any special results. It is a method only." (Ibid., 25.) Different pragmatists can very well arrive at different conclusions—one can be an atheist and another kneel down and

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<sup>2</sup> Peirce is not in these two quotes strictly talking about himself but about experimentalist scientists in general. However, he makes it clear in the text that he as the writer "exemplifies the experimentalist type" (Peirce, 1905b, p. 332).

pray (Ibid., 27)—but what unites them is a certain “attitude of orientation” that James famously defines as follows: “The attitude of *looking away from first things, principles, ‘categories,’ supposed necessities; and of looking towards last things, fruits, consequences, facts*” (James, 1907, 27).

This attitude is contrasted with the attitude of rationalism against which “pragmatism is fully armed and militant” (Ibid., 26). Rationalism seeks final truths, absolutes, and certainties upon which one can rest and that end one’s metaphysical quest. Pragmatism, in contrast, “unstiffens all our theories”, treats them as instruments that are used for certain purposes and that are always open to be molded in the future (Ibid., 26). Pragmatism as an attitude for James is an attitude that denounces all “supposed necessities” (Ibid., 27), accepts the contingency of stream of experiencing, and instead anchors the value of theories, ideas and concepts to their practical bearings in human life.

As regards Dewey, the most explicit discussion about the nature of pragmatism takes place in his article *What does pragmatism mean by practical* (1908), where he takes issue with William James’ (1907) above-discussed book on pragmatism. Dewey acknowledges the dualism inherent in James: James speaks of pragmatism both as a “temper of mind [and] an attitude” but also as a certain theory of truth (Dewey, 1908, 85). Dewey himself decides to “regard pragmatism as primarily a method” treating different theories of truth and reality as more or less incidental outcomes of this method (Ibid., 86). Dewey emphasizes that whatever theories one comes to hold, the key is to have the right attitude towards these theories: “treating conceptions, theories, etc. as working hypotheses” (Ibid., 86). In other words, “pragmatism as attitude represents what Mr. Peirce has happily termed the ‘laboratory habit of mind’ extended into every area where inquiry may fruitfully be carried on” (Ibid., 86). For Dewey, the attitude underlying pragmatism is thus about giving up the hope of finding anything “absolutely permanent, true, and complete” (Ibid., 87), instead remaining always open to change the tools of one’s thinking—concepts, theories and so forth—to accommodate for the experiential requirements of living.

In conclusion, while Peirce is explicit about associating pragmatism with its theory of meaning, he nevertheless admits that certain attitudes underlie this theory and are necessary for the acceptance of the theory. James, in turn, acknowledges that there are two ways to understand pragmatism: “first, a method, and second, a genetic theory of what is meant by truth” (James, 1907, 32). Dewey acknowledges also this dualism, but is explicit about treating the attitude or method of inquiry as primary in pragmatism.

### 3. Schiller's pragmatist humanism

In discussing the doctrines behind his version of pragmatism Peirce claims that "they are included as a part of the pragmatism of Schiller" (Peirce, 1905b, 335), whom he sees as an "admirably clear and brilliant thinker" (Ibid, 334). Peirce also talks approvingly of the way Schiller used the term pragmatism in the essay *Axioms as Postulates*, which Peirce views as a "most remarkable paper" (Ibid, 334)<sup>3</sup>. Despite their surface differences, Peirce and Schiller thus seem to share some basic ways of thinking that unite them. Furthermore, William James, in his preface to *Pragmatism*, recommends for the reader interested in pragmatism Schiller's writings: "Probably the best statements to begin with, however, are F. C. S. Schiller's in his *Studies in Humanism*" (James, 1907, 3). These approving remarks by Peirce and James makes it important to also investigate what Schiller had to say about pragmatism that was so much liked by both writers.

Schiller's version of pragmatism in *The definition of pragmatism and humanism* (1907) starts with an analysis of truth: when an assertion claims truth, "its consequences are always used to test its claim" and these consequences "must be consequences to some one for some purpose" (Ibid., 5). However, it soon expands into a broader analysis of the human condition where it is claimed that "all mental life is purposive" (Ibid.,10) and *actual knowing* is always permeated with interests, purposes, desires and emotions (Ibid.,11). "Human reason is ever gloriously human", as Schiller (Ibid., 11) plainly puts it. However, "this or that formulation" of pragmatism is not as important as the *spirit* behind these claims, which is a "bigger thing" and which Schiller denominates as *Humanism* (Ibid, 12).

Humanism, for Schiller is the simplest of philosophic standpoints: It "is merely the perception that the philosophic problem concerns human beings striving to comprehend a world of human experience by the resources of human minds" (Schiller, 1907, 12).

In other words, Schiller claims that as human beings we are always embedded within human experiencing and thus our philosophical inquiry also has to take place within and is constrained by this experiencing. Schiller sees this as an "obvious truism", because "if man may not presume his own nature in his reasonings about his experience, wherewith, pray, shall he reason?" (Ibid, 12). Humanism is thus just the claim that

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<sup>3</sup> In a letter to Schiller, Peirce even states that Schiller's philosophy is "at any rate in its conclusions nearer my own than does any other man's." (12 May 1905, quoted in Pietari-nen, 2011)

there is no escape for humans from their human condition and thus it must be taken into account in what man may capable of doing through inquiry. In the end, it is this humanistic spirit that is most fundamental for Schiller as pragmatism as a theory is just "a special application of Humanism to the theory of knowledge" (Ibid, 16). In another text he notes that this kind of *humanism* is an "attitude of thought", which he knows "to be habitual" in both his own and in William James's thinking (Schiller, 1903, xvi), thus emphasizing that it is precisely an underlying attitude for philosophical inquiry rather than a polished theory that he shares with the other pragmatists.

#### 4. Pragmatist attitude as a way to understand the nature of human inquiry

Based on the above remarks we can generalize that pragmatism is a way of approaching philosophical questions that can be applied to any area of philosophical inquiry. It is first and foremost a method and only secondarily a theory. And what seems to make an inquiry pragmatist is its forward-looking nature and its denouncement of any absolutes and givens. This focus on beliefs, theories and concepts as tools guiding actions rather than something objective and given is what seems to unite all four pragmatists discussed above. Pragmatists come to emphasize human inquiry as a process that takes place within actual living and thus is always constrained by the human condition. Accordingly, perhaps the best modern definition of this attitude is made by Richard Bernstein who characterizes pragmatism as follows: "A nonfoundational, self-corrective conception of human inquiry based upon an understanding of how human agents are formed by, and actively participate in shaping, normative social practices" (Bernstein, 2010, x).

Pragmatism as an attitude is thus a way of conducting philosophical inquiry that emphasizes its ongoing, ever-evolving nature. As an attitude of inquiry, pragmatism seems to have two essential characters. First is the attitude of *fallibilism*, according to which "we cannot in any way reach perfect certitude nor exactitude. We never can be absolutely sure of anything" (CP 1.147, c. 1897). Instead, our knowledge "swims, as it were, in a continuum of uncertainty and of indeterminacy" (CP 1.171, c. 1897). James picks up this theme in talking how pragmatism is opposed to any kind of "divine necessity" and thus "unstiffens all our theories" (James, 1907, 28, 26) and Dewey emphasizes how pragmatism as a method treats

conceptions and theories "as working hypotheses" (Dewey, 1908, 86). Similarly, Schiller emphasizes how all actual knowing must be understood as instrumental instead of believing it ever to be 'pure' or 'absolute' (Schiller, 1907, 11). This abandonment of the search for absolute knowledge and final truths is thus what all four pragmatists seem to be firmly committed to.

The centrality of fallibilism is also visible when we look at what doctrines pragmatism is set against. James sees as its primary enemy *rationalism*, which seeks to find "objective truth", or an "absolute correspondence of our thoughts with an equally absolute reality" (James, 1907, 32). From thinkers in search for absolutes, pragmatists have suffered "a hailstorm of contempt and ridicule" (Ibid, 32). Dewey points out that this heated resistance might be due to basic differences in philosophical temperament rather than mere disagreement about doctrines<sup>4</sup>. Pragmatism is a threat to those who have "the feeling that the world of experience is so unstable, mistaken, and fragmentary that it must have an absolutely permanent, true, and complete ground" (Dewey, 1908, 87). Schiller also contrasts his pragmatism with those who "dream of a truth that shall be absolutely true, self-testing and self-dependent, icily exercising an unrestricted sway over a submissive world" (Schiller, 1907, 9). More generally, the start of pragmatism as a philosophical movement has been located to this radical critique of the "spirit of Cartesianism" which is dominated by a search for indubitable foundations in a world where there are sharp dichotomies between mental and physical, and subject and object (Bernstein, 2010, IX). According to Bernstein, Peirce started a "fundamental change of philosophical orientation" with his attack on Cartesianism, in which philosophy attempts to secure and make objective its foundations by starting from something that is absolute and that we can be certain about (Bernstein, 2010, 19; see especially Peirce, 1868). So all four pragmatists seem to agree that all our convictions are "plastic", "even the oldest truths" (James, 1907, 31).

The second basic attitude underlying pragmatist inquiry is related to the aims of inquiry, given that it can no longer end in absolute certainty. Pragmatists anchor the value of inquiry into its prospective ability to influence the conduct of life. This is visible in Peirce's maxim of pragmatism where the rational purport of a word "lies exclusively in its conceivable

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<sup>4</sup> Schiller makes essentially the same point in stating that the dislike that pragmatism and humanism have met is "psychological in origin", arising from "ascetics of the intellectual world", "who have become too enamoured of the artificial simplifications" (Schiller, 1907, 14).

bearing upon the conduct of life" (Peirce, 1905b, 332). It is also at the heart of James' famous definition of pragmatism as the attitude of looking towards last things, fruits, and consequences. Dewey echoes the same idea in stating that "ideas are essentially intentions (plans and methods), and [...] what they, as ideas, ultimately intend is *prospective*" (Dewey, 1908, 86), and Schiller captures the same spirit in stating that "the meaning of a rule lies in its application" and that knowing is always purposive (Schiller, 1907, 11). Although much could be said about the differences in the exact definitions and ways these pragmatists aim to anchor the value of knowledge to future actions, the spirit of future-orientedness and pragmatic value of knowledge is strongly present in all. Thus Peirce seems to be right when he stated that all pragmatists will agree that their method is no other than the "experimental method" of sciences, which itself is but a particular application of the older logical rule: "By their fruits ye shall know them" (Peirce, 1907, 401).

Pragmatism as an attitude for inquiry thus seems to be essentially about the suspicion against any absolute and necessary principles that would be more basic than our human experience, and the forward-looking characteristic of pragmatist thinking that looks primarily at the consequences. This is the attitude that pragmatists see that could—and should—be applied to a wide number of questions, in fact "into every area where inquiry may fruitfully be carried on" (Dewey, 1908, 86), and "to every concern of man" (Schiller, 1907, 16). As the history of pragmatism has shown, this attitude could lead to highly different *conclusions* and *theories* as regards even basic questions about the nature of reality, but what unites different pragmatists seem to be the way they approach these questions. Pragmatism attitude thus can be summarized as consisting of "an attitude of orientation that looks to outcomes and consequences" (Dewey, 1908, 85) and an "idea about ideas" as tools (Menand, 2001, xi).

## 5. Human condition for Pragmatists

To truly appreciate the attitude behind pragmatism and pragmatist inquiry, I feel that we still need to take one further step backwards. I see that the attitudes described above are themselves based on a certain underlying understanding of the human condition that the pragmatists share. The birth of pragmatism can be traced back to the shift of western worldview from medieval way of seeing the world as a static and stable constellation, towards an attitude that sees the world and humanity in progressive

movement. Dewey acknowledges that this sort of worldview is behind the birth and success of pragmatism: "It is beyond doubt that the progressive and unstable character of American life and civilization has facilitated the birth of philosophy which regards the world as being in continuous formation, where there is still place for indeterminism, for the new and for a real future" (Dewey, 1925, 12). Accordingly, we need to look more carefully into how pragmatists come to understand the human condition within which the pragmatist inquiry takes place.

In particular, I will concentrate on three essential characteristics of human condition that pragmatism seems to presuppose. In calling these characteristics attitudes, rather than theories or beliefs, I am drawing attention to the fact that these beliefs are what we find at the beginning of the philosophical journey of a pragmatist. They are not the results of a rigorous philosophical inquiry, but rather the backbones supporting such inquiry. They are, to use James' words, the "more or less dumb sense of what life honestly and deeply means" that we have acquired through living; they are our "individual way of just seeing and feeling the total push and pressure of the cosmos" (James, 1907, 5). In other words, they are what constitutes a certain way of approaching the world in a philosophical manner or the intellectual conditions through which one's philosophical inquiry is made. Therefore, it is not my task to try to prove these attitudes here<sup>5</sup>, as they are the very attitudes through which one judges certain philosophical positions as good or bad in the first place (see here Pihlström, 1996, 393). The aim is rather to become more conscious about them, and through that act of reflection, to start taking greater responsibility (see Dewey, 1908, 97) for them.

### 5.1 Human experiencing as the starting point

We are embedded within a stream of experiencing. Taking this statement seriously is what I see to be at the heart of the pragmatist attitude or *Weltanschauung*. James speaks of "stream of experience" or the "flux

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<sup>5</sup> This does not mean that these attitudes would be completely arbitrary. I see these attitudes as fruitful from both a philosophical and extra-philosophical point of view (and superior to many other attitudes in this regard). But showing this to be the case would require a lengthy discussion. From a philosophical point of view, the attitudes are shown to be sound by looking at the soundness of the philosophical systems and theories built upon them. So this would require a comparison of the pragmatist tradition as a whole against some other philosophical traditions. From an extra-philosophical point of view (see here Zackariasson, 2002, 75), this would require showing that these attitudes lead to better outcomes in the actual human conduct than some other attitudes, also an enormous task.

of our sensations" (James, 1907, 66, 107) as the place within which our inquiry takes place and towards which it aims to contribute. We can never escape this stream of experiences; to be alive means to experience. As human beings we are bound by the human condition, which means that all we ever have are our particular experiences.

How should we understand human experiencing then? Building on Dewey (1917), we might say that "experience is primarily a process of undergoing" (Dewey, 1917, 49); it is a temporal and ever-evolving stream. Dewey emphasizes that as long as we treat it as "primarily a knowledge-affair" (Dewey, 1917, 47); a mere passive setting in which the world is reflected in front of us like a movie, and we merely sit and acquire knowledge from it, we are not really capturing what human experiencing is alike. Instead, we should understand that human experiencing is about "the intercourse of a living being with its physical and social environment" (Dewey, 1917, 47). As living beings, our relation to the stream of experience is essentially active. Hence, I prefer to talk about human *experiencing*, not human *experience*. This makes it more visible that experiencing is an active process.

Schiller, in his humanism, emphasizes that this experiencing is the only starting point that human inquiry can have: "The only natural starting-point, from which we can proceed in every direction" is the "world of man's experience as it has come to seem to him" (Schiller, 1903, xvii). For him, this is a "philosophic attitude" that takes "human experience as the clue to the world of human experience" rather than "wasting thought upon attempts to construct experience *a priori*" (Schiller, 1903, xix-xx).

Even Peirce seems to think approvingly of this experiential starting point behind pragmatism. In a letter to James in 1904 Peirce wrote: "The humanistic element of pragmatism is very true and important and impressive"<sup>6</sup> (quoted in Houser, 1998, xxvii), and in a letter to Schiller Peirce acknowledged that pragmatism is only "a particular offshoot of humanism" and adds that it is the route through which he himself found pragmatism (Peirce MS L390 c. 1905). In another text he states that pragmatism is "a sort of instinctive attraction for living facts" (Peirce, 1903, 158). Fur-

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<sup>6</sup> Revealingly, the quote continues as follows: "but I do not think that the doctrine can be *proved* in that way." We are well aware of Peirce's efforts to prove his pragmatism (see e.g. Peirce 1907) and this might explain why Peirce didn't write so much about this humanism or experientialism. Even though he here clearly approves it, from his point of view it doesn't seem to be an area of pragmatism that he is interested in, as it doesn't offer the potential for a proof.

thermore, and as already noted, when Peirce discussed the background doctrines behind his pragmatism he made it clear that there is only state of mind from which one can set out: "the very state of mind in which you actually find yourself at the time you do 'set out,'" which is already laden with an "immense mass of cognition already formed" (Peirce, 1905b, 336).

Thinking and philosophical inquiry must start from particular human experiencing, from the particular worldview that we are already occupying, because, in essence, that is something "of which you cannot divest yourself if you would" (Peirce, 1905b, 336). The ongoing stream of experiencing thus is the place where philosophical inquiry for a pragmatist starts from; our particular experiences are all the material we have upon which to start building anything. Human experiencing is also where the inquiry ends; it is our human experiencing that is transformed through our philosophical and other forms of activity. Experiencing itself must here be understood as an active process of exploration within an embodied stream of experience in which the more cognitive dimensions are just one part. Experiencing thus involves all forms of sensory and bodily sensations as well as all possible modes of thoughts and feelings. It includes our slightest wishes, recalled memories, dreams, as well as the feelings that arise when we read a particularly interesting philosophical article. Taking seriously human experiencing, and acknowledging it as an *inescapable* starting point for all philosophizing as well as for other human activities, is what could be named as the core of the pragmatist attitude. A philosopher who is able to appreciate this as the backbone of any inquiry is already more or less a pragmatist. And acknowledging this experiencing as the inescapable starting and end point of inquiry is already almost subscribing to the pragmatist attitudes of fallibilism and forward-looking nature of inquiry. Pragmatist attitude of inquiry thus could be seen to be arising from the pragmatist acknowledgement of the human condition as experiencing.

## 5.2 Three characteristics of human experiencing

A more careful look at this human experiencing reveals that embedded in our understanding of it are three elements that are essential for characterizing its nature: Firstly, we have a sense of influencing our future experiences. Secondly, we do care about the nature of these experiences; some of them are more desirable than others. And thirdly, our experiencing is not free but constrained.

Firstly then, our mode of being within the stream of experience is active. "All our thinking and all our living seem to overflow" with "the experience of activity" (Schiller, 1907, 11). We are not mere passive observers of life, but a sense of acting within it is always present. Peirce notes how this active relation to our actions is part of the background doctrines on which pragmatism is based on: "Among the things which the reader, as a rational person, does not doubt, is that he not merely has habits, but also can exert a measure of self-control over his future actions" (Peirce, 1905b, 337).

To put it boldly, as human beings we are thrown into a world in which we need to act; we are inescapably creatures of action. Dewey emphasizes that ours is an engaged organic life, in which we actively engage with "a universe of experience" (Dewey, 1938, 68). The stream of experience unstoppably unfolds around us, so even if we shut ourselves up in the most clam-like fashion, we are still doing something, "our passivity is an active attitude" (Dewey, 1917, 49). We are "obliged to struggle—that is to say, to employ the direct support given by the environment in order indirectly to effect changes that would not otherwise occur" (Dewey, 1917, 48). Enactors of our human condition, we never are neutral observers of the world but engaged in it from the very beginning. As Hans Joas has put it: "Action [...] is the way in which human beings exist in the world" (Joas, 1999).

Secondly, a certain sense of care for how our lives develop—for how the stream of experience is shaped in the future—seems to be something we must also regard as part of our human condition. Being active already presumes this kind of caring: "Action cannot exist without the immediate being of feeling on which to act" (Peirce, 1905b, 345). Without some form of interest in what happens, we would not have the necessary motivation to exercise our agency—or to engage in any inquiry in the first place. Peirce thus acknowledges the "inseparable connection between rational cognition and rational purpose" (Peirce, 1905b, 333). When we recognize ideas as intentions (Dewey, 1908, 86) or emphasize their usefulness (James, 1907, 28), we are already assuming some human purposes that they serve. These interests and purposes color our experience of reality as essentially normative; some developments we judge as good or bad based on our commitments. We don't live in complete indifference; if we would, this would make us entirely unable to act, because some forms of preferences—whether implicit or explicit—are a precondition for anything called *choice* or *acting* to take place. As human beings, we thus have a *sense of agency*

combined with a *care* about how things develop in our lives and in the world around us. "Experience, in other words, is a matter of *simultaneous* doings and sufferings" (Dewey, 1917, 49).

Inherent in the above conditions of human experiencing is already the third one, the fact that things develop independent of our conceptions of them. We don't have a total control of our experiencing, or even what we believe in. There is a certain "Outward Clash" that molds our conceptions of the world (see also Bernstein, 2010, 46; Peirce, 1885, 233). Peirce describes this part of the human condition as follows:

Experience is that determination of belief and cognition generally which the course of life has forced upon man. One may lie about it; but one cannot escape the fact that some things are forced upon his cognition. There is an element of brute force, existing whether you opine it exists or not

CP 2.138, c. 1902

James acknowledges this outward clash in describing how flux of our sensations are "forced upon us, coming we know not whence," and over which we seem not to have too much control (James, 1907, 107).

An essential element of the human condition thus seems to be this sense of brute force, sensations taking place that we can't control. In other words, our experiencing is not free, but constrained. As part of our experiencing is a "brute compulsiveness" (Bernstein, 2010, 52); we cannot help but experience certain things. Acknowledgement of this resistance to our projects and conceptions separates pragmatism from pure idealism. For example, Peirce regards as "the capital error of Hegel" the fact that "he almost altogether ignores the Outward Clash" (Peirce, 1885, 233).

The acknowledgement of this outward clash as part of human experiencing thus arguably unites different pragmatists. What they make out of it, however, is one of the main separating lines between, for example, Peirce and Schiller. Peirce was a self-proclaimed believer in scholastic realism (see especially Peirce, 1905a), while for Schiller, philosophy is always "the theory of *a* life, and not of life in general", and accordingly the metaphysics for two men with different fortunes and histories ought to be different and based on what their "personal life affords" (Schiller, 1907, 18). This is something that Peirce opposed. One of the main reasons for him to introduce the concept of *pragmaticism* was to separate it from the pragmatism of James and Schiller, which he saw to imply "'the will to believe,' the mutability of truth, the soundness of Zeno's refutation of motion, and pluralism generally" (Peirce, 1911, 457).

We cannot here go deeper into this ontological debate about the merits of different doctrines about the nature of reality in pragmatism (for a discussion about them, see e.g. Pihlström, 1996). However, two general points can be made: First, pragmatist emphasis on experiencing does not automatically imply solipsism or pure idealism. Peirce saw realism to be a direct consequence of his pragmatism (Peirce, 1905a). When different investigators apply the pragmatic method of fixing beliefs through experiences "a force outside of themselves" leads them towards "one and the same conclusion", and the "object represented in this opinion" is what is real (Peirce, 1878, 138–139). Dewey also couldn't understand why pragmatism is accused of subjectivism or idealism, "since the object with its power to produce effects is assumed" (Dewey, 1908, 88). Rather than being opposed to realism, (at least certain) pragmatists aim to go beyond the false dichotomy between realism and idealism by understanding even realism through experience and inquiry. But as said, here we can only notify this, but have not space to elaborate the issue (see Martela 2015).

Second, pragmatism can lead to different ontological conclusions: to Peirce's realism, to Schiller's quite solipsistic view (see Schiller, 1909)<sup>7</sup>, or even going "beyond realism and antirealism" as Dewey is said to have done (Hildebrand, 2003). But these conclusions are what we find at the end of inquiry. Reality for Peirce is not something we can base our investigation on; on the contrary what is real can only be found in the (ideal) *end of inquiry, through* inquiry. Thus we are reminded of James metaphor of pragmatism as a corridor through which everyone must pass before reaching widely different conclusions. And the corridor seems to be about the acknowledgement of human experiencing as the starting point.

I have thus argued that the human condition inherent in pragmatism acknowledges that our way of experiencing involves sense of activity, purposefulness and resistance. Taken together, these three dimensions of our relation to experience amount to an understanding that the human condition means an active interest in developing the stream of experience in certain directions. Our primary interest as regards the world is about attempting to navigate our way within it's constraints as best as we can. Taking seriously human interest (e.g. Schiller, 1907, 5)—the fact that as hu-

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<sup>7</sup> In his article "Solipsism", Schiller aims to argue that it is almost impossible to escape solipsism and many who consider themselves realists stand on solipsistic ground. However, humanism can easily refute solipsism: "He is not a solipsist, because he chooses to believe in the existence of others" as this is found out to be a useful belief (Schiller, 1909, 180), an argument that no doubt wouldn't satisfy many realists.

man beings we are interested in and attempt to influence the unfolding of the stream of experience—is really what makes pragmatism *pragmatism*. As James (1907, 23) notes, the term is derived from Greek *πρᾶγμα*, “meaning action, from which our words ‘practice’ and ‘practical’ come.” Anchoring human life, human inquiries, and even philosophy itself, to human purposes while acknowledging the fallibilism of these inquiries is thus the pervasive attitude of pragmatism. In other words, pragmatism claims that our relation to the world is primarily practical rather than theoretical. As Putnam (1994 152) notes, this thesis that “in a certain sense, practice is primary in philosophy”, is one of the theses which “became the basis of the philosophies of Peirce, and above all of James and Dewey.” And as I have tried to argue, this thesis arises from a certain background understanding of the human condition. Accordingly, pragmatism as a theory or mode of inquiry appeals mainly to those who have come to embrace this kind of *Weltanschauung*, while being unattractive to others who want to escape from the messiness of actual living, into a more static, rigid and ‘pure’ worldview. As Sami Pihlström puts it: “To philosophers who are not at all interested in the contingent fact that we happen to be humans existing in irreducibly human situations, located in a human world, the pragmatist does not have very much to say” (Pihlström, 1996, 17).

## 6. Conclusion

What I have offered in this article is an understanding of pragmatism that emphasizes the underlying sense of us as creatures of action embedded in a constant stream of experiencing. The appreciation of the active nature of the human condition here is an attitude; a way of approaching philosophical questions, other forms of inquiry, as well as our life more generally. It is an attitude, or habit of thought, through which to grasp reality, and what it means to be a human agent in this reality. This pragmatist understanding of human condition starts from an emphasis on experiencing that is understood to be active, involve valuing and purposes, and constrained by an outward clash. From this background arises the understanding of human inquiry that has two essential characteristics that lie at the very heart of the pragmatist attitude. First, inquiry is always fallible and unable to reach perfect certitude or absolute knowledge. Second, inquiry is future-oriented, it is judged by its fruits.

I suggest that it is this *attitude* that unites different pragmatists more than any explicit *theoretical doctrine*. However, in saying this I do not deny

that many pragmatists clearly connect pragmatism with a certain doctrine, in particular with Peirce's maxim of pragmatism. Along with James and Dewey I acknowledge that there are (at least) two different ways to understand pragmatism. One can either associate it with a certain doctrine or theory (of meaning or truth), or one can look at it more broadly as a certain kind of attitude. In this article I simply have wanted to concentrate on the latter understanding of pragmatism, aiming to figure out what kind of attitude would unite pragmatists, in particular Peirce, James, Dewey and Schiller.

In the end, the question of whether one wants to associate pragmatism with its underlying attitudes, or with the more strictly defined methods or theories to be applied in one's inquiry, is a matter of preference. For someone with the Peircean wish for "philosophy to be a strict science, passionless and severely fair" (CP 5.537, c. 1905), it is surely more easily acceptable to take something exact and explicitly stated as the point of reference for one's philosophical identity. For someone who has a more holistic view of philosophy as embodying the whole of human being, it might be more natural to associate oneself with the underlying attitudes. It is notable that both might sign to the same basic attitudes, the difference being only in the fact that one of them is anchoring his or her philosophical position to these attitudes, while the other identifies with some more explicit theories that are built upon them. This choice might be a matter of philosophical temperament, but the least we can say is that conceiving pragmatism to be about committing to certain attitudes is a genuine possibility—especially as these attitudes seem to operate as the background upon which the more explicit theories are built on.

Staying true to this fallible pragmatist attitude throughout one's philosophical journey is certainly not an easy task. It is so much easier to start the philosophical inquiry from an established framework of given premises and accepted ways of proceeding. Starting from some solid ground—from something that is Given—means that one can in the best case reach conclusions that have the same sense of firmness. But the path from an indeterminate situation to more determinate, yet fallible, pieces of knowledge is much harder to walk (see Dewey, 1938). This *more humane* approach to philosophy may not be as exact, analytic or confident as the more idealized way of doing philosophy. But I see it to be a more honest way of doing philosophy, and less an intellectual escape from the particularities of human life. It means embracing the uncertainty and still advancing, animated by the hope that one has the possibility to make

a difference through one's thinking; to cultivate the map that is one's way of navigating through the grand experience that is called life.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The author would like to thank Lauri Järvillehto, Sami Pihlström, Mats Bergman, and the participants of the Helsinki Metaphysical Club for helpful and constructive feedback on earlier versions of this paper.

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PART V

INQUIRY

# On Why's, How's, and What's—Why What's Matter

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## 1. Inquiry: what's the problem?

A pragmatist prides herself in declaring that the *problem* is the essence of inquiry: It is its beginning but also its end when a proposed solution is successful. In the classic doubt-belief theory of inquiry, Charles S. Peirce addresses the *problem* from a behavioural point in that doubts disturb an organism and sets in motion thoughts so as "to attain a state of belief" (CP 5.374). Peirce distinguishes between real or merely feigned doubts/problems: real doubts instigate constructive action in terms of thoughts-activities, while feigned doubts fail to have such consequences (CP 5.376). Such pragmatist insights are important in considering the urgency of problems, i.e. if these propel a mode of action or else are easily discarded.

Problems vary greatly, and for the purpose of discussion I will suggest that there are what's, how's, and why's problems: what's refer to very basic matter as in "what's going on?"; how's refer to relations or how things or elements hang together as in "how do I drive to reach a certain place quickly?" or "how do A and B relate?"; and why's refer to causes or else purposes as in "why do women shun away from Republican vote?" or else "why do you hang on to that man?"<sup>1</sup> Such problems trigger inquiry both in everyday life and in science. The force of problems depends on the context of action, and has to be viewed *in situ*. However, and again for the purpose of thought/discussion, I will here suggest that the how's and

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, I follow Kevelson's (1988) use of the question forms "how's" and "why's" as short forms for "how is" and "why is". The addition "what's" for "what is" is my own.

why's largely depend upon the felt urgency of what's. In asking "what's going on?" or else "what is this really about?", the inquiring person seeks a response to a basic existential/ontological question, as she is in doubt as to the configuration of matter, and thus potentially to her own role in pursuing a course of action. Finding an answer, perhaps of a preliminary kind, the inquiring person can stubbornly pursue her first suggestions (vague perceptions); what's are then transformed by the how's of finding relations and finally by the why's in penetrating the purposes or else the causes "behind"; perhaps instigating new thought/action/seeing in a perpetual motion or else stopping from mere exhaustion. At the end of such inquiry, when we perhaps attain a "state of belief", at least for the moment, we can turn around (like Gertrud Stein on her deathbed in Paris as revealed by her lover Alice B. Toklas) asking once more "What is the question? . . . If there is no question then there is no answer" (Malcolm, 2007, 172).

At the bottom of any belief, in everyday life as in science, there was once a question, although most often forgotten in the present and deeply buried in the thought-habits of generations before us. The urgency of what's questions as relating to profound "matters" (what the real is all about) resides in their power to disturb and to irritate. Such perturbations (to use modern system-language) can set out wholly new action-schemes in exploring what is possible, perhaps also what is reasonable? This text is about the worth of such perturbations/irritations as crucial in critical inquiry.

As a precursor to the thought-actions that I am about to sketch, I will mention two particular texts that have acted as sources of irritation in my own mind for quite some time. The first one is Roberta Kevelson's "How's of why's and why's of how's: Relation of Method and Cause in Inquiry" (Kevelson, 1988), and the second is the recent book by John Levi Martin, *Explanation of Social Action* (2012). I will briefly relate the content of these two texts, as they have caused irritation and consumed thought-energy for quite some time.

## 2. Kevelson on the dialogical structure of why's and how's

In her erudite but also complex text on the relation between How's and Why's governing the logic of inquiry, Kevelson attempts to uncover a family resemblance between the many fragmented disciplines of the scientific system now in use. Her stimulation derives from Peirce's work on *Specu-*

*lative Rhetoric* and on *Methodology*, but she drafts her text by also linking it to modern speech act theory, especially in its original legal version as the basic structure of interrogation, sequencing questions and answers. Her resort is also that of modern functionalist linguistics and the study of natural languages. Her aim is no less than to uncover a very basic structure of thought, here conceived of as action. In so doing she aims to unite the separate sciences and their multiple and diverse methods under a common theme, that of General Inquiry. How's and Why's questions are the arches in this endeavour, while she firmly relegates What's question to a much less prominent place in inquiry. This latter step I find problematic in her otherwise very stimulating text, but I will wait with such criticism until I have introduced some of her own arguments.

According to Kevelson, every idea or belief-system, whether in the sciences or in daily life, rests upon an often depleted question. Her aim is thus similar to that of Michel Foucault (although she works in a very different linguistic universe): an "archaeological" search for the depleted, neglected, forgotten questions that underlie our beliefs. She draws upon the following illustrations (Mathesius model) of theme/rheme in the accumulation of information:<sup>2</sup>

1. a/b = theme/rheme = old/new
2. ab/c = theme/rheme = old/new
3. abc/d = theme/rheme = old/new
4. abcd/e = theme/rheme = old/new

Answers and questions change as we go along in accumulating information, or what we with a more pretentious phrase could call the "growth of knowledge", nevertheless the structure of accumulating information by means of questions and answers remains the same all through the process. The point of the model is to show the continuity that underlies the process of inquiry: the basic question remains all through, although often in an embedded or hidden form. Each stage is a sign (re)presentation of the previous one in an attempt via the *rheme* to add a new piece to the existing argument. The *theme* can be read as a theory or as a discourse to

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<sup>2</sup> Vilém Mathesius (1882–1945) was a member of the Prague linguistic circle, whose work on word order and syntax are considered pioneering. He used the term *theme* (or *topic*) to identify "what the sentence is about". *Enunciation* (or *rheme*) adds new or unknown information to ongoing discourse. ([www.newwordencyclopedia.org/Mathesius](http://www.newwordencyclopedia.org/Mathesius)).

which the process of inquiry seeks to add new information (*rheme*). Kevelson supplies yet another (everyday) illustration of the question/answer sequencing of inquiry in the following discourses:

1. Who knocked at the door? John did. = a/b
2. What does he want? His gloves. = ab/c
3. Where are they? He lost them. = abc/d
4. When? Yesterday. = abcd/e

In order to understand the information in (3), we need to recover all that went before. Having recovered all the questions, we can conclude that "John, who knocked at the door, wanted his gloves which he lost yesterday" (97). We can also agree that all previous fragmented "discourses" (Q/A sequences) only become clear to us as we can see them (re)presented in the final argument. The imaginary of a final argument the end of inquiry is powerful in Peirce's theory of inquiry, although as Kevelson reminds us, Peirce never closed the possibility that a rheme (new information) might again pop up, and propel inquiry to continue: "Do not block the way of inquiry" (CP 1.135).

In recovering the very basic Q/A sequencing underlying inquiry, thus forming a united platform for diverse sciences with their multiple methods, Kevelson proceeds to classify types of questions. She refers to the WH questions as those above: Who, What, Where, When, Where, Which as questions that in principle allow for a *binary* response: Yes or No (truth/falsity). Singling out the special *semantic* structure of How's and Why's as not-binary, she reserves a special role of such questions as *Interpretants*, i.e. they demand the triadic structure that we know from Peirce's three categories: *Firstness*, *Secondness*, and *Thirdness*. If we take a look at the conclusive statement in the above illustration "John who knocked at the door, wanted his gloves which he lost yesterday", we discover that it is composed of various *dyads*: "John knocked at the door"; "he wanted his gloves"; "he lost them yesterday". It is only when we realize the basic triadic relation linking the various dyads into a meaningful *triad* (a whole of sequencing), we reach a final argument answering a basic why-question. The why-question in this case is not binary, it is not true or false, but supplies us with an underlying *reason* for the series of events we have observed to occur.

It is of course possible to translate the triadic relational structure of why's into dyads of empirical inquiry: Was it true or false that John did

what he did in order to recover his gloves? In a detective story, we are as Umberto Eco has shown free to question "the story" based on an accumulation of abductive inferences as in *The Name of the Rose* (1983). John was perhaps only pretending to find his gloves, while his real purpose was quite different: to visit a potential site of criminal action? Nevertheless, while we are free to transform previous Q/A sequences in a perhaps endless course, and opening up inquiry (themes) once again with new spaces (rhemes), the structure of thought and action as a semiotic process is recursive and figures in all speech acts (if they are to be completed).

In Kevelson's presentation, how-questions have the same triadic structure as why-questions in inquiry, but with a central difference: Such questions do not supply underlying reasons for why something occur, but aim at recovering the various steps taken in a chain of events to reach a set goal (solution to a problem). In our illustration above, John took a series of action to secure what he wanted: to find his gloves. How-questions refer to the discrete points in a continuum of action (sequencing) to secure a warranted outcome. As in classic Greek, where *methodos* stands for "finding the way ahead", how-questions recall methods, i.e. the steps taken to reach a goal. As such, the how's are not binary either: they can be more or less satisfactory, i.e. they presume, like the why's, a triadic structure of linking at least two points to a set goal (xyz).

In Kevelson's presentation, the how's and why's, as the title suggests, are intrinsically related to Peirce's theory of inquiry. All how-questions of how parts are or could be related are in the final instance embedded in why-questions, i.e. the underlying purpose of inquiry. Curiously, in Kevelson's text, how-questions can end in a myriad of possibilities as when we start to inquire into "possible worlds": not just what *is* here and now, but also what possibly could become. From such a perspective of "unbounded freedom" of the how's, why-questions act as sobering up devices in reminding the how's of the undercurrent of purported *reasons* underlying any inquiry. Peirce himself refers to the relation between the how's and the why's as governed by the "economy of research" (CP 5.600).

In a similar manner, why's necessarily call out how's on the ground that without such how's as supplying methodical nods, why's can easily end in pure (thought) speculation, thus weakening the spirit of empirical inquiry proper. In the end, there is no hierarchy between why's and how's as they are closely linked in pragmatist inquiry: Indeed, they presuppose one another. Why's secure the interim and ultimate reason(s) of inquiry, while how's explore and test the methodical steps to be pursued in the course of such inquiry.

### 3. Why what's also matter

As noted, Kvelson does not consider What's questions to have a similar status in the logic of inquiry. In her view, such questions relate to *dyads*, as do when, who (or what in English goes under the name of *WH* questions). As far as what's questions are concerned, I want to dispute its exclusion from the triadic category *a priori*. Clearly, what's questions may, as also the why's and the how's, assume many modes of questioning, from very simple to much more complex ones. As illustrations of diverse what's questions, let's consider the following well-known example from a sociological textbook (Sachs, 1974):

- (1) The baby cried                      theme/theme = a/b  
 (2) The mother picked it up      theme/rheme = ab/c

At first glance, we are dealing with two dyadic sentences (of what we can call observational "facts"): a baby is crying, and a woman whom we suppose is the mother picks up (her) child. In both cases, we deal with reports to what's questions: What's going on out there?

In my view, however, there is a distinct difference between the two what's as (2) really is a disguised triad, i.e. it contains an *interpretant* that helps in making sense of the first observation (1). No more information (rhemes) is needed, at least for the time being. In case, our second observation would have been of the following kind: "a woman picks it up", then yet another dyad "sequences" the first observational statement, eventually to be concluded with an *abductive* inference (3) "The woman, who picked up the baby, was its mother". However, the second statement in the above illustration is a contraction, as it already contains an interpretive term "the mother" that helps clarifying what goes on out there. The mother-sign (as a *significant symbol*) purports the observation: it supplies us with a purpose.<sup>3</sup>

In the theme/rheme modelling previously employed, we could say that the new information of rheme (c) resides in the noun of the statement ("the mother"). In the language of Peirce's semiotics, we would say that an "immediate interpretant" is in operation as this is what we "see" is happening. Among competent language users in everyday discourses, such "immediate interpretants" abounds as these help economizing our

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<sup>3</sup> The notion "significant symbol" is from George H. Mead's adaptation of Peirce's semiotic philosophy into modern social psychology (Mead, 1938). Significant symbols arouse similar responses in Ego and Alter, and are thus crucial in coordinating social action.

thoughts-action in making sense of the myriad of observational possibilities that surround us. Such interpretants reduce complexity and helps us to navigate in an otherwise chaotic world. As is well known, Umberto Eco has long employed such interpretive links to construct exciting detective stories. Such links ("it was the mother who picked up the child, or was it?") can in the course of (detective) inquiry also be transformed into "dynamic interpretants" as good starting points in clarifying what goes on. In this latter case, we come close to Kevelson's interpretation of the how's as methodical steps in exploring how the events unfolded: "Was the child picked up with care or in a hurry"? If a child molester rather than the mother were acting at the site, we would perhaps speak of abduction (!) in a criminal sense: the baby was possibly carried away by a stranger, whose status we know nothing of as of yet. A technical inquiry at the site could perhaps reveal *What* actually happened, in better clarifying the relation between the how's and the why's.

My suggestion is that what's questions should be included in the list of complex questions, which are central in the process of inquiry. In Kevelson's revelation of "The How's in Why's, and the Why's in How's", the What's supply the "material ground" (the act of seeing itself) upon which How's and Why's can proceed accordingly. As "immediate interpretant" the what's provide us with a glimpse of the "real"; How's act as "dynamic interpretants" in helping to reveal the details of the matter in the further sequencing of events; Why's are the "final interpretants" that settle the question, until further notice. New information can always unsettle our first determinations, and with Peirce, the *rheme* of a last (final) interpretation can never be completely ruled out.

The triadic structure of the *interpretant* (Mead's *significant symbol*) is not static, but rotate in accordance with the employed aspect of the observer/user. The *immediate interpretant* employed in the what's question refers to what strikes our vision, but the what's are easily transformed into the how's of what's, or else into the why's of what's. When how's are in focus, more determined relations are in operation when starting to inquire into "how it is possible at all to see what we think we see?": the methodical steps of inquiry can take form (*dynamic interpretant*). When why's are in focus, "causes" or "purposes" are *thought* for as sequences of action, now set in motion. The "final cause" in operation in our abductive inference, that it was the mother who picked up the baby, closes (temporarily) our inquiry. In the social world that we inhabit, it is typical and thus expected that mothers attend to their screaming babies. Once inquiry

has determined in due course, that it was indeed the mother who picked up the child, the immediate interpretant turned out also to be a final interpretant. Our common sense intuitions are more often than not also correct, a suggestion, which is in line with Peirce's own view of the (economizing) role of critical common sense in the evolution of the universe (CP 5.600).

My corrective to Kvelson's inspiring text on the "How's of why's and why's of how's: Relation of Method and Cause in Inquiry" resides in the attempt to add yet another *rheme*, i.e. some new information allowing also for What's to enter the Logic of Inquiry, thus informing the very topicality (theme) of discourse. With Peirce, one might even suggest that inquiry starts out with a bothering *What* irritating us, as we do not quite know what is going on; but the end of inquiry might also be a more informed *What*, now in the form of a more ripe hypothesis as to what goes on. In relation to the Why's and the How's, What's appear to us as infinitely open-ended, as a point of reference in which interlocutors in a dialogue help finding a common ground of reference so as to secure further (inter)action. When operating as a triadic template ("the mother picked it up"), what-questions have the same complex triadic structure of relations as do how- and why-questions. Such questions supply us with meaningful responses so that joint action (inquiry) can be pursued.

#### 4. A recent debate as to the matter of explanation in social science and why what's matter

A current debate in sociology actualizes the urgency of taking what's questions seriously. In a recent book, *The Explanation of Social Action* (2012), John Levi Martin mounts an attack on the persistence of why- and how-questions to the detriment of what questions in seeking explanatory patterns in social science. In his view, and for that matter in traditional social science accounts, the term "explanation" has come to be reserved for the why's (and how's) as these relate to causal processes underlying the unfolding of social events, while the what's typically are relegated to the more descriptive stage of inquiry. In the classic *Verstehen/Erklären* controversy, *Verstehen* was linked to interpretation/description with a subjective undertone, while *Erklären* was given a logical, and hence objective epistemic status (Abel 1948).

In methods- and philosophy of science textbooks in the social sciences (including Martin's text), why- and how-questions are seldom, if ever, related to *Method* and *Inquiry* in Kvelson's (and Peirce's) sense, but to tech-

nical details as to what constitute proper explanations in matters of social life. When concluding this section, however, I will again attempt to link to Peirce's semiotic logic in order to reveal its potentiality and richness in the revitalizing of the full range of explanatory reasoning in the social sciences, notably in my own discipline of sociology.

When talks evolve around social science explanation, it is typical to restrict the term explanation to that mode which Aristotle referred to as "efficient explanation": a force (x) that "pushes" an entity (y) to come about so that an explanatory relation holds between (xy). Andrew Abbott, a close colleague of Levy Martin at the University of Chicago, has called attention to the unfortunate consequences of such methodological restriction of the term 'explanation' (2004). In seeking to enrich the many modes of explanation in use both in ordinary life and in various sciences, Abbott revitalizes Aristotle's classification of *causes*: *material* cause; *formal* or *structural* cause; *effective* cause; *final* cause.

Although any particular analyst of social action may have specific preferences in concentrating on only one of these classes, in technical inquiry most often that of "effective cause", the whole spectrum of causes is most often in operation when complex social events are to be explained (and understood). As an example of *material* cause, Abbott uses the following example: "The Republicans lost the election because they lost the women's vote" (2004, 95–97). Women's vote is here considered crucial in winning a US election, and is in this instance regarded as the *material* in the making or unmaking of this special event. As an example of a *formal* or *structural* cause, Abbott refers to Georg Simmel's recognition that a group with three members is inherently unstable, as dyads are easily formed thus weakening the structure of the group. As an *effective* cause, Abbott provides the following example: "a strike caused employer retaliation". In this latter case, we are dealing with a time sequence: A (a strike) forced B (employer retaliation). In the great majority of causal explanation in (social) science, the cause (A) needs to proceed (B) as constituting its effects. *Final* causes refer to the aims of events: The cause of universities is the education of young people, a mode of reasoning which classic social science often linked with *functions*. The *cause* is no longer prior to the event, but ahead. Functionalist reasoning has typically been discarded by empirical social science, while favoured by (speculative) social theorists.

As an illustration of the complex of reasoning/explanation in social science, let's consider the material causation referred to above: "The Republicans lost the election because they lost the Women's vote." Clearly,

we deal with a *triad* in the sense employed previously: (ab/c). The proposed *cause* is perhaps necessary, but it is clearly not sufficient in fully understanding *why* women in large measures chose not to vote Republican. In Kevelson's Q/A sequencing, we are in need of further information: a response to the question of why women chose not to vote Republican. While the triad in the first round is an easily observed event or compound of events externally reachable and improved with statistical reasoning (differential percentage of women), the second round of inquiry requires much more of the actors point of view, i.e. a phenomenological-interpretive understanding of what it is in Republican policies that put women off the track. The observer is now required to step down from her external position and to "participate" at the stage in the unfolding of events she aims to understand. Women may have good grounds not to vote Republican: the *causes* or *reasons* of their behaviour need to be found *in situ*. Now the causes are no longer external to action, but profoundly internal in a (typical) action sequencing (acts): Women stay away from the Republican Party, and *why* is that the case? *What* is there in women's perception of their political environment that "explains" (help in illuminating) the reasons *why* they vote as they do? Why questions are then deeply embedded in what questions, as what's help in configuring the spectrum of options upon which the how's and the why's can be further elaborated. Hence, there is a need to take description of social science events (the what's) quite serious as this stage is foundational for inquiry.

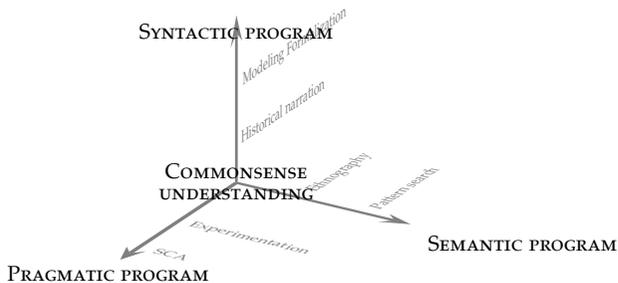
Abbott's and Martin's insistence that a full (and rich) explanation of social science events need employ the whole spectrum of Aristotle's causes is especially important in the light of the eruptive division in modern social science between structure and agency, constraints and choice, because-of vs. in-order-to motives. Such divisions are often lumped as explanation vs. interpretation, and engage very different communities of inquirers: quantitative vs. qualitative analysts. Indeed, both Abbott and Martin consider the long held distinction between description and explanation in need of abolition, and description to be a primary and also final aim of social science explanation. The wider aims of such interventions are to foster more sophisticated and formalized modes of description in order to shun away from its traditionally perceived subjectivity.

From a pragmatist viewpoint, such aims are fully congruent with Peirce's own claims: to induce the act of seeing with greater self-control; learning to see possibilities and options in what we tend to consider as

givens. But attending to pragmatist logic, the claim by Martin and Abbott to replace the how's and the why's with a paramount what's appears as problematic as did Kevelson's omission of that self-same what's. On the contrary, the three modes of asking questions are closely intertwined and mutually engaging if inquiry is to proceed at all in accordance with pragmatist logic.

Description relates to registration of a series of events as what's: What makes an event an event? From whose point of view? And for how long? Such elementary questions, crucially important in inquiry, easily multiply once registration of events as what's going on is taken seriously as the starting point, and the end of Inquiry: to register what indeed happened is most often also to know why and how it happened as "first impressions" in need of critical tests. What's supply the sites upon which further inquiry (the how's and the why's) can proceed. In such a way, what's define the situation and set the stage so that further trajectories (how's and why's) can be pursued.

But as there appears to be a confusion as to the denotation and thus meaning-use of the term "pragmatic" in these more current debates in the social sciences, it is worthwhile to take issue with a well-known triadic representation as to explanatory modes proposed by Abbott his popular textbook *Methods of Discovery, Heuristics for the Social Sciences* (2004, 29).



I cannot relate in detail Abbott's rich discussion concerning the three dimensions of explanatory understanding in social science, only spell out the main features of the three-dimensional schema. I want in particular to take note here of Abbott's use of Charles Morris' (1938) classic triadic model of symbolic systems (semantic, syntactic and pragmatic) and how it might affect Abbott's own reasoning, especially with regard to his consideration of the "pragmatic program" (here covering "causal effects" or what is also referred to as SCA, *standard causal analysis*).

In *common sense, everyday, reasoning*, the triadic scheme of distinct explanatory trajectories is not yet exploited in full. Common sense typically draws upon all dimensions without necessarily making hierarchies in what counts as a sufficient account *in making sense* of what's going on. The drift of inquiry whether in science or in law leads to a refinement in the suggested three dimensions, which in Abbott's presentation appear to be mutually exclusive of one another.

*Semantic* reasoning (as explanation) relate(s) to meaning and its translation both in everyday discourse and in science (such as anthropology). The explanation of witchcraft in primitive society occurs by translating odd events (such as the rain dance) into our everyday language so that we can "understand" such events as quite ordinary. When translated into a set of performing events, often occurring just prior to the rain season, the rain dance is then quite understandable: after all, there is a co-occurrence between the rain dance and the occurrence of rain, in addition it strengthens collective life (Boudon, 1993). When moving from the concrete to the more abstract level, semantic reasoning often involves pattern search, for instance the search for more or less "universal patterns" that reoccur under very different conditions such as pure/impure; high/low; raw/cooked. Such distinctions have rich semantic meaning and can easily travel across temporal and spatial setting.

As examples of *syntactic* mode of reasoning, Abbott points to the narrative reasoning typical of the historical sciences: in unfolding the complex of events that preceded the French Revolution, the historian helps the reader/listener to order, thus also understand, the series of events in relating (meaningful) action sequences. Such sequencing is not equivalent to "causal effects" between independent events in a logical chain, but is rather validated by an internal affinity of meaning. In its more abstract form, syntactic reasoning can refer to game theory and cover such activities as the prisoner's dilemma, a syntactic *imaginary* with wide application in social sciences, especially in economics.

The third program, that of *pragmatic* reasoning, refers in Abbott's text to *standard causal analysis* (SCA), i.e. typical variable analysis with dependent and independent variables: "What explains the decline in birth rate?" The education of women, and hence their access to the job market, is often seen as one such independent factor in helping to explain the decline; other factors deal with the general decline of available jobs and thus the rise of gloomy prospects among both men and women. Abbott employs the notion "pragmatic" with reference to "what to do" and refers to what

he says was its original implementation in the social sciences, namely different kinds of policy research as for instance when choosing between two fertilizers with regard to their respective effects in agriculture. Modern evaluation (evidence-driven) analysis is in this sense strictly "pragmatic"; policy analyst's need to find out "what works" in different settings. Accordingly, SCA as Abbott implies, is quite a useful technique in ordinary policy analyses. In his view, problems arise when SCA is transferred to the academic theoretical field in social science and is burdened with finding independent relations between causes and effects which can be subsumed under "covering laws".

Abbott's criticism of SCA is in line with quite a persistent history within modern sociology to question the adequacy of variable analysis when applied to social life in general, and social action in particular (Blumer, 1969, 127–52; Abbott, 2000, 97–129).<sup>4</sup> Variables such as "education of women" or else "birth rate" do not, in Abbott's words, refer to easily isolated entities in social life but are properties of yet other more complex generative action systems; the educational system, family life, and women's position to govern their own life are all interconnected. When applied outside a strict experimental situation or else in policy analysis (when something has to be done for political purposes), the problems with SCA and variable analysis in general are, in the views of both Abbott and Martin, that these techniques tend to promote a false claim to causality between independent and dependent variables constructed for the purpose of inquiry. A syntactically imposed vocabulary of causal orders is imposed on social action processes most often governed by unruly sets of mutually interacting events and processes (Abbott, 2004, 38–49).

A parallel criticism is mounted by Martin against the predominance of causal why-questions which in his view cultivates "third-person" expla-

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<sup>4</sup> We should recall that in the history of social science (which cannot be recorded here), explanatory reasoning has long favoured why's (and how's) explanation for being more *scientific*. Even Max Weber wavered in that he finally favoured "explanatory understanding" as the proper methodology of social science (Weber, 1949, 49–112). While description as what's was formulated in common sense language, the why's and how's could be formulated in technical science language (such as statistics and/or mathematics). Hence, the rise of a hierarchy. Although repeatedly challenged, the hierarchy nevertheless persists in the majority of methodology texts in the social sciences. Challengers have long been marginalized to the outskirts of mainstream social science. The question at issue in the new debates is, in my view, whether or not the old hierarchy between (technical) explanation and (common sense) understanding now is being cut asunder in that a new concern with "description" is arising, not the least due to the explosive growth of computerized data in a digital age with interconnected supercomputers.

nations (from the analysts point of view) while neglecting "first-person" accounts (actors own accounts of available options). Third-person explanations isolate and abstract factors or else invent relations (such as in psychoanalysis) to please a sense of *scientificity* among observers. Martin is arguing that social science/sociology needs to take common sense definitions of social actors much more seriously as real vehicles of inquiry, and avoid the tendency to abstract and isolate components into artificially constructed technical language idioms (2012, 3–23). What-questions then become of central importance in the attempt to grasp ongoing social processes "from actors' points of view". This is not necessarily to discard the possibility of more abstract propositions as for instance Alexis de Tocqueville's "law" that revolutions tend to eat their own children or for that matter statistical regularities as for instance the claim that unequal access to higher education between social classes tends to accentuate class differences over time. On the contrary, such abstraction, whether in theory or else in aggregated empirical data, are for the most fertile (macro) consequences of complex sets of "situated" social activities on the micro-level.<sup>5</sup> In sum, the criticism mounted in the current debates I have attended to as to what explanations are all about in social science is simply that why-questions (and -explanations) in social life need be anchored in the much more basic what-questions (and -explanations) of real life-events and their sequencing.

I have thought it worthwhile to attend to these current discussions in the social sciences as to what explanatory reasoning is all about, not the least for the reason that the "pragmatic program" in Abbott's presentation is made to coincide with the calculation of "causal effects" in SCA. In my view, such a coincidence amounts to an undue limitation of what pragmatist reasoning is all about, as clearly revealed by Kvelson's intervention as to the Q/A sequencing at the bottom of all inquiries. As already hinted at, Abbott's presentation of the three explanatory modes operating in the social sciences heavily relies on Charles Morris' original (mis)interpretation of Peirce's logic of inquiry.<sup>6</sup> Morris reduced the pragmatic use of language (as in talk) to mere facts, to "secondness", thus ripping such use of logical self-control and "thirdness". Clearly, the notion of pragmatism (and pragmatic reasoning) invites many different employments, as Peirce

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<sup>5</sup> James Coleman's boat-metaphor as to the dynamic interplay between macro/micro/macro relations is a case in point (Coleman, 1986).

<sup>6</sup> See (Kvelson, 1988, 94); see also John Dewey (1946, 85–95) on Charles Morris' (mis)interpretation of Peirce's semiotic logic.

himself noted repeatedly. In following Morris's recommendations, Abbott, too, limits the meaning of "why", and thus the problem of causality, into a technical-pragmatic complex of causal effects and their interplay. This is in my view an unfortunate limitation of the why's as such questions permeate inquiry on all levels, not least on the level of conduct and purpose of inquiry. It would be unfortunate to free the semantic and the syntactic programs in Abbott's scheme from the impact of such why's as such questions supply the very ground of inquiry in the first place.

The three modes of explanatory reasoning in Abbott's exposition have also come to shape quite different (also antagonistic) communities of inquiry in the social sciences: SCA observers have little, if anything, in common with the meaning-interpretations of cultural anthropologists or with the rich (or else thin) narratives of historical scholars intrigued by the events that led to the Fall of the Roman Empire or for that matter by such events today that lead to the radicalization of young Muslims. Kvelson's concerns in seeking to reveal the long forgotten questions which are at the bottom of all inquiries, also the more specialized ones, spelt out in the first part of my presentation could, if attended to, rectify the many animosities that have plagued and still plague social science practitioners. Hence, my focus on "the what's of the why's and of the how's": the inter-relations of immediate interpretants (seeing) with (logical) reasoning and (dynamic) action respectively.

## 5. What's up – abductive inferences, perceptual judgements and ditto facts

Abductive inference seems particularly relevant, when, as in the present text, the what's are in question. I have already alluded to how our ordinary language is ripe with such abductive inferences as in the case of "the baby cried—the mother picked it up". A "social" relation is provided between the two subjects (the baby—the mother), as between the two predicates (crying picking up): and the event is fully naturalized (taken-for-granted). In the social philosophy of G. H. Mead, abductive inferences abound in what he refers to as "significant symbols" (Mead, 1938). Significant symbols supply social actors with shared repertoires of action sequences. A flag is much more than a piece of cloth: it calls out shared behaviours among actors; to stand up and sing the national hymn for instance. What is particularly curious in the case of such abductive inferences-in-use is the frequent "fact" (or possibility) that we also can

"see" such (interpretive) events happening: "the mother picked it up". In the language of Peirce, the abductive inference shades into perceptual judgement without any sharp line of demarcation between them (CP 5.182). At this point, it is worthwhile to continue quoting from *The Three Cotary Propositions* as the third of these deals with the relation between "seeing" and "reasoning": "In other words, our first premises, the perceptual judgments, are to be regarded as an extreme case of abductive inferences, from which they differ in being absolutely beyond criticism. The abductive suggestion comes to us like a flash. It is an act of *insight*, although of extremely fallible insight." (CP 5.182)

Peirce's comments are about how the act of seeing (what) is infused with interpretation or even reason. In the case referred to "the mother picking up the child", a reasonable interpretation in itself as *it makes sense of* what is happening, we seemingly have a perceptual judgment, and not an abductive inference proper (although they shade into one another). The two differ, as Peirce states, in that perceptual judgments are *immediate*: they are what they are, no matter what, while abductive inferences call for a more cautious formulation inviting criticism: "the woman picking up the child was probably the mother. . .". Another curious comment of Peirce refers to the contraction of perceptual judgments into immediate facts: "(T)his process of forming the perceptual judgment, because it is subconscious and so not amenable to logical criticism, does not have to make separate acts of inference, but performs its act in one continuous process" (CP 5.182).

When we go around our daily chores, we do not necessarily notice what is around us for the simple reason that we expect things to be what they have been so far: seeing "what's" is part of our routine action chains, our habits. It seems in line with Peirce's own suggestions that seeing as action is habitual as long as nothing unusual occurs: we no longer find the scissor or else the comb at their usual place. If so, our organism and thought are set in motion: What's up? Where to look? Aha, all of a sudden, I become aware of "the fact" that I used the gadgets yesterday in the bathroom, and in an act of insight I turn around: I find what I was looking for. It is curious to reflect upon such chains of action, when the routine is broken, and we are unable to find what we are looking for. When we start to "think", it seems that we are generating pictorial action chains: what did I do yesterday? In so doing we "see" not just singular items the comb or the scissor but we see these items in terms of action sequences, often immediate ones: I was in the bathroom, wasn't I?

Peirce stresses the point repeatedly that when we "see" what's going on, or what could possibly have happened, we see *generals*, and not *particulars*, i.e. we do not see a comb or a scissor isolated from the context of continuous action, but we see "totalities" in terms of action chains. Such assertions are also in line with the classic Gestalt schools of viewing perception: seeing "what" demands a context of action, "what's up"? To see generals in operation out there, if I am allowed to freely interpret Peirce, is also to see purposes, many of which also are immediate flashes of insights. Oh, now I suddenly see what I could not see earlier! Peirce's own reference to his fathers' use of a serpentine which as well could be seen as a stonewall is most relevant; we cannot see both at once, but we can (learn) to shift between the two "facts" which are present for us as immediate percepts (CP 5.183).

Perceptive judgments or else facts are as noted beyond conscious control; they are what they are, no matter what. They come to us like a flash of insight, although extremely fallible. It is the purpose of inquiry to translate such insights into abductive inferences, into hypotheses. In this context, Peirce ventures a line of thought, which I consider both curious and valuable for reasons that I am going to spell out in more detail below.

A man must be downright crazy to deny that science has made many true discoveries. But every single item of scientific theory which stands established today has been due to Abduction. But how is it that all this truth has ever been lit up by a process in which there is no compulsiveness, nor tendency to compulsiveness? Is it by chance? Consider the multitude of theories that might have been suggested.

CP 5.172

What I find curious in Peirce's pondering here is that what's questions, clearly not all but at least some, are endowed with a special worth: to put us in touch with that diffuse matter that we call "the real". Following up on such a line of thought, one might further surmise that what's questions can be evaluated along a scale where some are *stronger* than others in leading to valuable insights well knowing that there might always be yet other *rhemes* (new information). It might well be that in such a search we never know at the start which among the what's that are more valuable. Nevertheless, the insight that there are some what's that are more worth pursuing than others help us navigate an ocean of possibilities: to put us on the right track. Some insights come to us as more pressing than others, a curious recognition of Peirce in distinguishing among the various inferences. The validity of a deductive inference resides in its logical necessity,

it is not more or less valid, or more or less strong, but either/or. But the fragile validity of an abductive inference has no such built-in necessity: its presence "speaks" to us; it is a felt necessity. As such it arouses the organism and compels us to act. In the further chain of action sequences, our first hints as to the what's will prove whether or not we are on the right track.<sup>7</sup>

Pursuing the centrality of what's the delicate line between perceptual judgments (seeing), abductive inferences (reasoning), and reality-formation also opens up a road to understand more readably Peirce's insistence that the essence of Pragmatism resides in the logic of abduction (CP 5.196).

We owe to the classic pragmatists (Peirce, Dewey, James and Mead) to conceive of scientific inquiry as a privileged continuation of routine social action; the former is set in motion to provoke trials in terms of experimentation (what is this all about) while in daily contact "critical common sense" performs the same role, although with greater caution. To reach a common definition of the situation to respond mutually to what-questions requires ongoing efforts amongst participants to make sure that they are on the same track. Routine social action also inhabits "trials" when we test one another's sense of understanding: Illusions do break down, generating new action chains, perhaps strengthening old ones. Tracing the role of what's in generating reasonable responses in ongoing interaction chains (finding solutions to pressing problems) might also open up for valuable insights for sociology to pursue leads to evolutionary social biology: why some collectives (groups and/or societies) appear to be more robust than others when viewed over time.

## 6. What's as decisive trials in the communal life of interpretation

To respond to others' gestures by means of action (talk is also a kind of action) demands interpretive work on behalf of each part in a dialogue (Mead, 1938). When we belong to the same interpretive community and share many action lines, joint action is less problematic than in cases where we belong to different interpretive communities where dif-

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<sup>7</sup> Peirce even ventures lines of thoughts in these and related paragraphs that the insights brought about by great discoveries (seeing what's) in the history of science go beyond the merely human realm of (interpretive) action by opening up for conversations with nature itself and partake in evolutionary processes. "You may say that evolution accounts for the thing. I don't doubt that it is evolution. But as for explaining evolution by chance, there has not been time enough (CP 5.172)

ferent action lines are pursued. We have all been foreigners somewhere and become aware of difficulties when we are not understood; much energy is required. Joint action really demands what one by recourse to ethnomethodology can call "accomplishments" on behalf of actors. When we carry on conversations, we routinely fill out "black holes" by saying "as you know", or else "as everyone knows", "look, man, can't you see?". Interpretive understanding is the result of constant accomplishments on behalf of actors: in case one part in a dialogue comes out saying "I do not know what you are talking about", then the dialogue stops, and repair work is needed. The what-questions are in this sense often very decisive they are, to borrow from Peirce, dangerously close to reality! The long-term goal of his pragmatism was to engender critical instances by means of inquiry so that humankind, in the final instance, could come to rest in "the fixation of belief", reaching a point of interpretive convergence. Even if such a point of convergence will never be reached in finite time, it serves, nevertheless, as a transcendent vision, the lack of which would make our faith in reason futile.

But such a vision of a final community of interpretation where truth resides in the "fixation of beliefs" has been severely criticised in the last couple of decades as harbouring a scientific fallacy, possibly also a tyranny of reason. Most influential in this regard is H. G. Gadamer's exposition of hermeneutics in *Truth and Method* (1989). Instead, any interpretive community is always contextualized in time and space; *what* (*how* and *why*) we see is always localized. We approach history through our own lenses with all their prejudices and interests. Historical scholarship can at best aim at "the fusions of horizons" where we at best can learn to see ourselves from the standpoint of the others: self-understanding accompanies the seeing/understanding of the others. Such a hermeneutical vision shuns the idea that historical and social truth could ever be reached via convergence; each time-space epoch needs to elaborate upon its own understanding of, say, the French Revolution. There can be no final interpretation of such a social event, there can only be understandings from given standpoints.

More recent scholarship in the intersection of pragmatism and hermeneutics are influenced by an even more radical reading of the *what's* rendered by Martin Heidegger's philosophy. Indeed, Heidegger's ontological exposition of "being in the world" has significant affinities to recent exposition of pragmatism (Rorty, 1979; 2011). Traditional philosophies take their point of departure in there being "subjects" and "objects" in the world as if these were separated entities, and could be approached in isola-

tion. In hermeneutics and pragmatism, the world is always already there and will be there long after we are gone: we are always situated in a world of ongoing action. The question then arises how we can (and should) act in a world that is always already there. Our obligations towards ourselves and others lie in our awareness that we as social actors are responsible for that common world of ours. Our routine habits of response to simple what questions confirm and solidify what lies ahead. Our obligation is to interpret and act in that world of ours from possibly new angles: to take serious the challenge that lies in simple what-questions. Most of us shun away from such responsibilities, and we go along with others by nodding, smiling and agreeing.

Social acts whether in science or in daily life build upon (pragmatic) accomplishments, that we, as actors, fill in, point to, and ease the interpretive/seeing works of others, thus allowing for cooperation in the long run. The recent twist in the fusion of phenomenology and pragmatism challenge the routine activities upholding the taken for granted world of ours. Ruptures are no longer seen as unruly events challenging the social order, but as moments of creation and possibilities; Asking what-questions are no longer merely nuisance but seen opening up new visions, and perhaps also new entrances into that elusive world of ours. What we see "out there" is no longer just a (dyadic) relation between the subject (us) and the object (it) but is about a (triadic) being in the world in common with others that may think (and act) differently than we do. It is about us-them-it prolonged in time. What's are decisive as such questions, with a term borrowed from Heidegger, "attune" us to the world. Or as Peirce said, which I have tried to convey in this text, the world come to us as "precepts", as given perceptual judgements "beyond doubts". In the process of inquiry such precepts (of facts) shade into abductive inference thus awakening doubts as to "what it is all about". Such doubts can, but need not, lead to new insights. Profound what-questions intersect the outer world with our inner selves (whom we are), thus provoking possible new pathways in our relations with others and the world we share in common. What's can be seen as nuisances, but in critical inquiry, the what's are central in setting the stage for the how's and the why's.

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# Deweyan Approaches to Abduction?

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## 1. Introduction

Apparently, Dewey never explicitly commented on Charles S. Peirce's notion of abduction; nor did he use the term in his own writings. Although there are clear differences in Peirce's and Dewey's logic and inquiry, this is still somewhat surprising. For Peirce abduction is a third main mode of reasoning, besides deduction and induction, which is about the process of forming hypotheses or suggestions. There are, in my view, interesting affinities between abduction as presented by Peirce and elements of reflective thinking presented by Dewey.

In the secondary literature on Dewey, there are different interpretations of the basic relationship between Dewey's and Peirce's overall conceptions of inquiry. Some researchers emphasize the differences between Peirce's and Dewey's conceptions, while others, like Prawat, seek to merge Dewey's and Peirce's conceptions by developing a new interpretation of abduction (Prawat 1999, 2001; see also Sleeper 1986). This latter project has been criticized as based on misinterpretations (Garrison 2001; Koschmann 2003). Other researchers emphasize the overlaps and continuities between Dewey's and Peirce's conceptions, while also acknowledging that there are differences between them (see e.g. Burke 1994; Colapietro 2002). My interpretation is closest with this last group.

In this paper, I focus on Dewey's formulations of aspects (or phases) of reflective thought (or pattern of inquiry), and I will investigate whether abductive elements can be found from these formulations. Both Dewey's analyses of reflective thought and Peircean notions of abduction are, so to speak, moving targets. Dewey developed his notion of inquiry or reflective thought over many years. Peirce, too, developed his conception of ab-

duction throughout his entire academic life, and after Peirce, others have formulated new notions of abduction. There are, then, many interpretations on abduction that may be used for the comparison. In this paper, I am not attempting to undertake any comprehensive comparison of abduction and Dewey's notion of inquiry. Instead, I wish to concentrate on an analysis of what we may call abductive elements in Dewey's writings on reflective thought. My aim is not just to discuss whether Peircean notions of abduction can be found lurk in Dewey's thought, but also to use Dewey's work to give resources for developing the notion of abduction further.

First, I present some main interpretations of Peircean abduction and how it has been interpreted by later thinkers. Next, I present Dewey's conceptions of reflective thought (or pattern of inquiry), and point to some abductive elements within it. Finally, I return to the question of the continuity between Peirce's and Dewey's conceptions of inquiry.

## 2. Peircean formulations on abduction and phases of inquiry

Peirce's own formulations of the notion of abduction leave room for different interpretations (Paavola 2012, 21–55). This is not so surprising given the fact that Peirce discussed abduction (or, with alternative names, *à posteriori reasoning*, *hypothesis*, *presumption*, or *retroduction*) over almost fifty years (see Bergman & Paavola 2014). He consistently maintained that abduction is a third main mode of reasoning besides the more generally acknowledged *deduction* and *induction*. What makes Peirce's conception of abduction interesting, but also controversial, is the fact that he developed abduction in close to (using modern terms) "cognitive" topics not just a part of "pure" reasoning. For Peirce, abduction is reasoning, but also, at the same time, it comes close to (or in some formulations even the same as) sensations and emotions (e.g. CP 5.291–2, 1868), conceptions (w 1, 516, 1866), guessing (CP 7.219, 1901), instinct (CP 7.220, 1901), insight (CP 5.173, 1903), perception and perceptual judgments (CP 5.180–94, 1903), or pure play, and musement (CP 6.455–69, 1908). Abduction is for Peirce thus hypothetical, "weak" reasoning to tentative suggestions and provisional adoption of an explanatory hypothesis, which comes close to perception and/or ways of seeking conceptual unity on the basis of observations.

It is customary to discern two main periods in Peirce's conception of abduction. In his early formulations, Peirce treated abduction syllogistically (or as an evidencing process) (Burks 1946; see e.g., Peirce CP 2.623,

1878): abduction is a way of reasoning backwards (retroductively) from an effect to a cause. Peirce's example was that if we find fossils of fish in the interior of a country we can (tentatively) explain this finding with the help of an abductive hypothesis that the sea once washed over this land (EP1: 189, 1878). Or, if we have documents and monuments referring to a man called Napoleon Bonaparte, it is basically a hypothesis that this person has existed (*ibid.*). Abduction is, though, weaker than basic forms of induction: we use abduction not to infer what is directly observed, but rather to explain what is observed (EP1: 198, 1878).

In his later formulations of abduction (Burks 1946; see e.g., Peirce CP 7.202–19, 1901), Peirce did *not* abandon a syllogistic approach to abduction, but he began to describe abduction as a part of a broader methodological process of inquiry. Inquiry starts with observation, in particular when there are some surprising or anomalous phenomena which go against some habits of expectations, and the anomalies make the inquirer ponder the phenomena and search for ways of coming to terms with the wonderment (EP2: 440–1, 1908). The inquirer seeks a solution, that is, a conjecture or an hypothesis that can plausibly dissolve the puzzlement. Abduction (or retroduction as Peirce named it at that time) is a characteristic form of reasoning at this "first stage of inquiry", that is, "reasoning from consequent to antecedent" (*ibid.*). Abduction is a weak form of reasoning in the sense that it does not lead to certainty: its results must be tested, which occurs in the second and third stage of inquiry. The testing starts with a deductive process that clarifies the conditional, experiential consequences of the hypothesis (EP2: 441–2, 1908). *If* things are as the hypothesis asserts, what kind of consequences should follow concerning other relevant things? The third stage is the actual testing, where inductive reasoning is prevalent (see EP2: 442, 1908). It is about ascertaining how far consequents (expected on the basis of the hypothesis) accord with experience, and deciding if the hypothesis requires some modifications or should be rejected (*ibid.*). In sum, then, we can say that abduction is central in the first stage of inquiry where hypotheses are generated and provisionally adopted, made clearer with deduction in the second stage and tested through induction in the third (see also CP 7.218, 1901).

In his later conception of abduction, Peirce maintains that abduction is close, or even the same, as a "guessing instinct" we use to find fruitful hypotheses. While still maintaining that abduction is essentially a form of reasoning, he was wondering how human beings have been so successful in coming up with fruitful hypotheses when all they have is this basically

very weak mode of inference (Peirce CP 7.220, 1901). He ended up postulating that human beings possess a guessing instinct which is an important part of abduction. This instinct is fallible, but still strong enough to explain how people come up with so many good guesses. Peirce offered various kinds of support for this hypothesis (see Paavola 2005).

In his later conceptions, Peirce also maintains that abduction is close to perception or perceptual judgments. In one famous passage he writes that:

abductive inference shades into perceptual judgment without any sharp line of demarcation between them; or, in other words, our first premisses, the perceptual judgments, are to be regarded as an extreme case of abductive inferences, from which they differ in being absolutely beyond criticism. The abductive suggestion comes to us like a flash. It is an act of *insight*, although of extremely fallible insight. It is true that the different elements of the hypothesis were in our minds before; but it is the idea of putting together what we had never before dreamed of putting together which flashes the new suggestion before our contemplation. EP2: 227, 1903

Then Peirce offered, as a further illustration of the relationship between perception and abduction, an example of visual illusions (nowadays called reversible figures) where the same data can be interpreted in two different ways (as a serpentine line or as a stone wall) (EP2: 228, 1903; see also Hanson 1958). Under certain circumstances, abduction comes very close to being a form of (perceptual) insight, especially when the insight (or hypothesis) arranges phenomena, which we have been puzzling about, in a novel and promising way. On the other hand, even if perception is something which is so to speak forced onto the observer, there is still an interpretative element in it. This means that abductive and hypothetical elements can be found in perception. This latter point has been treated subsequently in discussions on theory-ladenness of observations (Hanson 1958). Actually Peirce here emphasizes the "observation-ladenness" of theories (or hypotheses) as well as the theory-ladenness of observations (which is not often noted in discussions on theory-ladenness of observations). Hypotheses are seen as closely related to observations, and they have their origins in this close relationship.

One interesting question in Peirce's conceptions of abduction which relates to Dewey's conceptions of inquiry is what role Peirce's doubt-belief formulation of inquiry should play. In his influential article "Fixation of Belief" (EP1: 109–23, 1877) Peirce maintained that the goal of inquiry is the settlement of opinion. The process of inquiry can be described with

the help of the notions of belief, doubt, and habit. Beliefs "guide our desires and shape our actions" (EP1: 114). The feeling of believing is an indication that there is an established habit determining how we will act. Doubt, on the other hand, is "an uneasy and dissatisfied state". The irritation of doubt causes us to inquire. Peirce maintained that to initiate an inquiry, it is not enough to just utter a question: there "must be a real and living doubt" (EP1: 115). In this same article, Peirce presents his famous four methods to settle opinion: 1) the method of tenacity, 2) the method of authority, 3) the a priori method, and 4) the scientific method. Peirce presents these methods in a certain order, so that the next method is always answering to some problems which made the former unsatisfactory. The scientific method is the one where our beliefs are caused by some external permanency, and this permanency does not affect merely some individuals, but is such "that the ultimate conclusion of every man shall be the same" (EP1: 120).

It is a bit curious that Peirce did not clarify the relationship of his doubt-belief theory to his conceptions of abduction, or to the cycle of abduction, deduction, and induction. In general terms, these two seem to be parallel ways of describing the cycle of (scientific) inquiry, the doubt-belief theory having more "psychological" connotations. It might be asked if the settlement of opinion is the same as the testing of hypothesis with deductive and inductive phases. Abduction is connected to the irritation of doubt, although the doubt-belief cycle is not saying much on the details of the abductive phase.

Given the purpose of this paper, newer developments (after Peirce) on abduction are also worth considering. In the 1950s and 1960s, N. R. Hanson argued for a logic of discovery based on Peircean abduction (Hanson 1958). The kind of abductive search for hypotheses based on data is, according to Hanson, an alternative to both to the inductive and to the hypothetico-deductive model of inquiry. In the late 1960s, Gilbert Harman argued that the inference-to-the-best explanation (IBE) should be seen as a basic model for inductive reasoning. Nowadays IBE is often also called "abduction". Peircean abduction and IBE are closely related, but they have a different focus and strength. Peircean abduction concerns more the process of generating promising hypotheses while IBE is more about evaluating and selecting best from existing hypotheses (Minnameier 2004; Paavola 2006; Campos 2011). In the 1980s abduction started to attract interest from the point of view of semiotics, and it was interpreted as a "detective methodology" (Eco & Sebeok 1983). Nowadays

there are also new developments on abduction which are interesting related to Dewey's conception of inquiry such as practical syllogism interpreted abductively (Hilpinen 2007), or abduction related to distributed cognition (see Magnani 2001, Paavola 2006), or manipulative abduction which "happens when we are thinking through doing and not only, in a pragmatic sense about doing" (Magnani 2004, 229).

In summary there are several overlapping interpretations on Peirce's conceptions of abduction (and inquiry) relevant if compared to Dewey's conceptions, like

- a) a weak mode of reasoning (besides deduction and induction) on searching explanatory hypotheses on the basis of observations and anomalies,
- b) a first phase of inquiry where tentative and testable hypotheses are formed,
- c) a guessing instinct, or insight, close to perceptual judgment,
- d) a part of the irritation of doubt starting the doubt-belief cycle and process of inquiry,
- e) (potentially) starting a change of practices as a part of distributed cognition (in newer formulations of abduction).

### 3. Different formulations by Dewey on reflective thought

Now, I will turn to Dewey's conception of the phases or aspects of reflective thought. Dewey formulated these aspects in different ways in his writings (see Miettinen 2006). In this paper, I will mostly use the general term "aspects of reflective thought", although on the basis of Dewey's writings, they could also be called "analysis of process of thinking" (MW 6, 234), "general features of a reflective experience" (MW 9, 157), "phases of reflective thought" (LW 8, 199), or "pattern of inquiry" (LW 12, 105). In this chapter I will list these formulations in Dewey's writings briefly and point out some abductive elements in them.

Dewey did not use the term abduction in his writings, but I will concentrate on issues surrounding the "abductive puzzle". By that term, I refer to the question of how people have found good or successful hypotheses and ideas, given that there are aspects of reasoning or inference involved in the answer (even if as a weak form of reasoning). My aim is not

to answer the question whether Dewey had exactly similar conceptions as Peirce did, but rather point out abductive themes in Dewey's formulations.

### 3.1 Stages of logical thought (1900)

A first version of these aspects of reflective thought can be found in Dewey's article "Some Stages of Logical Thought" from 1900 (MW 1, 151–74; see Burnett 1976). Here, Dewey formulates "stages of thinking" which concern "both the race and the individual" (MW 1, 151). They are not yet about phases or aspects within the process of inquiry, but rather some kind of historical overview of earlier approaches (Burnett 1976, xv). There are, though, many similarities to Peirce's treatment of inquiry in the "Fixation of Belief". Dewey discusses doubt-inquiry processes caused by questioning and doubt aiming to establish a new equilibrium, or fixed ideas. Both Dewey and Peirce discuss the method of scientific inquiry as a last stage in these historical processes.

Dewey does not name (or categorize) these stages clearly, but the initial stage is one where "the doubt is hardly endured but not entertained" and "beliefs are treated as something fixed and static" (MW 1, 152). The second stage brings ideas subject to change, and involves comparison, compromise and modification, and contains conversation of thoughts, that is, discussion (MW 1, 157–61). The third stage is where there is a "transformation of discussion into reasoning, of subjective reflection into method of proof" (MW 1, 161), and it involves such things as reflection and the bringing of different ideas into relation, developing suggestions, testing, and experimenting (MW 1, 160–7). But inquiry is still limited and fixed. The fourth stage covers an inductive and empirical science. Thought then "takes the form of inference instead of proof" which "goes from the known to the unknown" (MW 1, 168; see 1, 166–9). The model of this fourth stage is modern experimental science, and Dewey maintained that existing theories of thinking, that is, Aristotelian logic, empiricism, and rationalism (Dewey does not use these latter terms but the meaning is quite clear) are insufficient. He seems to set a program for himself by maintaining that "scientific procedure, as a practical undertaking, has not as yet reflected itself into a coherent and generally accepted theory of thinking, into any accepted doctrine of logic which is comparable to the Aristotelian" (MW 1, 172).

As I see it there are many abductive elements present, although in a quite general manner, in the last stage, that is, the stage of experimental science. This stage aims at *discovery* rather than proof, and at "pushing out the frontiers of knowledge", and "making friends with facts and ideas hitherto alien" (MW 1, 168). It means "the importance of noting apparent exceptions, negative instances, extreme cases, anomalies" because they stimulate inquiry (MW 1, 169). Inquiry is, here, clearly oriented towards the future. Dewey maintained as Peirce had done in the "Fixation of Belief" that the method of scientific inquiry was not properly understood in existing conceptions.

In the "Studies in Logical Theory" (1903) Dewey makes a similar distinction though with a different emphasis. According to it, scientific inquiry passes historically through at least four stages: 1) in which scientific inquiry does not take place at all, 2) an empiric stage with crude and unorganized facts, 3) a speculative stage with guessing, with making ideas and framing ideas but later on condemned only as ideas, and 4) "a period of fruitful interaction between the mere ideas and the mere facts" with experimental inquiry (MW 2, 306–7).

### 3.2 *How We Think* (1910)

In the first edition of *How We Think*, Dewey presents formulations which come close to Peirce's formulations of three phases of inquiry (abduction, deduction, and induction). Dewey distinguishes between "five steps or elementary constituents" within an "analysis of the process of thinking" (MW 6, 234): 1) a felt difficulty, 2) its location and definition, 3) suggestion of possible solution, 4) development by reasoning of the bearings of the suggestion, 5) further observation and experiment leading to its acceptance or rejection; that is, the conclusion of belief or disbelief. (MW 6, 236–7).

Dewey describes simple examples of this kind of a process, and also how this process starts. The difficulty (the first step) can be a conflict between conditions at hand and intended results (like, in Dewey's example, how to get to another part of a city in time), or an incompatibility between suggested belief with some other facts (like when we start to wonder what the function of a strange looking part of a ship might be), or some oddly behaving natural phenomena that we become aware of (like bubbles appearing outside of the mouth of the tumblers washed in hot soapsuds and placed downward on a plate).

Dewey says that the first and second step (that is, a felt difficulty and the attempt to define it) often fuse into one another. He describes this stage:

In cases of striking novelty or unusual perplexity, the difficulty, however, is likely to present itself at first as a shock, as emotional disturbance, as a more or less vague feeling of the unexpected, of something queer, strange, funny, or disconcerting. MW 6, 238

I think this is a very good description of the basis for abduction understood as a kind of methodology of detectives. There is some kind of problem or anomaly, something that goes against what we would have expected. Sometimes this anomaly is nothing more than a vague feeling of disturbance which instigates the process.

The third step is "suggestion" which comes also very close to abduction:

Suggestion is the very heart of inference; it involves going from what is present to something absent. Hence, it is more or less speculative, adventurous. Since inference goes beyond what is actually present, it involves a leap, a jump, the propriety of which cannot be absolutely warranted in advance, no matter what precautions be taken.

MW 6, 239

Dewey also says that if the suggested conclusion is not accepted but only tentatively entertained, it constitutes an idea (or supposition, conjecture, guess, hypothesis, or in elaborate cases: theory).

Dewey's formulations of the fourth and the fifth step come quite close to Peirce's formulations of deduction and induction respectively, at least as formulated within Peirce's later theorizing. In the fourth step, the idea is elaborated by the use of reasoning, and particular attention is paid to what we should expect to follow given the suggestions at hand. The fifth step is "some kind of experimental corroboration, or verification, of the conjectural idea" (MW 6, 240).

In the first edition of *How We Think* there is a separate chapter for "systematic inference: induction and deduction". This shows that Dewey does *not* consider abduction to be a separate form of reasoning, at least not in this book. Instead, he calls "the movement toward building up the idea" "induction" (MW 6, 243). Ideas are built in different ways depending on who we are and what background we have:

Just what is suggested to a person in a given situation depends upon his native constitution (his originality, his genius), temperament, the prevalent direction of his interests, his early environment, the general

tenor of his past experiences, his special training, the things that have recently occupied him continuously or vividly, and so on; to some extent even upon an accidental conjunction of present circumstances.

MW 6, 246

He continues:

These matters, so far as they lie in the past or in external conditions, clearly escape regulation. A suggestion simply does or does not occur; this or that suggestion just happens, occurs, springs up                      *ibid.*

These formulations might seem to be in opposition to the general idea of abductive reasoning. But in actual fact, Dewey is, even here, quite close to certain conceptions of abduction. It must be remembered that Peirce made similar remarks of abduction:

The abductive suggestion comes to us like a flash. It is an act of *insight*, although of extremely fallible insight.                      Peirce, CP 5.181

Even if Dewey discusses factors that are more “psychological” than “logical” as the basis for suggestions—such as a person’s temperament, interests, past experiences, special training, etc.—I do not see these factors as opposed to abductive reasoning. Dewey is making a difference between *reasoning* and *inference*, and saying that even if *reasoning* is either inductive or deductive, there can definitely be *inference* from facts: “As an idea is inferred from given facts, so reasoning sets out from an idea” (MW 6, 239). This “inference from facts” is quite close to what is happening in abduction.

Dewey is also otherwise giving descriptions of how to use facts as clue-like signs:

To inventory the facts, to describe exactly and minutely their respective traits, to magnify artificially those that are obscure and feeble, to reduce artificially those that are so conspicuous and glaring as to be distracting,—these are ways of modifying the facts that exercise suggestive force, and thereby indirectly guiding the formation of suggested inferences.                      MW 6, 246–7

### 3.3 *Democracy and Education* (1916)

In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey once again analyzes thinking as a process of inquiry (see especially chapter 11 “Experience and Thinking”). Here, again, many abductive elements are invoked. Dewey emphasizes that inquiry is about “seeking, a quest, for something that is not at hand”,

it "involves a risk", and the "conclusions of thinking, till confirmed by the event, are, accordingly, more or less tentative or hypothetical" (MW 9, 154–5). Dewey points out that the deficiency of the classic *Meno paradox* is that it assumes either complete knowledge or complete ignorance. It overlooks what is central to inquiry and learning, that is, the possibility of hypothetical conclusions, of tentative results, and the process of "forming conjectures to guide action in tentative explorations" (MW 9, 155–6). According to Dewey, inquiry is more elaborate than the trial and error situation, but still, it is not wholly beyond it (MW 9, 157–8). This is clearly an abductive kind of a solution to the *Meno paradox* (in contrast to traditional inductive or deductive solutions) (see Paavola & Hakkarainen 2005). Dewey presents a distinction of "general features of a reflective experience" (MW 9, 157):

- (i) perplexity, confusion, doubt, due to the fact that one is implicated in an incomplete situation whose full character is not yet determined;
- (ii) a conjectural anticipation—a tentative interpretation of the given elements, attributing to them a tendency to effect certain consequences;
- (iii) a careful survey (examination, inspection, exploration, analysis) of all attainable consideration which will define and clarify the problem in hand;
- (iv) a consequent elaboration of the tentative hypothesis to make it more precise and more consistent, because squaring with a wider range of facts;
- (v) taking one stand upon the projected hypothesis as a plan of action which is applied to the existing state of affairs: doing something overtly to bring about the anticipated result, and thereby testing the hypothesis.

These five features are in line with the distinctions made in *How We Think*, although it seems that the second and third features are ordered differently here. I think that this variation shows that for Dewey, the order (or the content) of these features is not fixed. A conjectural anticipation might, for instance, help clarify the problem, or another way around.

### 3.4 *How We Think* (1933)

In 1933, Dewey published a substantially revised version of *How We Think*. The analysis of reflective thinking is, here, somewhat different compared to the 1910 version. He presents a distinction between five "phases" or "aspects of reflective thought" but the list is different to the earlier formulations:

- (1) *suggestions*, in which the mind leaps forward to a possible solution;
- (2) an intellectualization of the difficulty or perplexity that has

been *felt* (directly experienced) into a *problem* to be solved, a question for which the answer must be sought; (3) the use of one suggestion after another as a leading idea, or *hypothesis*, to initiate and guide observation and other operations in collection of factual material; (4) the mental elaboration of the idea or supposition as an idea or supposition (*reasoning*, in the sense in which reasoning is a part, not the whole, of inference); and (5) testing the hypothesis by overt or imaginative action.

LW 8, 200; Dewey elaborates these phases in LW 8, 200–6

A difference compared to Dewey's earlier versions is that already the first stage is called "suggestions", while in the earlier versions, the first phase was a felt difficulty or perplexity. This is not, however, a major difference since Dewey is also stating, in the 1933 edition, that reflective thinking involves "(1) a state of doubt, hesitation, perplexity, mental difficulty, in which thinking originates, and (2) an act of searching, hunting, inquiring, to find material that will resolve the doubt, settle and dispose of the perplexity." (LW 8, 121). It seems that in the 1933 edition, Dewey is treating the difficulty or perplexity that arises as a part of *pre-reflective* phase that sets the problem (LW 8, 200). That is why it is not an element of *reflective* thought.

There is also an addition to the earlier formulations about the third phase (the use of one suggestion after another). Dewey says that the first suggestion occurs spontaneously, and that there is nothing intellectual about its occurrence (phase 1) (LW 8, 202). Here, Dewey is repeating the idea that the first suggestion "springs up, it "pops" . . . "into the mind"; it flashes upon us" (ibid.). But now, he is emphasizing that the trained person does not stop here, but treats the suggestion tentatively, as a guiding idea, or a working hypothesis (LW 8, 203). What is interesting from the point of view of abduction, is that the guiding ideas, or hypotheses can also be modified:

The facts or data set the problem before us, and insight into the problem *corrects, modifies, expands the suggestion* that originally occurred  
LW 8, 202; *emphasis SP*

The hypothesis is tentative, it is a working hypothesis, partly because it has to be tested, but partly also because it can be corrected, modified, or expanded during the process of inquiry. Peirce did not have this kind of an idea of working hypotheses (to be modified or expanded during the inquiry) which I think would be an important addition to the conception of abduction (cf. Hanson 1961).

There are many other formulations in this book which are abductive as I interpret the term (even though Dewey is not using the term here either). For example,

[t]he suggested solutions for the difficulties disclosed by observation form ideas. Data (facts) and ideas (suggestions, possible solutions) thus form the two indispensable and correlative factors of all reflective activity. LW 8, 198

Dewey also makes a remark that is important for the sake of interpreting his distinctions between phases of reflective thought. He emphasizes that the five phases, or aspects of thought that he is discerning, do not follow upon another in any strict order (LW 8, 206). Each aspect might affect all the others. For example, "[t]he elaboration of the hypothesis does not wait until the problem has been defined and adequate hypothesis has been arrived at" (ibid.). Dewey also states that it is possible to discern a sixth phase or aspect of reflective thought, as an addition to the five aspects discerned earlier in the book:

Again, it has been suggested that reflective thinking involves a look into the future, a forecast, an anticipation, or a prediction, and that this should be listed as a sixth aspect, or phase. LW 8, 208

This also shows that Dewey did not take the five phases to be the only way in which reflective thought can reasonably be analyzed.

### 3.5 *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (1938)

Dewey's *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* is a large volume where Dewey embeds inquiry within a framework of biological and cultural operations. Dewey reiterates a Peircean cycle of doubt, inquiry, and belief. He states that he prefers "warranted assertability" to "belief" because of the way in which the former emphasizes the continuing process of inquiry rather than the settlement of beliefs (LW 12, 14–6). Dewey makes his famous definition of inquiry in line with this:

Inquiry is the controlled or directed transformation of an indeterminate situation into one that is so determinate in its constituent distinctions and relations as to convert the elements of the original situation into a unified whole. LW 12, 108

Dewey states that inquiry (and logic) is autonomous, but still there is a clear continuity between operations of inquiry and biological and physical operations on the one hand, and social and cultural processes on the

other hand (LW 12, 26–9). There are many affinities to Peirce's broad conception of inquiry here. Peirce also sought for continuities between inquiry and biological and social aspects of life. One clear difference between them is Dewey's emphasis on cultural factors: "every inquiry grows out of a background of culture and takes effect in greater or less modification of the conditions out of which it arises" (LW 12, 27). Peirce emphasized development and change, as well as social aspects of inquiry, but not cultural aspects. On the other hand, it has been argued that although Dewey recognized the significance of cultural issues, he never offered satisfactory means for analyzing historical and cultural dimensions of human activity (Miettinen 2006). Both Peirce's and Dewey's approach could be developed further in these respects.

In *Logic*, Dewey does not clearly list phases or aspects of inquiry, but still, he is making a similar kind of an analysis. He maintains that inquiry, in spite of diversity of applications and subjects, has a common structure or pattern, which he seeks to explicate (LW 12, 105). There is a number of sub-chapters which are close to previously formulated aspects of reflective thought (except last two of these chapters): i) The antecedent conditions of inquiry: The indeterminate situation, ii) Institution of a problem, iii) The determination of a problem-solution, iv) Reasoning, v) The operational character of facts-meanings, vi) Common sense and scientific inquiry (LW 12,109–20).

There are many affinities with abductive puzzle solving especially in the institution of a problem and in the determination of a problem-solution (i.e. first two sub-chapters). Dewey maintains that the "indeterminate situation comes into existence from existential causes" and does not start intellectually or cognitively (LW 12, 111). Problems grow out of actual situations. Institution of a problem means that constituents of a given situation are sought and settled in observation (LW 12, 112–3). In Dewey's model, problems and tentative solutions develop together and have their basis in prior inquiry. It is an important part of Deweyan abduction here that Dewey emphasizes that problems do not arise by themselves, or intellectually, or even as a specific phase of inquiry, but from an actual situation and as a part of the entire inquiry. This has affinities with ideas of distributed cognition and the emphasis on practices in relation to abduction.

Dewey maintains that ideas have their basis in observation, but at the same time, an idea is "an anticipation of something that may happen; it marks a possibility" (LW 12, 113). This kind of an interaction between ob-

servations, ideas, and anticipations is at the heart of abductive processes. Dewey emphasizes that “[s]uggestions” have received scant courtesy in logical theory” (LW 12, 114). He is developing an alternative to both traditional empiristic and rationalistic schools. Like Peirce, Dewey denies the possibility of immediate knowledge, and he points out mediational and inferential aspects of knowledge (LW 12, 143; Peirce EP1: 11–27, 1868; Peirce EP1: 28–55, 1868). For Peirce, this alternative to both traditional empiricism and rationalism can be seen also in his analysis of a simple perception involving interpretative and abductive elements (see Peirce EP2: 226–33; and above).

The interaction between observed facts and ideas is a continuous process that works both ways in Dewey’s characterization of inquiry. An important point related to abduction is Dewey’s holistic and relational emphasis: “no fact in isolation has evidential potency” (LW 12, 117). Dewey says that “[s]ome observed facts point to an idea that stands for a possible solution. This idea evokes more observations” (ibid.) and then again “[t]he new order of facts suggests a modified idea (or hypothesis)” (ibid.). The role of a number of observations is not always appreciated when Peirce’s basic formulation of abduction starting with “the surprising fact” is emphasized (see Peirce EP2: 231). But there are also formulations of abduction in Peirce that emphasize this kind of a holistic process. Abduction then “consists in the introduction into a confused tangle of given facts of an idea not given whose only justification lies in its reducing that tangle to order” (Peirce MS 831: 13–4, nd.; see also Peirce PPM 282–3, 1903).

One difference to Peirce’s abduction seems to be that Dewey does not classify abductive elements within forms of *reasoning*. He classifies only induction and deduction within scientific method also in this book (LW 12, 415–36), while issues that can be taken to lie closer to abduction are classified in terms of psychology. For instance, Dewey maintains that suggestions “are not logical” when they just “pop into our heads” (LW 12, 114). In Dewey’s model, reasoning elaborates further and examines those ideas and hypotheses that are produced with psychological means. This is not, however, a clear-cut distinction in Dewey’s formulations either. Some of the issues related to hypothesis formation are, for instance, treated as a part of induction. While discussing inductive phases of inquiry he, for example, points out that data is a basis for suggested solutions and possibilities (LW 12, 423). He states that this comes close to seeing “scientific inquiry as hypothetical-deductive” but it is not still the same; one difference is the role of “observational determinations in order to indicate a relevant hypothesis” (LW 12, 423).

*In summary*, there are many abductive elements in Dewey's different formulations of reflective thought. Dewey (like Peirce) has brought forward several elaborate descriptions and formulations on how problems and tentative suggestions originate and how they are developed further. They have clear affinities with different interpretations on Peirce's abduction and give opportunities for further development.

#### 4. Discussion

In this paper I have characterized, first, some basic ways in which Peirce formulates his idea of abduction, and, second, presented Dewey's formulations of phases, or aspects of reflective thought or inquiry. I have not aimed at making a full-fledged comparison between Dewey's and Peirce's conception of inquiry. There are differences in Dewey's and Peirce's overall view of the aims of inquiry and also in those subject areas of research on which they targeted their analyses. Dewey emphasizes practical problem solving, action, the situated nature of idea generation, the material settings (Koschmann 2003, 8–9; Miettinen 1998) and cultural factors, while Peirce more clearly emphasized (formal) logic, scientific hypotheses and explanations, and semiotic processes (Bernstein 1971, 201; Turrisi 1990; Miettinen 2006; Brogaard 1999; Garrison 2001; Koschmann 2003, 8–9). My paper seeks to show that nevertheless, there are clear continuities and overlaps between both their interests and interpretations, especially when it comes to the area of abduction formulated by Peirce, that is, issues concerning processes of discovery and the formation of hypotheses. I have pointed to abductive elements in Dewey's formulations of aspects of reflective thought which could also enrich Peircean formulations of abduction, and vice versa.

I call this common area an "abductive puzzle" to emphasize that both Peirce and Dewey provided various kinds of elements (or working hypotheses) to make sense of these first phases where problems are formulated and solutions take shape. During their long career, they provided different kinds of formulations of these aspects of inquiry. Both of them offered comprehensive discussions of inquiry. A contentious nature of processes of discovery has probably also contributed to different interpretations concerning their approaches. It is hence difficult to compare Dewey and Peirce. Advocates of Dewey's approach might easily give a skewed picture of Peirce's, and vice versa. Some researchers have argued that Dewey provides a clearer and more comprehensive picture on

the formation of hypotheses (Roth 1988, 136; Talisse 2002) while others have made similar claims about Peirce (Turrisi 1990 476; Brogaard 1999). According to Turrisi (1990, 476), one problem with Dewey's account of the hypothesis formation is that it has its basis in pre-reflective, emotional and psychological processes which just appear or do not appear. But the same problem occurs with some of Peirce's formulations that highlight flashes of insight or a guessing instinct as the basis for abduction. I think then that this problem is related to the nature of the hypothesis formation more than to Dewey's or Peirce's formulations as such.

The similarity or at least the continuity between Dewey's and Peirce's understanding of abduction is often recognized (Anderson 1986; Prawat 1999, 2001; Marcio 2001; Martela 2015). According to Miettinen "Peirce calls the inference that proceeds through hypotheses, an abduction. Dewey further elaborated this logic and applied it to the social practice" (Miettinen 2000, 64; see also Elkjaer & Simpson 2006, 4). According to Marcio (2001, 112): "the concept of abduction was actively at work in Dewey's thought, though the term itself was absent". In this paper I have sought to analyze in some detail these abductive elements in Dewey's formulations.

In a way, Dewey had reasons for not talking about "abduction" in his writings. Dewey understood reasoning to encompass (traditionally) deduction and induction. Abductive elements in Dewey's formulations, or those elements that can be interpreted as abductive, were understood by Dewey as being non-logical, or inferential (see above). This does not, however, mark a clear difference to Peirce. The nature of abduction was a constant question for Peirce, and his formulations of abduction were often close to many "psychological processes" like perception, instinct, guessing or insight. On the other hand, Dewey's ideas about the role of hypotheses, suggestions, or ideas as a part of processes of inquiry are quite close to Peirce's.

Both Peirce and Dewey aimed at broadening the conception of inquiry to encompass elements that are important for understanding the dynamics of inquiry. This broadening means taking into account biological, material, practical, situational, perceptual, esthetic, ethical, social, and cultural aspects as a part of inquiry. I have not analyzed all these aspects in Dewey's and Peirce's formulations in this paper. They were, in any case, both developing an epistemology and methodology that would be different from traditional rationalism (with its emphasis on deductive reasoning) and traditional empiricism (with its emphasis on inductive reasoning) by emphasizing pragmatistically mediated processes of inquiry

where interaction between, for example, observations, hypotheses and action is central. Here, abductive processes play a central role, whatever name these processes are given. I hence agree with Bernstein that the basic differences between Peirce and Dewey have a creative influence and can lead to a richer conception of the nature of human action and thought (see Bernstein 1971, 200-1; cf. Elkjaer & Simpson 2006, 4). Both Peirce and Dewey were constantly developing their accounts on the processes of inquiry and logic. They both gave new means for developing these accounts further.<sup>1</sup>

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# The Role of Intuition in Inquiry

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## 1. Introduction

On June 20<sup>th</sup>, 1879, the philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce took a river boat to attend a conference in New York. On the boat, Peirce's overcoat was stolen, along with an expensive watch. To apprehend the thief, Peirce rounded up the entire service personnel on the boat. On nothing more than a hunch, he soon identified a man he believed had stolen the watch. He could not, however, persuade the man to confess.

Shortly after the ship had landed at a dock, Peirce hastened to the Pinkerton agency to report the crime. He gave a detailed description of his suspect. The Pinkerton detective assigned to the case, however, identified a different suspect, whom he followed but who turned out to be innocent. Later, it was discovered that the person Peirce had identified was, indeed, the person who had stolen the watch. The property was recovered, and the culprit tried. Peirce's hunch was vindicated (Sebeok & Sebeok, 1981).

What was at work when Peirce identified the thief in the first place? Peirce himself maintained that *guesswork* has an important role in carrying out inquiry (Peirce, MS 629; Sebeok & Sebeok, 1981). Mere guessing, however, amounts often to not very viable results. While in some cases, guessing seems to work better than mere chance, there are cases where guesswork is delimited by prejudice or mere ignorance. What are then the grounds for following hunches?

The concept of *intuition* is something of a philosophical conundrum. While the idea of immediate apprehension or immediate insight has been a central subject of debate in philosophy for centuries, its nature is still shrouded in mystery. What makes some guesses work better than others? And why are some people better at guessing than others? It is my

intention in this paper to shed light to this peculiar capacity of the human mind, and its role in carrying out inquiry.

## 2. Two Types of Intuition

Intuition has perplexed thinkers throughout millennia. There have been various explanations to what just occurs to us out of the blue “gut feelings.” Roughly, the positions on intuition can be divided into two categories.

The first use of intuition was made famous by Immanuel Kant. This is the notion of *immediate apprehension*. The second use has gained popularity especially since early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and concerns *immediate insight*. This is the idea of viable insight that is generated independently of conscious inference. Let us call these two types of intuition apprehensive intuition and generative intuition, respectively.

Kant’s idea is relevant in particular to formation of knowledge, in particular his notion of *a priori knowledge*. Kant argued that we can arrive at an understanding of the truth of some statements just by thinking (Kant, 1998). This understanding is rooted in the immediate apprehension, or the intuitive capacity of the human mind. The notion bears some resemblance to Descartes’ idea of clear and distinct ideas: ideas that just *seem* to be true to us, no matter what.

In this paper, however, I will mostly focus on the second type of intuition. This is the type of intuition that is exemplified by the story about Peirce above. Somehow it seems that some people possess a Sherlock Holmes-like capacity of drawing immediate insight from no apparent inference. But up till the recent years, the nature of this mechanism has been unknown.<sup>1</sup>

In order to shed light on the mystery of this intuition, I will, however, need to sidetrack for a moment to recent findings in cognitive psychology and neuroscience. While empirical, these findings will lend considerable argumentative support for the notion of intuitive insight defended below.

## 3. Intuition and the dual-processing theory of thought

In recent years, the psychologist Jonathan Evans, among others, has proposed a theory called the dual-processing theory of thought (e.g. Evans,

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<sup>1</sup> For a more in-depth comparison of apprehensive and generative intuition, see (Järvillehto, 2015).

2003; 2009; Stanovich, 2004; 2009; Kahneman, 2011; Evans & Stanovich, 2013). Evans argues that the human mind consists of two Systems, called System 1 and System 2:

Dual-process theories of thinking and reasoning quite literally propose the presence of two minds in one brain. The stream of consciousness that broadly corresponds to System 2 thinking is massively supplemented by a whole set of autonomous subsystems in System 1 that post only their final products into consciousness and compete directly for control of our inferences, decisions and actions

Evans 2003, 458.

System 1 is evolutionarily speaking old. Humans share it with most "higher" animals and it concerns for the most part non-conscious processing. That is to say, System 1 is the seat of instinct, emotion and intuition. System 1 has a very high capacity and can process many streams of information in parallel. Most of System 1 processes take, however, place unknown to the cognitive agent.

System 2 is, evolutionally speaking, new, and it is typical only to humans and some more "advanced" primates. It concerns the conscious processing of the agent. System 2 is the seat of logical and analytical reasoning. Its processing capacity is very limited compared to System 1, and it can typically process information only serially.

System 2 is constrained by the limitations of working memory, discovered already in the 1950's by George Miller (1956). Miller argued that a person can consciously process only about seven items of information at a time. This number has since been corrected downwards, and the consensus of present day memory researchers is that System 2 can only process about three to five items at a time (Dietrich, 2004).

Manfred Zimmermann argued that human conscious capacity is only around 40 bits per second. (Zimmermann, 1989.) If we suppose that a working memory chunk (an item of information) takes about 8 bits to encode, as with computers, Zimmermann's study comes close to most working memory research: about five units at a time.

Zimmermann, however, also proposed measuring the non-conscious processing capacity of the human brain. Extrapolating from the structure of the nervous system and the channel capacity of the various human senses, Zimmermann ended up hypothesizing that the non-conscious processing capacity of the human mind is a whopping 11.2 million bits per second. In other words, the parallel processing capacity of System 1 is capable of processing almost 1.5 million items of information at one time.

It should, of course, be noted that such results are highly speculative: no direct measurement of the human non-conscious capacity can be carried out as of this moment.

Proponents of the unconscious theory of thought, Ap Dijksterhuis and Loran Nordgren argue also that a considerable body of research suggests that the discrepancy between the conscious and non-conscious processing capacity is considerably large (Dijksterhuis & Nordgren, 2006). A great majority of the information processing carried out by an individual happens non-consciously.

Prominent researcher in social psychology focused on non-conscious thought, John Bargh argues with Tanya Chartrand that 95% of human activity happens non-consciously and automatically (Bargh & Chartrand, 1999). In terms of Zimmermann's research, the relationship of conscious to non-conscious capacity is a whopping  $1/280\,000$  units per second.

While this capacity discrepancy is quite astounding, it cannot alone explain the viability of non-conscious thought. There must also exist some such structures in non-conscious processing as to enable the generation of *viable* insight. This viability can perhaps be explained by *neuroplasticity*: the brain's capacity to change its structure through experience and practice.

Donald Hebb proposed in the 1940's that repeated exercise should produce predictable changes in the brain (Hebb, 1949). This notion, now often referred to as "Hebbian learning," was demonstrated empirically in the Nobel prize-winning studies of Eric Kandel. In studying the nervous system of the *Aplysia* snail, Kandel demonstrated that by repeatedly stimulating a neuron, synaptic growth is produced in connections to adjacent neurons (Kandel, 2006). To paraphrase, the nervous system of human beings changes with experience and practice.

In carrying out a vast meta-analysis of studies on talent, Anders Ericsson and his team found out that no world-class expert had put less than ten years of deliberate practice in their trade (Ericsson et al., 1993). As Ericsson later argued, it takes approximately 10 000 hours, or ten years, of deliberate practice in a domain to become expert in it (Ericsson et al., 2007). It takes, in other words, a considerable amount of time to generate the neural structures that produce viable results sufficiently well to warrant expertise in a domain.

In a study on the nature of intuitive insight, the organisational psychologists Erik Dane and Michael Pratt found out that the intuitive capacity to draw valuable insight was, indeed, domain-specific. People such as corpo-

rate executives and experts, who often trusted their "gut feelings" would fare no better than the layman when drawing insight in an area they were unfamiliar with (Dane & Pratt, 2007).

Intuition appears then to be a domain-specific capacity that is learned by deliberate practice. In carrying out exercises in a given domain, the neuronal structures relevant for producing viable results within that domain are strengthened on the grounds of the Hebbian principle. This in turn creates a better suited System 1 to produce results that are crucial to drawing non-conscious insight and to making fast viable decision within the scope of the given domain.

#### 4. Intuition and Habit

The development of neural structures correlates directly with the pragmatic notion of *habit*. William James wrote already in 1890 presciently of the Hebbian principle: "When we look at living creatures from an outward point of view, one of the first things that strike us is that they are bundles of habits" (James 2007, 104).

Peirce described habits as follows:

[a habit] denotes such a specialization, original or acquired, of the nature of a man, or an animal, or a vine, or a crystallizable chemical substance, or anything else, that he or it will behave, or always tend to behave, in a way describable in general terms upon every occasion (or upon a considerable proportion of the occasions) that may present itself of a generally describable character Peirce, 1934, § 538

Habits are identified by the results that they produce. Or more specifically, what they *would* produce, given the appropriate circumstances. To Peirce, this idea of the conditionality of habit was important. According to Peirce, "the identity of a habit depends on how it might lead us to act, not merely under such circumstances as are likely to arise, but under such as might possibly occur, no matter how improbable they may be. What the habit is depends on when and how it causes us to act." (Peirce, 1934, § 400).

The idea of acquiring habits by practice and repetition is also something central to Peirce's idea. He writes: "habits differ from dispositions in having been acquired as consequences of the principle [...] that multiple reiterated behavior of the same kind, under similar combinations of percepts and fancies, produces a tendency, the habit, actually to behave in a similar way under similar circumstances in the future."

(Peirce, 1998, 413). This notion comes, indeed, quite close to the idea of Hebbian learning.

Peirce's idea of habits as acquired structures is further developed by James. James, in fact, almost eerily predicted Hebb's idea in his magnum opus, *Principles of Psychology*:

A path once traversed by a nerve-current might be expected to follow the law of most of the paths we know, and to be scooped out and made more permeable than before; and this ought to be repeated with each new passage of the current. Whatever obstructions may have kept it at first from being a path should then, little by little, and more and more, be swept out of the way, until at last it might become a natural drainage-channel

James 2007, 108

Exercise and experience affect our neural structures, which in turns produces automated habits that function well in the environment where the experience has taken place. The nature of our habits is, in other words, determined by what we have experienced.

Thus intuition can be construed as a domain-specific capacity to generate viable insight that is based on non-conscious System 1 processes. At the root of intuition is experience and practice in a domain that generates the non-conscious ability to produce viable results in that domain.

## 5. Intuition and Inquiry

Why does a scientist entertain a given type of hypothesis rather than another? What, for example, caused Ernest Rutherford to argue, when he had discovered anomalies in J. J. Thomson's theory of the atom in his alpha ray experiments, that there was, in fact, a nucleus present within the cloud of electrons Thomson had postulated? Clearly, Rutherford's experimental results could have led him in innumerable alternative directions. Why, exactly, did Rutherford end up postulating the nucleus?

Peirce was skeptical about the existence of the Kantian-type intuition as immediate apprehension. He, as most American pragmatists, regarded the idea of self-evident knowledge with great suspicion. However, Peirce developed several notions that could be of use in understanding generative intuition.

Peirce argued that in addition to the traditional inferential modes of deduction (inferring particulars from laws) and induction (inferring laws from particulars), there is a third: *abduction*. In abductive inference, a hypothesis is first formed, which then acts like the law in deduction. If the

particulars inferred from the hypothesis are corroborated by experience, the abduction is considered valid.

In coming up with an abductive hypothesis, the role of *clues* is critical. But what drives the scientist to pay attention to just the right kinds of clues and to draw up a hypothesis on the grounds of them? This ambiguity in generating hypotheses has created a generous amount of criticisms towards the idea of abduction. Is any guess or viable hypothesis as good as the next? Or are there some demarcation criteria by which different hypotheses can be evaluated?

The dual-processing theory of thought offers us a credible account of how the abductive hypotheses are formed. In the light of what was argued above, the reason to both the acuity of the scientist and her forming of viable hypotheses lies in the highly sophisticated System 1 of the person.<sup>2</sup>

After having practiced and performed within a domain for years, the scientist has acquired a considerable amount of various skills relevant to that domain. Some of these skills pertain to being able to single out the relevant pieces of information from background noise. By carrying out experiments, the scientist has learned that certain kinds of results are significant, and certain other kinds are not. Likewise, the scientist has a wide knowledge of what has previously passed on as a viable hypothesis. Rutherford would have hardly found it viable to postulate a little green elf playing tennis with his alpha rays but to have a positively charged particle was, instead, perfectly in line of his acquired knowledge in his trade.

The available variety of different hypotheses for abductive inference is unlimited. But the available variety of *viable* hypotheses is scarce. Pure guesswork would amount to nothing more than just picking out one of the available hypotheses at random. Based on the acquired skills and the accustomisation of the scientists' System 1, a massive processing capacity for singling out the viable hypothesis based on earlier knowledge can take place. Intuition, therefore, plays a tremendously important role in discovery. And only once the intuitive capacity of System 1 has produced a viable hypothesis can the validity of the hypothesis be tested in terms of System 2 inference and conscious experimentation.

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<sup>2</sup> For a more in-depth discussion on the critique and viability of abductions, see (Paavola, 2004).

## 6. Generative intuition and immediate apprehension

While I argued above that there are two kinds of intuition, I will tentatively offer here a potential future avenue of inquiry that might be pursued to bring these two kinds together. Namely, while at first it appears that apprehensive intuition is somehow different from generative intuition, it may be argued that both have grounds in the ontogenesis of the organism: in other words, in learning to function in a domain.

The idea of apprehensive intuition concerns knowledge, and in particular, knowledge of necessary truths. The Harvard pragmatist C. I. Lewis argued that such knowledge is generated by our application of concepts (Lewis, 1946). He furthermore held that concepts are subject to change both within a culture and as concerns the agent. (Järvillehto, 2011).

The intension, or the criterion of application, of a concept is subject to change. For example, after repeated encounters with hairy cats, having hair becomes an intensional criterion for the identification of cats. And if the present concept of the atom does not explain empirical evidence sufficiently well, a new criterion, such as having a nucleus, will eventually be added to it.

Thus Lewis' work could be used as a foundation to demonstrate that while generative intuition is based on domain-specific learned System 1 processes, also apprehensive intuition has its root in similar processes that is to say, learned conceptual structures.

I do not have the capacity to delve deeper into this convoluted issue; I have, however, elsewhere presented a deeper analysis of Lewis' System and its application in conceptual analysis and the resolution of a priori knowledge, which is highly compatible with the notion of intuition presented here.<sup>3</sup>

## 7. Conclusion

So how was "Peirce, the consulting detective", as the Sebeoks, alluding to Sherlock Holmes, so aptly put it, able to pick out the culprit? I can, of course, only speculate about which domain-specific skills were relevant for Peirce's feat. Two tentative answers may, however, be offered.

First, Peirce was, of course, a master of inference. Having practiced and developed logic in its many guises, Peirce had learned a considerable

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<sup>3</sup> (Järvillehto, 2011); for a more detailed account of the relationships between apprehensive and generative intuition, see also (Järvillehto, 2015)

amount of thought processes relevant to logical inference both inductive, deductive and abductive. Given sufficient clues, Peirce may have simply been able to single out the most likely candidate to have perpetrated the crime. Also, Peirce's work on abduction must have given him an edge in knowing to look for the proper clues.

Second, Peirce was a true renaissance genius: a man proficient in a dozen or more specific traits. This gave him certainly an edge in singling out the various hypotheses available and to choose the most viable one.

Whatever the particular source of Peirce's expertise in the case of the river-boat, it is clear that human beings, time and again, have demonstrated the peculiar characteristic of coming up with correct answers without being able to consciously justify them.

I have argued that this capability must be more than guesswork, and that it must have a basis on what we now know about the functioning and the neural basis of the human mind. The intuitive capacity of the human being taps into the considerable domain-specific resources of the System 1 of the human mind, acquired by experience and deliberate practice. As in so many areas of life, also in the matters of intuition, practice makes perfect.

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PART VI

ONTOLOGY AND  
MEANING

# Method and Metaphysics: Pragmatist Doubts<sup>1</sup>

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## 1. Introduction

Donald Davidson fits quite neatly into the resurgence of metaphysics that has been evident in Anglophone philosophy for a generation or so. At the same time, however, Davidson has been an important source—indeed, a main source—of inspiration in the development of the increasingly and self-consciously *ametaphysical* variety of pragmatism, associated with Richard Rorty, that has come to the fore during that same time. This makes Davidson a particularly interesting philosopher to engage with if one wants to understand the nature of the pragmatist critique of metaphysics—if there is one. I begin by expanding on the first claim, that Davidson is easily absorbed by metaphysics. Next, I marshal pragmatist reservations toward metaphysics and toward the metaphysical Davidson. In the third section, I ask whether it is not possible, after all, to recover a pragmatizing reading even of this Davidson. Finally, I allow myself to wonder about the force and point of the pragmatist stance against metaphysics. Even if metaphysics remains elusive, however, there is the hope that some light will have been shed on the resources that Davidson offers pragmatists trying to affect the philosophical conversation, and also on what the metaphilosophical divergences are between a naturalistic pragmatism and contemporary analytic metaphysics.

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<sup>1</sup> Previously published in Jeff Malpas (ed). foreword by Dagfinn Føllesdal: *Dialogues with Davidson: Acting, Interpreting, Understanding* (pp. 129–144), Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press. © 2011 Massachusetts Institute of Technology, republished with permission of The MIT Press.

## 2. Metaphysical Davidson

The challenge that Davidson poses for pragmatists who wish to co-opt his work is clearly in evidence in a paper from 1977, "The Method of Truth in Metaphysics". It opens as follows:

In sharing a language, in whatever sense this is required for communication, we share a picture of the world that must, in its large features, be true. It follows that in making manifest the large features of our language, we make manifest the large features of reality. One way of pursuing metaphysics is therefore to study the general structure of our language. Davidson, 1984a, 199

Davidson, it seems, unequivocally affirms the idea that there is a way of viewing the world such that all language-users share it, that this common picture can be characterized in terms of its general features, and that these features are ipso facto general features of the world. Metaphysics, then, is what we do when we try to say what these features are. Paying attention to language, tracing its "general structure," we may come to know something about how the world must be. This is the characteristic modality of metaphysics; it uncovers necessary truths.

In Davidson's hands, the concept of truth is methodologically central to metaphysics for a plain reason: "What a theory of truth does for a natural language," Davidson explains, "is reveal structure" (Davidson, 1984a, 205). Metaphysics, then, is recast as the explication of the ontological commitments we must undertake as we develop a recursive theory capable of specifying the truth conditions of any of the infinitely many assertive sentences of a language. Insofar as "such a theory makes its own unavoidable demands" on ontology, we are able to say something very general about how the world must be structured (Davidson, 1984a, 205). The application of the method, which Davidson offers in the final part of the paper, is a matter of considering what is needed to construct "a comprehensive theory of truth." Davidson concludes that unless we wish to deny that a very large number of our most ordinary sentences can be true, we must take it that there are objects and events.

The tight connection between ontology and logical form that Davidson's method exploits depends on his initial claim, that successful communicators share a largely true picture of the world. It is in the context of this claim that Davidson's method of truth yields constraints on what the world must be like. Moreover, this claim and the argument for it are connected to a number of philosophical theses for which Davidson is fa-

mous, claims concerning the nature of minds, of knowledge, and of the interrelations between knowing subjects and the world they occupy. These theses certainly are not derived by the method just described; rather, they make up the underpinnings of it. Yet they appear to be, and are typically treated as, metaphysical theses. Considering this metaphysical underpinning a little more closely will take us into familiar Davidsonian ground.

What is needed to understand the utterances of a speaker and figure out what is on her mind must be available to observation. The stance of the interpreter is methodologically basic. What the interpreter has to go on is what a speaker says and the circumstances of her saying it. The details of the method of radical interpretation need not concern us here. The key idea is that interpretation requires that the interpreter is able to form an idea of what a speaker acting in the world is up to. This implies two things. First, what the interpreter believes about the world must give some indication of what the speaker believes about it—this is obvious when it comes to the perceptual registration of salient facts in the communication situation, but actually pertains much more generally. Second, both the inferential connections between beliefs that the interpreter is disposed to endorse, as well as the action-guiding preferences that the interpreter possesses, must give some indication of what the speaker is likely to say or do given her beliefs. Failing these requirements, that is to say, if the interpreter cannot recognize a basic rationality in the speaker, there is no connection to be made, neither between utterances and action, nor between utterances and the world, and the interpreter will literally have no clue as to what the speaker might be saying.

In "The Method of Truth in Metaphysics," Davidson is clear that these considerations initially seem to give us only agreement between interpreters. "And certainly agreement," he observes, "no matter how widespread, does not guarantee truth" (Davidson, 1984a, 200). The real point is that "objective error can occur only in a setting of largely true belief. Agreement does not make for truth, but much of what is agreed must be true if some of what is agreed is false" (Davidson, 1984a, 200).

Here we confront the core thought in Davidson's philosophy: the intimate, inalienable nature of the connection between truth and meaning. The connection is emphasized wherever Davidson argues that we can describe what it is to understand a language in terms of the structure provided by a theory of truth for the language. The very same connection shows up, also, when Davidson argues against the skeptical idea that our beliefs about the world may be generally and systematically false;

wherever there is any degree of real semantic understanding (such as is presupposed in any agreement), Davidson claims, there is also common knowledge of the world. This symmetry has perhaps not always been evident in debates around these claims. Still, if one doubts the Davidsonian idea that successful communication—mutual understanding of the meaning of what speakers say to one another—entails that we are largely operating knowledgeably in the world, one ought to find at least *prima facie* troublesome the idea that meaning is closely tied to truth conditions. One way to respond, if one remains attracted to a truth-conditional account of meaning, is to allow that we may be massively ignorant of what we really mean when we speak. Alternatively, though still in the same general neighborhood as far as one's conception of semantics goes, one may hold that meaning is tied to verification conditions, to what it is that we count, based on evidence available to creatures like us, as justifying an assertion, so that while we well understand one another's utterances and agree about many of them, we may remain systematically ignorant of the world. Both of these strategies make much of the intuition that there is a gap between what we have reason to believe and how things really are. Indeed, a large number of philosophers have argued that Davidson, in his antiskeptical line of thought, makes far too little of exactly this gap. The objective, mind-independent nature of truth is obscured, or the human capacity to know is inflated—the corrosive power of systematic doubt is not fully appreciated.

One line of thought where this alleged tension in Davidson is often diagnosed is the argument against the idea that we can make out a philosophically interesting notion of conceptual schemes (Davidson, 1984b). Davidson identifies conceptual schemes with "sets of intertranslatable languages," and the question now becomes, "Can we then say that two people have different conceptual schemes if they speak languages that fail of intertranslatability?" (Davidson, 1984b, 185). This is the very idea that Davidson rejects. Given that interpretation is possible only if we assume shared norms of rationality and substantial overlap in belief, we will not be able to interpret a speaker without also recognizing a core of familiar concepts in her thoughts. This is not just a matter of intersubjective agreement; the connection between truth and meaning ensures not only that we share a significant body of concepts, but also that we largely apply them correctly to the world.

Scott Soames, in his much-discussed history of twentieth-century analytical philosophy, summarizes his response to Davidson's claims as follows:

First, the fact that we can interpret the speech of another group does not guarantee as much agreement between them and us as Davidson seems to assume. So long as it is possible for us to explain why the other speakers hold beliefs different from ours, we can make sense of a great deal of disagreement. Second, we can make sense of big differences between ourselves and speakers of another culture that don't involve disagreements—e.g., differences regarding which objects are basic, and most worthy of attention. These two points suggest that, contrary to Davidson, even those whose utterances we can interpret and translate may have views different enough from ours to warrant the attribution of a different conceptual scheme. Finally, we found no reason to believe that there couldn't be speakers whose conceptual schemes were so different from ours that we couldn't translate their speech.

Soames, 2003, 330

These are telling remarks. First, does Davidson underestimate the amount of disagreement there can be between us and another group? The objection suggests that the constraints Davidson articulates on radical interpretation produce a clear quantitative sense of agreement, and that such lessons from the idealized radical interpretation situation can be projected onto relations between "us" and some other group. These are questionable assumptions, but might seem natural to make on an *epistemic* reading of Davidson, that is, a reading that construes him as engaged in the project of evaluating and legitimating our beliefs. Second, may discrepancies between cultures be so great that, while they do not necessarily confound interpretation, we should take them as indicating different conceptual schemes? How we respond to this will depend on the kind of explanatory work we hope the idea of a conceptual scheme will do for us, as we will see in the third section. For now, though, a relevant question is this: Why are "differences regarding which objects are basic, and most worthy of attention" not disagreements? Perhaps these differences do not count as disagreements because they concern evaluations, how we respond to and cope with the world, not how we picture it. It is difficult to know, but certainly such a distinction may come more easily to us if we think it an important task of epistemology to sort our subjective *response* to the world as we conceive of it from our registered *picture* of it. And finally, why could there not be conceptual schemes—sets of intertranslatable languages—that we are unable to translate? Soames's reasoning continues as follows:

Since we know that whatever attitude we are warranted in taking toward a proposition, we are similarly warranted in taking toward

the claim that it is true, we will be prepared to accept and assert a new proposition just in case we are prepared to accept and assert that it is true. [...] We regard a sentence as true if it expresses a true proposition. What now becomes of the idea that there could be a language containing true sentences that are not translatable into English? This is just the idea that there could be a language that expresses true propositions that are not expressed by any sentence of English. This is no more incoherent than the claim that there are true propositions one has not yet encountered, Soames, 2003, 329–330

What, asks Soames, is so special about English? Why should we think that all the truths there are may be expressed in the particular language that we happen to speak? There is something immediately persuasive about this reaction. It seems preposterous to suggest that some particular language should be the one in which we are able to express a god's-eye view of things, to formulate sentences expressing all the true propositions there are. Surely, as Soames argues, just like we now know truths that could not have been expressed by past speakers, so it seems future communities may come to know things that we are unable to express, things that they can express in their language, but that simply cannot be translated into the English that we know. Faced with an argument that precludes this eventuality, the prudent thing to do is to be suspicious of the argument.

Two issues bear on the merits of this third point against Davidson. How are languages to be individuated in the context of Davidson's discussion? What is the relation between knowledge of some particular language and the nature of communicative success considered in Davidson's third-person perspective? We will return to these questions in the third section. At this point, let us simply note the idea against which Soames reacts, namely, that there is some language mastered by a group of speakers in which all the truths there are can be expressed, and that we belong to that group. This idea is part of the context of epistemology. It is a claim pertaining to the legitimacy of our picture of reality, specifically, the legitimacy of the tools we rely on to construct it. Soames rejects it. Making his three points, Soames insists that neither our concepts nor our beliefs are as closely tailored to those of our fellow creatures or to the nature of reality as Davidson claims. Soames, in effect, is asserting a more robust gap between how things appear to us to be and how they really are than Davidson seems willing to acknowledge.

Here is where we stand. Metaphysically speaking, Davidson advertises a way to get from mere belief, appearances, to truth, to reality: Taking ourselves to be rational, communicating agents we must also take ourselves to have knowledge—of ourselves, of others, and of the world we share. Certainly, we make errors regarding all three, but errors, no matter how deep or pervasive, are parasitical on a foundation of justified, true belief; take away that basis and errors simply dissolve into pointless noise and movement.<sup>2</sup> This view is the context in which efforts to tease out the logical form of expressions, the forms that implement a truth theory for a language, will also be a systematic approach to metaphysical knowledge, knowledge of the large structures of the world.

The response, however, has frequently been skeptical. For those who share a basic premise of modern epistemology, that the relation between appearance and reality is subject to general consideration, it seems that the skeptical challenge to knowledge is underestimated—Davidson is simply ducking it. Yes, you can tie meaning to belief and to observable behavior, or you can tie it to truth. Do both at the same time, however, and you are a verificationist. Yet this very context in which verificationism appears as a dodge, a failure of nerve or of philosophical seriousness, is one way to characterize the target of the pragmatist critique of metaphysics. This critique, I will suggest, provides a basis for a different view of the lessons to be extracted from Davidson. First, though, it is necessary to home in more closely on the pragmatist conception of the target.

### 3. Pragmatist doubts

Metaphysics probably cannot be given a useful, coherent definition, but that fact certainly need not impugn the practice of metaphysics. This, I think, is common ground between pragmatists and most practicing metaphysicians. Those working in the philosophical tradition that traces its main roots to ancient Greece have in the course of 2 500 years developed a repertoire of questions and styles of handling them that include metaphysical questions, questions we typically recognize as such even if we cannot give an adequate general description of the kind, and even if for some questions and some inquiries it is unclear or controversial whether they should be counted as metaphysics. That it recognizes this common ground is distinctive of the skepticism toward metaphysics that is char-

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<sup>2</sup> These claims run through much of Davidson's work, but are most fully elaborated in (Davidson, 2001a) and (Davidson, 2001b).

acteristic of pragmatism. It means that pragmatists will not frame this skepticism in a manner that presupposes a definitional handle on metaphysical questions. So pragmatists do not want to say that all metaphysical statements are necessarily false, or that they must be meaningless, or that metaphysical questions as such point to matters beyond the reach of human cognitive capacities. That all depends, the pragmatist will want to say—some metaphysical statements are false, some perhaps meaningless (without clear point, statements we don't know what to do with), and some metaphysical questions may in fact be forever unanswerable by creatures like us. But we will not want say that these facts, when they obtain, are somehow explained by the metaphysical character of the statement or question. Paradoxically, the pragmatist's complaint against metaphysics will not be that it is metaphysical.

The paradox is only apparent, however. The appearance depends on taking two kinds of critical response as exhaustive of the options. There are, first of all, the familiar attempts, exemplified paradigmatically in recent history by the logical positivists' struggle to articulate a criterion of verification, to criticize metaphysics that end up being co-opted by metaphysics; saying what metaphysics is, even to reject it, is to do metaphysics. Then there is the call, made by the late Heidegger and ever more imaginatively heeded by Derrida, to leave metaphysics alone. This second strategy is reminiscent also of Wittgenstein; if you can't say what it is without doing it, better shut up about it, and do something different. Both these broad strategies are what we may call *puritanical*—they attempt to free our thought from a kind of activity to which it is prone, but of which no good or truth can ever come. They are putative philosophical *cures*.

The pragmatist critique of metaphysics carves out space between these two unsatisfactory strategies. It is antiessentialist about metaphysics. It takes it that whether or not a statement is metaphysical depends entirely on the purposes for which it is deployed, and that these purposes can be understood as contingent historical artifacts of human culture. Rorty is its main exponent, and his strategy has been twofold: more or less direct attacks on key ideas in a broad but specific philosophical paradigm, and deliberations about what sort of contribution to life that philosophy should be making. Let us briefly consider each in turn.

Rorty's direct engagement with metaphysics is most systematically carried out in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, as an attack on the mirror-imagery informing the Cartesian conception of mind, purified by Kant, and setting the agenda for epistemology-based philosophy (Rorty, 1979).

Modern epistemology, in Rorty's diagnosis, is inescapably *representationalist*. Its task is to determine what the general characteristics are of mental or linguistic representations that succeed in rendering the world as it really is. In *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Rorty gives a genealogical interpretation of the conception of the mind that gives rise to this task, culminating in a set of arguments against it that he draws principally from Sellars, Quine, and Davidson. Without the myth of the given, and without a principled distinction between questions of meaning and questions of fact, the way is cleared for giving up what he later came to call the "world-picture" picture, the visual metaphors of our epistemic situation (Rorty, 2007, 150). To the extent that Rorty's account of the rise and unfolding of the vocabulary of modern epistemology is convincing, his readers will come to doubt that philosophy must continue to contend with a general gap between the world as it appears to us would-be knowers and the way it really is.

The appearance–reality gap provides a connection between the kind of philosophical argument offered in the main parts of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* and what we may call the external strategy pursued in much more detail in Rorty's later writings.<sup>3</sup> This strategy is not designed to undermine the epistemological project of the modern age by arguments that engage the project on its own terms. Rather, the point here is to read the significance of the project through a different lens; as a phenomenon of what Rorty calls cultural politics, what is the significance of representationalism? What, in cultural and political terms, is the effect of an epistemological conception that takes the essence of knowledge to be a matter of aligning appearance with reality? This is a theme that Rorty has pursued from a great many angles, not always with consistency. One persistent idea, though, is the link that Rorty finds between thinking in terms of the "picture-world" view and the hypostatization or externalization of moral, political, and epistemic authority. On this recognizably Nietzschean line of thought, we diminish ourselves—our ability both to shape and to embrace our fate—by maintaining a demand for legitimization in terms of something beyond human interest.

It is a noteworthy characteristic of Rortyan pragmatism that this second, external strategy is what motivates the first, more internally directed argumentative approach to representationalism; the common end is to affect the vocabulary of philosophy in such a way that questions of cul-

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<sup>3</sup> See, in particular, (Rorty, 1989), but also (Rorty, 2007).

tural politics, questions regarding the social significance of philosophical vocabularies, will no longer be perceived as extraneous matters.

Representationalism is Rorty's name for a conception of the mandate of philosophy that obstructs this change. To call it metaphysics is to indicate exactly this feature. As a polemical, argumentative target for pragmatism, then, metaphysics is the idea of philosophy as separable from questions of cultural politics.

Davidson, as we have seen, may be read into the project of providing philosophical legitimization for our picture of reality—in large parts and in its most general structure. But as we have also seen, on quite natural assumptions of this "picture-world" view, the legitimization Davidson offers is questionable. Reading Davidson along Kantian lines, one may well find his arguments about the inescapability of shared norms of rationality convincing, but the scope of the conclusion is restricted to how the world will appear to us. We human subjects cannot identify as communicators creatures with whom we do not share a basic epistemic outlook. We cannot identify creatures as thinkers without identifying them as deploying a basic core of familiar concepts. But to think that this constrains what is possible begs the question against someone who takes the objectivity of reality to consist in its independence of mind.

To the extent that he casts his central thoughts as underpinnings for a method in metaphysics, Davidson certainly may encourage such a reading. So one antimetaphysical response might be to set out to rescue the arguments from this packaging, deploying some version of the "new wine in old bottles" metaphor to set up a distinction that would free Davidson's thought of the self-imposed, nonobligatory metaphysical casing. This would be the *purification* response, and it would likely fail, for much the same reasons that what I earlier called puritanical critiques of metaphysics always fail: These critiques do not come to grips with the idea that metaphysics, as a tradition, a practice, is not something to be defined or eliminated, but something to be *transformed*—transformed, according to the pragmatist, by being treated as a species of cultural politics.

#### 4. Pragmatist Davidson

How, then, might pragmatists incorporate the thoughts distilled in Davidson's attack on the very idea of a conceptual scheme? As a first pass, let us return to Rorty. In *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, he com-

ments as follows on Davidson's move "in the direction of a purified and de-epistemologized conception of the philosophy of language":

One outcome of so recasting the subject is to discard what Davidson calls "the third dogma" of empiricism, namely, "the dualism of scheme and content, of organizing system and something waiting to be organized"—a dualism which I have argued [...] is central to epistemology generally as well as to empiricism in particular

Rorty, 1979, 259 <sup>4</sup>

For Rorty, the real gain is Davidson's critique of the metaphors of conceptual relativism—of a scheme organizing or fitting some uninterpreted deliverance from the objective side of the subject-object gap that is the heart of representationalist epistemology. The pragmatist's point here is not at all to delineate the extent of possible divergence of views. There probably is no interesting such delineation. It seems easy enough to imagine communicating organisms or systems whose makeup (say, life span) is so different from ours that communication between them and us would be impossible—perhaps we could flesh out a thought experiment such that As and Bs, happily chatting in their separate camps, would be unable even to recognize each other as communicating creatures. Would this show that Davidson is wrong? To the pragmatist, nothing Davidson says limits the extent to which the potential for communicative success remains an empirical question. The point, rather, is that we will never explain *failures* of communication and divergences of views by appealing to the notion of a conceptual scheme. Soames may well be right that on some occasions we might want to attribute different conceptual schemes to people or to cultures. What we would mean by that, however, is that their habits of acting, thinking, and speaking are different—rooted, perhaps, in vast differences in their natural or cultural environment—and that those habits are so rigid that there seems to be no way to work past them toward mutual understanding. But it wouldn't then be as if we had discovered that there are conceptual schemes after all. In such cases, we are not relying on the idea of conceptual schemes to explain anything; we are simply applying that term as shorthand for obstacles and differences that may well be quite pervasive and systematic, but whose roots and explanations are to be found in practice, in behavior, in the environment, and in interests. Indeed, it is the *explanatory uselessness* of the idea of a conceptual scheme that is the immediate pragmatist lesson of Davidson's attack on the idea.

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<sup>4</sup> The quote from Davidson is from "On the very idea of a conceptual scheme".

This lesson, moreover, steers us in the direction of a deeper point. To see explanatory value, where communication fails, in the idea of a conceptual scheme, one has to think of it as applying not primarily to would-be communicators and their practical situations, but to a relation between differing systems of thought or speech in which such noncommunicants are trapped. Crudely put: Communication fails because their representations are structured differently. Davidson deals explicitly with this idea in "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme." But there is an associated notion that may well survive the attack, in part because Davidson does not face up to it until later. This is the idea that the communicative capacities of speakers can be characterized in terms of knowledge of a shared language. That idea is explicitly challenged in "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs" (Davidson, 2005). In this paper, Davidson sets out to preserve the distinction between literal meaning and speaker's meaning in the face of difficulties posed by innovative, humorous, erroneous, idiosyncratic—in a word, nonstandard—use of language. A critical tool is the distinction he draws between *passing theories* and *prior theories*:

For the hearer, the prior theory expresses how he is prepared in advance to interpret an utterance of the speaker, while the passing theory is how he does interpret the utterance. For the speaker, the prior theory is what he believes the interpreter's prior theory to be, while his passing theory is the theory he intends the interpreter to use.

Davidson, 2005, 101

The distinction makes it possible to distinguish what Davidson calls *first meanings*, even where idiosyncratic, from *speaker's meaning*, but it spells trouble for a combination of views of how communicative ability relates to language mastery:

The asymptote of agreement and understanding is when passing theories coincide. But the passing theory cannot in general correspond to an interpreter's linguistic competence. Not only does it have its changing list of proper names and gerrymandered vocabulary, but it includes every successful—i.e., correctly interpreted—use of any other word or phrase, no matter how far out of the ordinary.

Davidson, 2005, 102

Communicative success, on this view, is a matter of transient convergence: "knowing a passing theory is only knowing how to interpret a particular utterance on a particular occasion" (Davidson, 2005, 19). If we spell out the nature of semantic competence with reference to knowledge of a truth

theory for a language, then we cannot also think of that competence as something stable, shared, and learned. As Davidson puts it: "We must give up the idea of a clearly defined shared structure which language-users acquire and then apply to cases" (Davidson, 2005, 19).

There is much to attract Rortyans to this view (see, e.g., Rorty, 2000). For our purposes, the relevant point is that the paper suggests a shift in what accounts for communicative success, and so also in what may be derived from such success. As long as we think that actual communicative success attests to a substantive, shared structure, we will be tempted to think of the features of that structure as in some sense defining the limits of what we are able to say, think, or know about the world. This is the real import of the idea of a conceptual scheme, and herein lies its connection to a representationalist conception of knowledge. By contrast, Davidson's attack on conceptual schemes is important because it helps clear the way past just those assumptions that make conceptual schemes a natural and interesting thing to imagine. Instead of structures—languages, conceptual systems—Davidson moves communicators and their activity into the center of explanation. That there are no conceptual schemes means that the linguistic resources of communicating agents are by their nature plastic, transformable, and adaptable in response to the situations of communication they are deployed in; if we want to say what is special about linguistic communicators, we need to consider the skills that support this process.

The third-person perspective, as Davidson develops it to a story about agents coordinating their responses in a shared world, contributes to a shift away from representationalism; instead of asking how it is that the rational subject can come to have knowledge of an objective world, Davidson, as pragmatists read him, asks how it is that organisms like us coordinate our activities into rational, communicating agency. The immediate objection is that we are communicating agents precisely because of our knowledge. But that is precisely where pragmatists want to stretch philosophical intuition: Our hunch is that the concept of knowledge will fall nicely into place, connected to our needs, wants, and interests, once we are allowed to address the question of what it is to be a communicating agent without importing representationalist assumptions.

From this point of view, the charge of verificationism seems simply misplaced, for this is just the charge that no amount of belaboring how things appear to us can get us to how they really are. For the pragmatist, the point is to get away from the representationalist vocabulary that sustains the idea of this gap, the idea that reality may contrast with our

picture of it in general, and not just in some particular respect or on some particular occasion. Consider, in this light, the line of objection discussed in section 2, that there may be truths not expressible in a particular language, and that there may be conceptual variation between speakers exceeding what can be captured in the resources of the language of one of them. These protests against Davidson presuppose an idea of communicators working within fixed schemes of concepts or stable languages—communicators with fixed repertoires that limit what they can know or say. But from the pragmatist perspective elaborated here, these worries fall away. For the dynamical, adaptive nature of interpretation that characterizes successful communication just is the ability to transcend at any moment the resources depicted in the frozen abstraction of a truth theory. This means, too, that although successful communicators believe true things about the world, there is no picture of the world such that all successful communicators share it; we have cut off the ascent (if that is what it is) from the idea of communication as a practice that puts speakers in touch with each other and the world to the idea of a general picture of the world that they all share, even if as abstract a picture as a general ontological structure. We can happily take ourselves to be in touch with the world, locally and perspectivally, but not with a general structure of all such being in touch.

Davidson's "method of truth in metaphysics" is impressive, but it is in the end not in itself very damaging to ametaphysical readers of Davidson. The real battle concerns how to understand Davidson's claims about the meaning-constituting role of reason, the social nature of thought, and the veridicality of belief. If we allow these to be cast in the mode of constructive representationalism, as purported philosophical discoveries about how things must be, a route from appearance to reality, then, sure enough, the formal semantics of the Davidsonian program is also reinflated into representationalist ontology, in spite of Davidson's own view—famously dim—of the promise of a theoretical notion of representation. However, as I have tried to make vivid in the discussion of the idea of a conceptual scheme, it is possible to resist this tendency. Instead of reading Davidson through the metaphors of representationalism, and as subject to the vocabulary that entrenches them, pragmatists will want to read Davidson's work as a contribution to the struggle to break free from those metaphors and that vocabulary. If this succeeds, then formal semantics and the "demands of a truth theory" will no longer strike us as the way, finally, to answer "perennial" philosophical questions about what there is and what we can know.

## 5. Concluding doubts

Metaphysics belongs to metaphysics. That is to say, the pragmatist takes the idea of the metaphysical as a category of inquiry as part of the broad project of supporting a representational conception of knowledge, of communication, and of human agency. It belongs, in a word, to the “world-picture” view of knowledge and agents. The central characteristic of this picture is to enforce a principled distinction between what we believe or know, that is, our representations, and what we do, that is, how we act in subjective response. The general structure of the world, the ultimate nature of reality, the general categories of being: These are all notions that we deploy, typically, to prop up this picture. The pragmatist, by contrast, thinks of all knowledge as a form of active, interested engagement with the world, not as a matter of peeling away the distorting influence of interest from receptive representational capacities.

The challenge I have addressed here is that this supporting idea of metaphysics, that there is such a general picture, is one to which Davidson appears explicitly to ascribe. This is also what informs the metaphysical readings of his work. From this perspective, Davidson’s contribution is twofold: He provides a view of meaning that entails bold and striking claims about the relation between our beliefs and those of others, and between our shared picture of the world and the world itself. This, in turn, supports the elaboration of a specific way, encapsulated in “The Method of Truth in Metaphysics,” to determine the large features of our shared picture—where, so to speak, its joints lie. However, I have suggested, metaphysical success is at best conditional; Davidson’s account gets us across the gap between subjective appearance and objective reality only by diminishing it.

From the pragmatist side, things look different. Verificationism is what antirepresentationism looks like when viewed through metaphysical spectacles. This is not a mandatory prescription. One finds support for the “world-picture” view in Davidson principally by taking communication to depend on a system of learned regularities that delineate not just a language, but also what a speaker is capable of thinking and uttering—on the idea of the mind as a structured system of propositions forming what we might call a global outlook. This image of mind as, for philosophical purposes, a set of propositions adding up to a picture of reality tempts one to read Davidson’s reflections on conceptual schemes as pertaining to the relation between how things appear to us to be and how they actually

are. But there are clear indications in Davidson's writings, most strikingly present in "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs", of a different view, one that rejects the idea of a global outlook and challenges the representationalist roots of that notion. On this alternative, pragmatist view, we place the dynamic nature of actual communicative encounters at the center of our account. We see the idiolects specified by truth theories as idealized moments, abstracted out of the dynamic process of collaborative interaction that is communication, and not as an actual picture of a temporary mind from which a global view of things may be extracted. We emphasize the capacity for adaptation and change, the historicity of meaning, the contextual and shifting nature of communication-supporting agreement, and the ubiquitous sensitivity (and resulting malleability) of concepts to practical interest. On this view, that communicators on the whole interact knowledgeably in the world does not mean that there is some general picture to be uncovered that they must all share. We are all knowledgeable about the world, but there is no particular general picture we must have in common, no master constraints to which we are all subject.

What, then, are we to say of Davidson's method of truth in metaphysics? Using the structure of a truth theory to say something about the most general categories of ontology—there are objects, there are events—Davidson purports, sure enough, to display general features of reality. He writes:

Metaphysics has generality as an aim; the method of truth expresses that demand by requiring a theory that touches all the bases. Thus the problems of metaphysics, while neither solved nor replaced, come to be seen as the problems of all good theory building. We want a theory [...] that accounts for the facts about how our language works. What those facts are may remain somewhat in dispute, as will certainly the wisdom of various tradeoffs between simplicity and clarity. These questions will be, I do not doubt, the old questions of metaphysics in new dress. But the new dress is in many ways an attractive one.

Davidson, 1984a, 214

The pragmatist, as we have seen, has no reason to recoil from aspirations to explanatory generality per se. The pragmatist's skepticism toward metaphysics is that the historical project of epistemology is representationalist in nature, fostering the regulative idea of a chief vocabulary, a scale, a hierarchy of forms of description, a hierarchy that may be discovered, that would be independently authoritative, and final. Pragmatists go after this ideal whenever and wherever they find it, because, we think, it sells

human freedom short. We think this, though, not because we imagine, frivolously, that our freedom is fostered by our ignoring reality. We don't doubt that the world constrains us in intransigent ways. What we doubt is the fruitfulness of the pursuit of a final, independently authoritative account of the general structure of such constraint. That project, we claim, turns its back on cultural politics; it sells freedom short by diminishing our active participation in, and thus our willingness and ability to take responsibility for, any particular rendering of our relations to the world, to each other, and to ourselves. The ascent to explanatory generality by itself, however, need have no such effect—once it is decoupled from the representationalist framework, from the idea that we are specifying features of global out-looks, features that must be true of any such. There may be, as Davidson acknowledges, many lines of ascent to generality, different ways of specifying structure—what we must turn our backs on is the idea that they will take us from what merely appears to us to be so to what is really real.

It is, then, the penultimate sentence in the quotation above from which the pragmatist should dissent. The questions raised by the semantic exploitation of truth-theoretic structure are indeed different questions—when they are liberated from representationalist epistemology and no longer serve those purposes that make the pragmatist stand against metaphysics. Should we then say that Davidson's self-proclaimed pursuit of metaphysics isn't really metaphysics after all, that he misdescribes his own most useful contribution? We might be stuck with this option, as an expression of minority protest, if representationalist thinking prevails and remains the lens through which Davidson's contributions are generally assessed. For in this case, the best we can hope for is to continue taking swipes at metaphysics, using whatever resources are to hand. Then again, perhaps Davidson's own sense that a major shift is occurring in philosophical intuitions about what it is to be a communicating agent in the world will turn out to have been prescient.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps the "world-picture" view is fading. In that case, it won't matter very much how Davidson describes his contribution, and the hopeful thing to say will be that metaphysics did not belong to metaphysics after all.

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<sup>5</sup> Regarding the dualism of the subjective and the objective, mind and nature, Davidson says, "Some of [...] [the associated] ideas are now coming under critical scrutiny, and the result promises to mark a sea change in contemporary philosophical thought" (Davidson, 1984a, 39).

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# On Quine's Pragmatic Conception of Ontology

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## 1. Introduction

My aim in this paper is to construe a pragmatic and rationally responsible account of ontological theorizing based on certain aspects of W. V. Quine's thought (cf. Koskinen, 2004, 2012; Koskinen & Pihlström, 2006; Sinclair, 2012). The account is *pragmatic* in the sense that it is compatible with philosophical naturalism and does not involve commitments to substantial and controversial doctrines like global realism or metaphysical essentialism. The account is *rationally responsible* in the sense that it incorporates a variety of rational constraints on ontological theorizing. I begin with a problematization of general metaphysics or ontology, and then suggest that by looking at different conceptions of rationality, we can build various types of rational constraints into our methodological picture of ontological theorizing. These constraints are based on *logical or argumentative rationality*, *trust in sense experience or scientific experiments*, and *the ability to organize our sensations by means of concepts*. To put the three conceptions of rationality to actual work, and to demonstrate their structural roles, a specific context of ontological theorizing is needed. As an illustrative example of how the relevant conceptions of rationality can be seen to provide rational constraints on ontological theorizing, I use Quine's analysis of mass terms.

## 2. The armchair problem

In terms of tradition as well as theory, i.e., considered both historically and systematically, it seems appropriate to characterize metaphysics as a highly general discipline, far removed from the senses and empirical observations. This is already recognized by Aristotle in *Metaphysics* (I.1, 982a, 24–5), where he states that the most general things are the hardest for men to know, because they are furthest from the senses. In a more recent estimation, Quine (1969, 98) seems to agree to some extent when he writes that existential quantifications of the philosophical sort belong to an inclusive theory of nature, although they are situated way out at the end, farthest from observable fact.<sup>1</sup> General metaphysics or ontology can indeed be seen as philosophy's unique contribution to the study of categorizing, and this uniqueness is based precisely on the generality and fundamentality of the ontological categories of being (cf. Westerhoff, 2005, 1).

Supposing that metaphysics thus does operate on a high level of generality, far removed from the senses and observable facts, some sort of "pure thought" or *a priori* reasoning might then seem to suggest itself as a natural method for the discipline. There is, however, an inherent and notorious difficulty built into such a methodological assumption. In "Fixation of Belief", C.S. Peirce (1877) famously criticized the *a priori* method, whose most perfect example he took to be found in the history of metaphysical philosophy (*ibid.*, 252). The problem with the *a priori* method according to him was that metaphysical systems have not rested upon any observed facts, at least not to any great degree. Moreover, Peirce saw fundamental metaphysical propositions as something adopted merely because they seemed "agreeable to reason". Indeed, he took the very essence of the *a priori* method to be *to think as one is inclined to think*. This makes inquiry into something similar to the development of taste and a matter of fashion (*ibid.*, 253). The method was accordingly taken by Peirce to resemble that by which conceptions of art have been brought to maturity.

If accepted uncritically, an aprioristic approach to metaphysics or ontology could lead to what Jonathan Lowe (1998, 26) has fittingly described as the impossible rationalist dream of being able to determine the fundamental structure of reality wholly *a priori* and with absolute certainty. Lowe's characterization of a degenerate metaphysical project actually incorporates a whole bundle of problematic features which might collec-

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<sup>1</sup> On various aspects in which the Quinean and the Aristotelian conceptions of metaphysics specifically do *not* agree, see e.g. Schaffer (2009).

tively be called "The Armchair Problem". The predicament involves at least four discernible aspects: first, the problem of responsibly constraining forms of *a priori speculation*; second, the problem of combining metaphysical speculation with *empirical considerations* from the spheres of everyday experience and scientific theory; third, the problem of *absolute certainty*; and fourth, the problem of *global realism* related with the notion of determining the fundamental structure of reality. Within the confines of the present paper, my main focus will be on the first two sub-problems, although I shall comment also on the last two.

Logical empiricism or positivism famously propagated its own radical vision, according to which there was no empirical connection between metaphysics and science at all, and all metaphysical speculation was simply nonsense (cf. e.g. Neurath *et.al.*, 1929; Carnap 1932). Carnap (1935, 32) also placed metaphysics in the same category with art, as (merely) expressive language. Quine (1969, 97), on the other hand, thought that the positivists were mistaken when they despaired of evidence in cases of existence statements in the philosophical or metaphysical vein. On Quine's view, we can have reasons, and essentially scientific ones at that, for including or excluding certain entities in the range of values of our variables. As I hope to show in the following, there are reasons to think that we should take our cue from this general Quinean optimism regarding the relationship between ontology and rationality.

I wish to try out an intellectual strategy in constructing a pragmatic account of ontological theorizing which is, *contra* Lowe (1998, 4–5; 2002, 5–7; 2014, 130–2; cf. Corradini 2006), compatible with philosophical naturalism, and not inherently committed to substantial and controversial doctrines like global realism or metaphysical essentialism. Global realism can be understood as a view according to which there is a mind-independent reality, and in studying categorial frameworks, ontology is studying the mind-independent structure of this reality. Essentialism can be seen as the assumption that such ontological research is based on the real essences of entities (cf. e.g. Lowe 2008). It would seem to me that compatibility with naturalism as well as the avoidance of an outright commitment to realism or essentialism are something that the pragmatist might also desire. My alternative way of trying to grapple with the Armchair Problem is to focus on the overarching notion of *rationality*. The basic idea is that if rationality can be understood in a multifaceted way which goes beyond the purely *a priori*, then we can also build various types of rational constraints into our picture of ontological theorizing, including empirical

ones. This should provide us with the fundamentals for dealing with the Armchair Problem.

### 3. Rational and ontological context

Three distinct conceptions of rationality (cf. e.g. Haaparanta 2010, 7–8) can then be deemed especially important for our present purposes. The first of these is *logical or argumentative rationality*, connected e.g. with formal systems tracing patterns of valid inference. The second one is *trust in sense experience or scientific experiments*, pointing towards the observational sphere of the empirical. And the third one is *the ability to organize one's sensations by means of concepts*, which acts as a kind of go-between, moulding the empirical input into a conceptual form utilizable by the deductive machinery of logic. These three conceptions can effectively act as different types of controls or *rational constraints* for epistemically responsible ontological theorizing.

To put the three general conceptions of rationality to actual work, we need a specific context of ontological theorizing which demonstrates their structural roles. I propose to use an example which arguably goes back all the way to the pre-Socratics, and Aristotle's discussion of matter and form (cf. e.g. Laycock 2006, ix). Mark Steen (2012) concludes his recent entry on the metaphysics of mass expressions in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* by assessing that the category of "Stuff" seems to be where the category "Event" was thirty or so years ago: It is an important ontological category which remains poorly understood. He also estimates that in the absence of consensus on the referents of mass expressions, controversy about stuff is bound to continue. Intuitively, mass terms like "water" refer to stuff, while count terms like "wombat" refer to objects or things. Moreover, amounts of stuff can be measured, while objects or things can be counted, quantified over, and individuated. The categorial distinction between objects and stuff is fundamental for ontology, semantics, and epistemology.

Although the classification of common nouns as "mass" or "count" dates back to Otto Jespersen's *The Philosophy of Grammar* from 1924 (188–211), contemporary philosophical interest in mass terms is mainly traceable to Quine's (1960, 90–124) discussion of the topic in his *Word and Object* (Lockwood, 1981, 454; Pelletier 1998, 170). My present intentions, however, are not directed at contributing to the theoretical advancement of the semantics of mass terms or the ontology of stuff *per se*, but rather, at

using Quine's analysis of mass terms as an illustrative example or a case-study of how the relevant conceptions of rationality can be seen to provide pragmatic constraints on ontological theorizing. And when I say "pragmatic" here, I mean to emphasize the actual practices related with ontological theorizing. For the *making* of observations, the *defining* and *using* of concepts, and the *constructing* of arguments clearly are something that we *do*: they are different types of actions and practices in themselves. They also have various kinds of effects on and practical consequences for a wider realm of concrete experience. To the extent that pragmatism can be seen as committed to, or founded upon a supposed distinction between *theory* and *practice*, I therefore suggest that we turn pragmatism on itself, and revise the doctrine by blurring this very distinction. The result could count as another version of "a more thorough pragmatism" (cf. Quine, 1980, 46).

#### 4. Trust in sense experience and scientific experiments

How does trust in sense experience or scientific experiments then function as a theoretical constraint in the context of Quine's analysis of mass terms? It would seem that there are at least two basic ways in which empirical considerations *can* constrain metaphysical speculation and ontological theorizing. First of all, trust in sense experience and scientific experiments can be interpreted as a requirement for a bottom-up epistemological story of how we get from sense experience to theoretical discourse, and to the heights of general metaphysics or ontology. We might call this requirement the "*Empiricist Epistemology Constraint*". Quine's influential vision of the ontogenesis (1960, Ch. III) or the roots of reference (1974) is precisely such a story of how we get from stimulus to science (1995), ascending from the level of empirical observation to more and more general concepts, eventually reaching the highest categories of being. Independently of Quine, it should be observed that although general ontological categories like *stuff*, *objects*, *properties*, *relations*, *states of affairs*, and *possible worlds* are in some sense highly theoretical, they are also clearly operational already on the level of everyday experience, where we talk and think quite fluently about various objects, their different properties, relations with other objects, possibilities, necessities, and so on. In a sense, these categories also have clear pragmatic consequences for our concrete actions, as when e.g. *x* decides to do *y* because she thinks that *z* is a real

possibility. Ontology, thus, can also have its beginnings in the most mundane and commonplace conceptual surroundings.

Secondly, once we have reached the heights of ontological theorizing, trust in sense experience and scientific experiments can be interpreted as a general requirement for consistency with the results of scientific experiments, accepted empirical data and established theories from the spheres of the various special sciences. We might call this requirement the "*Naturalistic Consistency Constraint*". Within his overall position, Quine certainly intends the Empiricist Epistemology Constraint to be in line with the Naturalistic Consistency Constraint. The whole point of Quine's (1969, 69–90) naturalized epistemology is to look to special sciences like psychology and cognitive science for answers to the genuine epistemological issues that remain in his revised conception of the theory of knowledge. On the other hand, among the special sciences relevant for the Naturalistic Consistency Constraint and ontology, physics clearly holds a special place for Quine. This becomes apparent, for example, in the way in which he (cf. e.g. 1960, 233ff.) develops his official ontology of physical objects and sets, arguing for the indispensability of the latter for serious scientific theorizing about the former.

When talking about trust in sense experience and scientific experiments as a rational *constraint* in connection with Quine, one might be swiftly reminded of the fact that his famous doctrines like the indeterminacy of translation and the inscrutability of reference (cf. e.g. 1960, 72–7; 1969, 30–5) seem to be based on exactly the opposite idea of the *empirical slack* to be found in our language and theories.<sup>2</sup> However, Quine also does have a constructive bottom-up story to tell, and important aspects of the story become clearly visible already in his paper "*Identity, Ostension, and Hypostasis*", or IOH for short, from 1950. IOH is central for the Empiricist Epistemology Restraint in general and for the analysis of mass terms in particular. In the paper, Quine tries to show how we get off from the empirical ground towards a pragmatically structured conceptual framework of spatiotemporally extended physical objects, and far beyond. As the title indicates, the notion of *identity* is crucial for getting from pure ostension to the hypostasizing of objects. Identity also plays an important part in the generated contrast between *singular terms* and *general terms*. This dual

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<sup>2</sup> How these two aspects of Quine's view hang together is a deep issue at the very core of Quine's thought. For Quine's naturalistic-cum-pragmatist attitude, see e.g. (Koskinen, 2004, 242–8).

distinction, in turn, constitutes a conceptual prerequisite for Quine's ontological analysis of mass terms.

The relevant TOH thought experiment utilizes a river as an example of a four-dimensional physical object extended both spatially and temporally. How is it, then, that we are supposed to postulate or introduce into our discourse a river on the basis of a mere series of pure ostensions, when we are not yet even in possession of the concept "river" itself? Quine starts from momentary objects or things, which supposedly are something that can be directly pointed to. Transforming Quine's original example to a different spatiotemporal context, these are entities like *a*: a momentary stage of the river Spey in Scotland on the 24<sup>th</sup> of August 2013, *b*: a momentary stage of the Spey two days later, and *c*: a momentary stage, at this same latter date of the same multiplicity of water molecules which were in the river at the time of *a*. Let us suppose that part of *c* is in the North Sea, while other parts remain scattered in diverse distilleries of the Speyside area. Thus *a*, *b*, and *c* are three distinct objects which are variously related. We might say that *a* and *b* stand in the relation of *river kinship*, and that *a* and *c* stand in the relation of *water kinship*.

According to Quine (1950, 66), the introduction of rivers as single entities consists substantially in reading identity in place of river kinship. We would be wrong to say that *a* and *b* are identical, because they are merely river-kindred. But if we were to point to *a*, and then wait on the Speyside for two days before pointing to *b* and affirming the identity of the objects pointed to, we would thereby show that our pointing was intended as a pointing to a single river which included both *a* and *b*. The imputation of identity is essential to fixing the reference of the ostension (*ibid.*). If we pointed to *a* and two days later to *b*, saying each time "This is the Spey", then the indexical word "this" used in such a manner must have referred neither to *a* nor to *b*, but beyond them to *something more inclusive*, identical in the two cases (*ibid.*, 67). From the learner's point of view, a tendency to favour what Quine (*ibid.*, 68) calls *the most natural groupings* is required. With the help of this tendency, after repeated pointings, the learner can project a correct general hypothesis as to what further momentary objects we would also be willing to include. Because the various pointings provide an inductive ground from which the learner is to guess the intended reach of the object, in the recipe of spatiotemporal integration via conceptualisation, *induction* needs to be added to the ingredients of identity, ostension and hypostasis.

From spatiotemporal particulars, Quine turns to the ostensive explanation of general terms, and notes (*ibid.*, 69) that the difference would seem to be merely that the spread concerned here is a conceptual one or a generality rather than a spatiotemporal one. Quine first plays down this difference by considering the general term "red" as an example, arguing that a theory of universals as concrete works for red, because it can be treated as the largest red thing in the universe, i.e., the scattered total thing whose parts are all the red things (cf. *ibid.*, 72). However, he then argues that a general equating of universals to particulars breaks down, by using an example of geometrical shapes. The gist of the *reductio* type of argument is that if we try to apply the same approach that seems to work for red to geometrical shapes, we shall intolerably end up with a situation where different shapes like square and triangle count as identical (*ibid.*, 73). This leads to a recognition of two different types of association: that of concrete parts in a concrete whole, and that of concrete instances in an abstract universal (*ibid.*, 74). In effect, we also come to recognize two senses of "is", namely that of *identity*, as in "This is the Spey", and that of *predication*, as in "This is square" (cf. Haaparanta, 1986; Lowe 2009, 3–4).

The difference between the ostension of spatiotemporally extended objects on the one hand and irreducible universals on the other is that in pointing to *a*, *b*, and so on, saying each time "This is the Spey", identity of the indicated object is understood from one occasion to the next, whereas in pointing to various particulars, saying each time "This is square", there is *no imputation of identity* from one occasion to the other (Quine, 1950, 74–5). At best, what is supposed to be identical from one pointing to another is an attribute of squareness, which is *shared by* the indicated objects. But actually, Quine (*ibid.*, 75) says, there is no need to suppose such entities as attributes in our ostensive clarification of "square" at this point at all. What suffices is that we clarify our *use* of the words "is square", and that the listener learn when to expect us to apply them to an object, and when not. The two different senses of "is" are intimately related with the contrast between *general terms* and *singular terms*. The ostensions which introduce a general term differ from those which introduce a singular term in that the former do not impute identity of indicated object between occasions of pointing. The general term also does not, or need not, purport to be a name in turn of a separate entity of any sort, whereas the singular term does (*ibid.*; cf. Koskinen, 2012).

Quine (*ibid.*, 76) thinks it clearest to view the postulation of abstract entities as a further step which follows after the introduction of the corre-

sponding general terms. When "This is square" or "x is square" is already introduced, then we can derive the attribute *squareness*, or what according to Quine comes to much the same thing, *the class of squares*. What is crucially important in this further step is the new fundamental "class of", or "-ness" operator. Quine places much importance on the traditional distinction between *general terms* and *abstract singular terms* because of the associated ontological point: use of the former does not in itself commit us to the admission of the corresponding abstract entity into our ontology, whereas use of the latter does. Here the deep logical and metaphysical roots of the Quinean dictum "no entity without identity" become clearly discernible.

Once a collection of ostensibly acquired basic terms is at hand, we may introduce additional terms by *discursive explanation*, paraphrasing them into complexes of terms already in use. Unlike ostension, discursive explanation can be used for defining new general terms like "shape" applicable to abstract entities. Applying the "-ness" or "class of" operator to such abstract general terms, we can get second-level abstract singular terms purporting to name such entities as the attribute of being a shape or the class of all shapes. This procedure can then be applied for the next level, and so on, taking us eventually to the highest generality levels characteristic of ontology that we started with. We do not have to accept all the details of the Quinean account to appreciate the way in which his story of the ontogenesis of reference can be seen as a response to the Empiricist Epistemology Constraint. The bottom-up epistemological story is an attempt to answer the empirical accountability requirement in this sense.

Having ascended to the heights of ontological theorizing, the *Naturalistic Consistency Constraint* can then be seen to present a general requirement for compatibility with the results of scientific experiments, accepted empirical data and established theories from the spheres of the various special sciences. D.C. Williams (1953, 3), Quine's contemporary in Harvard, stated that metaphysics is the thoroughly empirical science. Every item of experience must be evidence for or against any hypothesis of speculative cosmology, and every experienced object must be an exemplar and test case for the categories of analytic ontology (*ibid.*). Due to the generality of ontology, however, this is no straightforward matter. As Quine (1960, 276) himself points out, no experiment may be expected to settle an ontological issue. Systematicity, coherence, and simplicity may be appealed to, but since the general categories of ontology both transcend and unite the spheres of everyday experience and the various special sciences, it is not clear at all what the Naturalistic Consistency Constraint implies

in specific cases. This is a matter of further philosophical debate, which needs to be conducted in a careful case by case manner.

In terms of the semantics of mass terms, it might be useful to consider some input from empirical experiments and theories of psychology or neuroscience (cf. e.g. Mondini *et.al.* 2008; Warrington & Crutch 2005). In terms of stuff ontology, on the other hand, relevant empirical input might be obtainable from the field of chemistry and the surrounding philosophical discussion (cf. e.g. van Brakel 1986; Zimmerman 1995; Needham 2007).

## 5. Organization of sensations by means of concepts

In a supposed contrast between the armchair and the laboratory (cf. Haug, 2014), the relationship between ontological theorizing and our best empirical theories is readily problematized. However, another major aspect of the Armchair Problem concerns the problem of responsibly constraining forms of *a priori* speculation which is an activity more easily conducted from the confines of the armchair. These constraints need to be applied on at least two different intellectual fronts, namely, on what might in Quinean (cf. Quine, 1969, 69) terms be called the *conceptual* and the *doctrinal* side. The former has to do with the concepts we use, and the latter with the proofs or arguments that we employ. In this section, my focus will be on the conceptual front.

What kind of rational constraints could then be applied on the conceptual side of ontology? Again, it would seem that there are at least two different ways in which conceptual considerations can act as theoretical constraints. First of all, there is a semantic responsibility to make our concepts or ideas as clear as possible (cf. Peirce, 1878). This could be called the "*Conceptual Clarity Constraint*". Secondly, our concepts can be constrained by the requirement that they should be as useful as possible for the purpose at hand. This could be called the "*Pragmatic Utility Constraint*". Unsurprisingly, these two constraints are connected, because for systematic purposes characteristic of ontological theorizing, the clarity of concepts also contributes to their usefulness. Usefulness for the purpose at hand, on the other hand, is arguably a pragmatic notion which is healthily oblivious to the suspect dichotomy between theory and practice. The purpose at hand can be a theoretical one, and if the pragmatic utility of ontological concepts is judged in terms of the success of their practical application, then the relevant practices may also be theoretical ones. Irrespective of one's view of the categorial framework itself, as an illustra-

tive example, one might think of the way in which Lowe (2006, 121–140) argues for the usefulness of his four-category ontology in dealing with dispositional versus occurrent predication.

In the Quinean story of mass terms and stuff ontology, the ability to organize one's sensations by means of concepts begins with *occasion sentences*. These are sentences commanding assent or dissent only if queried after an appropriate prompting stimulation (Quine 1960, 36), variably from occasion to occasion (Quine, 1974, 39). In terms of both infantile learning and the first steps of radical translation, "Mama", "Red", and "Water" count as useful examples. For the child, the mother, red, and water are all of a type; each is just "a history of sporadic encounter, a scattered portion of what goes on" (Quine, 1960, 92). Occasion sentences belonging to this first phase of language learning are archaic, primitive, and indecisive in relation to the sophisticated dichotomy between singular and general. As we saw earlier, the distinction between singular and general terms is closely related with the notion of identity. With occasion sentences and mass terms, we still remain on a pre-individuative phase in the evolution of our conceptual scheme. It is only when individuation emerges that the mother becomes integrated into a cohesive spatiotemporal convexity, while water remains scattered in space-time. With the advent of individuation, the two terms part company (Quine, 1969, 10). The category of mass terms remains an archaic survival of the first phase of language learning (Quine, 1960, 121).

What we have termed the Conceptual Clarity Constraint may be seen to operate in the way in which Quine clarifies the distinction between singular and general terms. Initially, individuation is the one feature that distinguishes singular from general, or "Fido" from "dog" (Quine, 1974, 85). From a syntactic perspective, if a term admits the definite and indefinite article and the plural ending, then normally under our perfected adult usage it is a general term. A singular term like "mama" admits only the singular grammatical form and no article (Quine, 1960, 90). From a semantic point of view, the distinction between singular and general terms seems to be that a singular term names or purports to name just one object, while a general term is true of each severally, of any number of objects (*ibid.*, 91). Actually, however, Quine (*ibid.* 95) says, the difference of being true of just one object and of many is *not* what matters to the distinction between singular and general. There are counterexamples like "Pegasus". This is a derived term learned by description, and it counts as a singular term though true of *nothing*. Another counterexample is provided by "nat-

ural satellite of the earth". This in turn is compounded of learned parts, and counts as a general term although true of just *one* object.

One could vaguely say that "Pegasus" is singular in that it *purports* to refer to just one object, while "natural satellite of the earth" is general in that its singularity of reference is not something *purported* in the term itself (*ibid.*, 95–6). However, Quine takes such talk of purport to be only a picturesque way of alluding to distinctive grammatical roles that singular and general terms play in sentences. And it is precisely by their grammatical roles that singular and general terms are properly to be distinguished. The basic combination in which singular and general terms find their contrasting roles is that of *predication*. An example would be "Mama is a woman", or more schematically, "*a* is an *F*", where "*a*" represents a singular term and "*F*" a general term. Predication joins a general term and a singular term to form a sentence that is true or false according as the general term is true or false of the object, if any, to which the singular term refers (*ibid.*, 96; cf. Quine 1974, 84).

In connection with mass terms, the organization of sensations by means of concepts leads Quine (1960, 97) to notice an ambivalence with respect to the dichotomy between singular and general terms. This ambivalence becomes strikingly apparent precisely in predication, where the mass term behaves in two different ways. Sometimes the mass term enters predication after "is", like a general term in adjectival form, and sometimes before "is", like a singular term. Examples of such cases are sentences like "That puddle is water" versus "Water is fluid". The way in which Quine tries to solve the observed ambivalence is to explicitly give the mass term both of these roles. According to him (*ibid.*), the simplest plan seems to be to treat it accordingly, as a general term in its occurrences after "is", and as a singular term in its occurrences before "is". This decision leads to what has in subsequent literature been called *Quine's dual analysis of mass terms* (cf. e.g. Pelletier, 1998, 170).

According to the dual analysis (Quine, 1960, 98), a mass term *in predicative position* may be viewed as a general term which is true of each portion of the stuff in question, excluding only the parts too small to count. Thus, "water", for example, in the role of a general term is true of each part of the world's water, down to single molecules, but not to atoms. A mass term *in subject position*, on the other hand, is not taken to differ from a singular term like "mama", unless the scattered stuff that it names be denied the status of "a single sprawling object". Quine (*ibid.*) sees no reason to boggle at water as a single though scattered object, *the aqueous part of the*

*world*. This is not conceived as a particularly curious case either, because as Quine points out, even the tightest object, short of an elementary particle, has a scattered substructure when the physical facts are in. It might be thought that since mass terms before the copula have been assimilated to singular terms by appeal to scattered objects, we could also treat mass terms as singular terms equally after the copula by reconstruing "is" in such contexts as the mereological notion "is a part of". Quine (*ibid.*, 99) notes, however, that this version fails because there are e.g. parts of water that are too small to count as water themselves. A further difficulty has to do with the fact that the criterion of what counts as too small is not the same for water, sugar, furniture, and so on. The best strategy, Quine concludes, is to acquiesce in a certain protean character on the part of mass terms, treating them as singular in the subject and general in the predicate.

Quine does recognize that the primitive category of mass terms is ill fitting the sophisticated dichotomy into general and singular. But he (1969, 10) nevertheless insists that the philosophical mind sees its way to pressing this archaic category into the dichotomy. The motivation is *pragmatic*, and has to do with the organization and simplicity sought by science (cf. e.g. Quine, 1974, 88-9). Indeed, to get back to IOH, we may observe that the whole tone of the paper is conspicuously pragmatic, as Quine (1950) talks about identification determining our subject matter (*ibid.*, 65), positing of processes or objects (*ibid.*, 67), survival value of practices (*ibid.*, 69), benefits of formal simplicity of subject matter (*ibid.*, 70), relativity to a discourse (*ibid.*, 71), conceptual convenience (*ibid.*, 78), a pragmatically acceptable conceptual scheme (*ibid.*, 79), and finally, about conceptual frameworks into whose absolute correctness as *mirrors of reality* it is meaningless to inquire into (*ibid.*). Accordingly, Quine also concludes the paper by suggesting—instead of a realistic standard of correspondence to reality—a *pragmatic* standard for appraising basic changes of conceptual schemes.

A central principle in IOH proposed by Quine (*ibid.*, 71) towards the purpose of achieving a pragmatically acceptable conceptual scheme is the maxim of the *identification of indiscernibles*. The maxim states that objects indistinguishable from one another within the terms of a given discourse should be construed as identical for that discourse. As in our earlier river example, the references to the original objects should be reconstrued for purposes of the discourse as referring to other and fewer objects, in such a way that indistinguishable originals give way each to the same new object. Thus we get from various momentary river stages *a*, *b*, and so

on, to the single river Spey. Locally, this constitutes an application of Ockham's Razor. In a more global perspective, however, a new entity has simply been added to the old ones. The Spey is a convenient and pragmatic addition to our ontology because of the contexts in which it does effect economy (cf. *ibid.*, 70). The example constitutes yet another illustrative case of pragmatically organizing one's sensations by means of concepts.

## 6. Logical or argumentative rationality

Of the three central notions of rationality acting as different types of controls or constraints for responsible ontological theorizing, *logical or argumentative rationality* was mentioned first. In Quinean terms (cf. Quine & Ullian, 1978), logic and logical structure is what binds the *web of belief* together. The arrangement of our beliefs is crucial for any field's—including ontology's—counting as science. According to Quine (cf. *ibid.*), nearly any body of knowledge that is sufficiently organized to exhibit appropriate evidential relationships among its constituent claims has at least some call to be seen as scientific. As Quine (*ibid.*) puts it: "What makes for science is system, whatever the subject. And what makes for system is the judicious application of logic." Thus, science is a fruit of rational investigation. Logical structure is relevant for the coherence and consistency of theorizing, for seeing what follows from what, and how, as well as for connecting our theoretical enterprises with the empirical sphere of observations (cf. e.g. Quine, 1982, 3). Because of all this, logical or argumentative rationality can be seen as a structurally central notion of rationality that binds *trust in sense experience or scientific experiments* and *the ability to organize one's sensations by means of concepts* into a unified whole.

For Quine (see e.g. 1960), the supreme paradigm of logical or argumentative rationality is the privileged canonical notation of first-order predicate logic with identity. In the logical structure of implications charted by this formal system of logic, the bound variables of quantification constitute crucial nodes. They are also, I dare say, essential for Quine's methodology of ontology, where *to be is to be the value of a* [bound] *variable* (cf. Quine, 1980, 15; 1976, 199). In connection with the Naturalistic Consistency Constraint and physics, it was already noted earlier that in his official scientific ontology, Quine argues for the indispensability of sets because they are needed in mathematical reasoning about physical objects. What this means in terms of the canonical notation is that at some point,

we cannot avoid quantifying over sets, or accepting them as values of our bound variables, and thus making an explicit ontological commitment to their existence. This indispensability reasoning, too, seems to function in its way as an illustration of systematically combining *empirical*, *conceptual*, and *argumentative* notions of rationality.

As far as entailment relations between sentences go, however, in addition to arguing for the introduction of certain types of entities, argumentative rationality can also be used in making negative or eliminative points about specific analyses. And this has also been the case with Quine's dual analysis of mass terms. Without entering into further argumentation or ensuing adjustments and technical discussions, we can have a look at some of this critique *for our own purposes* purely as an example of how logical or argumentative rationality can function as a constraint in an ontological context.

First of all, it might be argued, as Tyler Burge (1972) has done, that Quine's theory is unsatisfactory because it is incomplete. The dual analysis does not seem to cover mass terms which occur neither before nor after the copula (*ibid.*, 266). Considering the sentence "Phil threw snow on Bill", it would seem natural and intuitive to extend Quine's theory to handle "snow" in this sentence as a singular term. Ignoring the aspect of tense, the sentence might then be roughly formalized as "Threw-on ( $p, s, b$ )". However, the problem with this formalization is that unless Bill is what Burge (*ibid.*) calls "the diabolical supersnowballer", the analysis will make the sentence come out false even if Phil did throw snow on Bill. In Quine's analysis, "snow" as a singular term refers to all the scattered snow in the world, which is supposed to constitute a single sprawling object. This is not something that Phil is likely to be throwing around. Whether "snow" might be paraphrased in other ways or not, Burge's (*ibid.*) point is that any account that hinges on the appearance of a copula in the sentence to be analysed will inevitably be incomplete.

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, logical or argumentative rationality can be applied directly in a deductive context to argue for a problematic feature of Quine's dual analysis of mass terms. The basic idea is that the account has unwanted consequences for formalizing intuitively valid deductions. Let us think of the following argument in English: "This puddle is water, water is wet, *ergo* This puddle is wet" (Pelletier, 1974, 88). Translating natural into artificial language, let us use the predicate "F" as a translation of "is water", the predicate "G" as a translation of "is wet", the individual constant "t" as a translation of "this puddle", and finally,

the individual constant "*w*" as a translation of "water". The whole argument would then be translated as " $Ft, Gw \vdash Gt$ ", which is obviously not deducible. This unintuitive result arguably constitutes a *reductio ad absurdum* against the dual analysis (cf. *ibid.*).

For our present illustrative purposes, these two cases of negative argumentation serve as examples of tracing the *consequences* of given technical assumptions or ontological analyses. We may of course also work in the other direction as well, and track down various *presuppositions* built into a given solution or technical suggestion. In this way, ontological theories and analyses are constrained by their logical connections with other assumptions within the web of belief. In terms of logical or argumentative rationality, and in connection with Quine's canonical notation, it might seem natural to think primarily about *deductive* procedures and relationships. But to keep in line with the demands of the Naturalistic Consistency Constraint, the central role of statistical and *inductive* inference must also be duly recognized. This is something enforced upon us by the nature of empirical knowledge and the Quinean picture of organization of sensations by means of concepts in general, and by our advanced physical theory in particular. So, in view of our characterization of the rational constraints of ontological theorizing, instead of speaking exclusively about deductive argumentation, we should call the relevant constraint the "*Argumentative Traceability Constraint*". This covers both deductive and inductive inferences, and nicely emphasizes our (at bottom ethical) responsibility of providing and keeping track of reasons and justifications for our views.

It is customary to distinguish not only between deductive and inductive inference, but also between *demonstrative* and *dialectical* reasoning. In terms of ontological theorizing, the latter distinction comes into play as a methodological suggestion or a kind of constraint on the style of rationality, according to which we should not proceed in a demonstrative manner in the sense that we would take our ontological premises, or in Peircean (1877, 252) terms, the fundamental propositions of our systems of metaphysical philosophy, as evident and necessary truths from which we can then infallibly proceed via deductive chains of argumentation. Instead, we should adopt a more dialectical and hypothetical attitude, accepting our ontological premises as starting points for further discussion, elaboration, and possibly even eventual refutation. This "*Dialectical Contextuality Constraint*", as we might call it, keeps our minds open, and guides us away from what Russell (1912, 93–94) called "the dogmatic assurance which

closes the mind against speculation". It also effectively keeps the scientific spirit of fallibilism alive, and nurtures a pragmatic attitude spiced with an appropriate amount of Carnapian tolerance with respect to ontological frameworks. Quine exhibits this, when he (1980, 19) suggests that in the question of what ontology actually to adopt, the obvious counsel is tolerance and an experimental spirit.

## 7. Conclusions

To get back to our original Armchair Problem with its various aspects, we can pull our strings together now, and see what kind of methodological picture we have ended up with. After having distinguished empirical, conceptual and argumentative forms of rationality and further constraints within these, and after having utilized Quine's analysis of mass terms as an illustrative example, we should now be able to address the Armchair Problem in a more informed manner to produce a plausible pragmatic account of ontology as a form of scientific philosophy.

The first aspect concerned the problem of responsibly constraining forms of *a priori* speculation. Logical or *argumentative rationality* was seen to have a central role here, as well as in binding the other forms of rationality together into a unified whole. When constrained by logical or argumentative principles, our *a priori* speculations cannot proceed merely in terms of free association, or however one is inclined to think, as in Peirce's (1877) critique. Logic gives a rigorous structure to our thought, and also introduces intellectual responsibility to our theoretical discourse. Of course, it may be a pragmatic and discourse-related matter to what extent any given lines of argumentation are actually *formalized* within some system of logic. The choice of logical system is also a further pragmatic issue (cf. e.g. Lowe, 2006, 52–65).

*Conceptual rationality* was seen to constitute another important constraint on *a priori* speculation, and hence, on the first aspect of the Armchair Problem. The Conceptual Clarity Constraint imposes a responsibility of defining one's concepts as clearly and explicitly as possible, whereas the Pragmatic Utility Constraint operates with respect to the requirement that our concepts should be as useful as possible for the purpose at hand. With the conceptual and doctrinal constraints in place, that is, once our conceptual and argumentative forms of rationality have been specified as constraints, we may be said to proceed in a responsible scientific manner in theorizing about ontological concepts, judgements, and frameworks.

To apply the Carnapian principle of tolerance (cf. Carnap, 1937, 52) to recognizably un-Carnapian ground, we might say that, apart from the requirement to provide arguments and definitions, in ontology, there are no morals. Everyone is at liberty to build up her own ontological framework as she wishes. All that is required of her is that, if she wishes to discuss it, she must state her concepts and arguments clearly (cf. Peirce, 1878).

In addition to the problem of responsibly constraining forms of *a priori* speculation, aspects of the Armchair Problem also include the problem of combining metaphysical speculation with empirical considerations. Having gone through the Quinean examples, we have seen how the Empiricist Epistemology Constraint and the Naturalistic Consistency Constraint can operate. Quine's story of how we ascend from empirical observations to the heights of ontology is a useful suggestion of how metaphysical knowledge can be compatible with our status as a kind of natural creature.

As far as the third aspect of the Armchair Problem, or the problem of absolute certainty is concerned, there is no need whatsoever to build such an assumption into our methodological picture of ontological theorizing. On the contrary, we can emphasize the healthy scientific attitude of fallibilism across the board. We can and do get all kinds of things wrong in the empirical, conceptual, and argumentative spheres of rationality. A pragmatic view of ontology as practised by us humans should definitely recognize this as a basic feature of the whole intellectual enterprise.

The fourth and final aspect of the Armchair Problem is then related with the problem of global realism (cf. Alston, 2001, 8; Niiniluoto 1999, 21–41) and the associated notion of determining the fundamental structure of reality. This issue seems to be relevant especially in connection with combining ontological theorizing with empirical considerations. However, I would suggest that we can have the kind of picture presented so far of ontological theorizing without any need to commit ourselves to global realism. Instead, we may acquire whatever benefits there are to be acquired from our methodological view, and treat the commitment to realism as a further issue to be argued for or against in a different context altogether. In terms of use and practice, the assumption of a substantial and controversial thesis like global realism is an unnecessary burden for a pragmatic conception of ontology. The same applies, and perhaps even to a stronger degree, to metaphysical essentialism. In the way I have described above with the help of Quine, it is arguably quite possible to engage in scientific theorizing about categorial frameworks of ontology without having to buy either global realism or metaphysical essentialism

as parts of the initial package. We would do much better to follow Quine (1950, 79) in adopting a tolerant attitude and a pragmatic standard for evaluating the conceptual schemes of ontological frameworks.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> A longer version of this paper has been presented at *Logical Empiricism and Pragmatism*, Institute Vienna Circle, 8–9 November 2013.

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# Davidson versus Chomsky: The Case of Shared Languages

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## 1. Introduction

Donald Davidson and Noam Chomsky are two giants in the contemporary study of language. Davidson is famous for employing Tarskian theories of truth as theories of meaning, and has made several concrete proposals concerning the semantical analysis of various constructions of English, such as belief reports and action sentences. Chomsky is the progenitor of modern theoretical linguistics. For him the analysis of the syntactical structures underlying natural languages is part of cognitive and ultimately biological science, insofar as its goal is to uncover certain aspects of the human brain, conceived at a certain level of abstraction. Both Davidson and Chomsky see a need for theorizing about language in formal or quasi-formal terms, and both see this need as at least partly grounded in the productive and systematic nature of language: its capacity for infinite expression and indefinite structural novelty. Both see this task as in some sense an empirical one, concerning the explanation of human linguistic behaviour.

At the same time, however, there is a large ideological difference in their overall approach. For Davidson, language is to be understood primarily in relation to the world of things and their properties that we talk about, as well as how we—thereby—communicate and interpret each others' utterances. This stance renders facts about speakers' brains—however abstractly conceived—irrelevant to an understanding of language and communication *per se*. Chomsky, by contrast, thinks that the only scientific

study of language will be one that focuses on the mental—i.e. at a certain level of abstraction, neural—structures that underlie language use in us.<sup>1</sup>

In spite of this disagreement, Chomsky and Davidson are united on one further overarching point: that the everyday, common-sensical notion of a language—the notion according to which English, Norwegian, Swahili and so on are different languages, as well as more generally the idea that a language is fundamentally something shared between speakers—has no role to play in providing a scientific or philosophical understanding of language and linguistic competence.<sup>2</sup> Davidson indeed famously proclaims in his paper “A nice derangement of epitaphs” that:

[T]here is no such thing as a language, not if a language is like what many philosophers and linguists have supposed, [that is] a clearly defined shared structure which language-users acquire and apply to cases.  
Davidson, 1986, 446

He also claims in this paper to have “erased the boundary between knowing a language and knowing our way around the world generally” (ibid., 446–7). We will be looking closely at the arguments for these claims in the sequel.

Chomsky’s view is similar but subtly different. For him, knowing a language remains a distinct mental capacity from general intelligence, i.e. “knowing our way around the world generally”. Nevertheless, he is sceptical of the traditional notion of language. For him, the object of linguistics should be the mental structure *underlying* an individual’s linguistic speech comprehension and behaviour—the speaker’s *grammar*, or *I-language*, as he also calls it—and the innate precursors that constrain the form these structures can take.<sup>3</sup> An I-language for Chomsky is something

<sup>1</sup> To avoid any misunderstanding: Davidson does not deny the kinds of mental structures Chomsky stresses, nor that they explain something. I elaborate further on their “ideological difference” below.

<sup>2</sup> Sometimes this is expressed in terms of the idea that both Chomsky and Davidson stress the priority of *idiolects*—the language of the individual—over public languages (indeed, Davidson does this himself—see e.g. Davidson, 2005a). Though I will in my discussion of Davidson have recourse to the notion of an idiolect, I choose not to frame the overall discussion in terms of it on the grounds that Chomsky doesn’t even acknowledge the notion of an idiolect as important in linguistic theory, focusing rather on those aspects of grammars that can be seen as fixed by the common innate component (cf. Chomsky, 1986, 16; and for discussion of the point, George, 1990, 294). Further explanation of Chomsky’s position is given below.

<sup>3</sup> The notion of I-language is first introduced in Chomsky (1986, ch. 2). “I-language” contrasts with “E-language” where the prefixes “I” and “E” suggest respectively “internal/intensional/individual” and “external/extensional”. The notions denote in the first

that develops in all normal human beings on the basis of their exposure—i.e. the language faculty's exposure—to linguistic input from their parents and/or others in their early linguistic environment. Competence in language is thus seen as a species property, on a par with being able to walk—not something that we have to learn as we learn, say, the rules of chess.

Insofar as Chomsky also holds that one and the same speaker can come to acquire two or more distinct I-languages—such as someone who is a fluent speaker of both English and Norwegian—it might seem that he would also operate with traditional language categories like those just mentioned. Chomsky indeed allows that in everyday parlance it can be informative to say that this person speaks both English and Norwegian. When it comes to giving a serious scientific account, however, we cannot ignore the fact that there is considerable variation in the actual competencies of those who would qualify as speakers of both Norwegian and English; moreover, the very notion of language employed in talking of “the English language”, “the Norwegian language” and so on is so infected by political considerations that its instances are unsuited as objects of scientific study. What we want to know and can profitably investigate is what enables an individual to speak in the way she does, and ultimately what the basis for this ability (or abilities) is in our common biological inheritance.<sup>4</sup>

Though I am not aware of any commentary by Davidson on Chomsky's views on shared languages, I think it is fair to say that Davidson would find most if not all of Chomsky's criticisms of shared languages congenial to his own line. Davidson also holds that we are (or at least might be) biologically predisposed to acquire language—and, indeed, languages with specific syntactical features—and that there are (or at least might be) certain special parts of the brain dedicated to language use and understanding (2005b, 132–4). However, for Davidson the first point concerns only syntax, not meaning, whilst the whole package concerns the *causal underpinnings* of language competence, not what the latter ac-

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instance different approaches to the *study* of language, rather than to what kind of entities exist: an E-language approach does not in and of itself presuppose that languages in the ordinary sense (like English) exist, though an I-language approach, in focusing on speakers' mind/brains, does strongly suggest they will not be interesting for theoretical linguistic purposes (see further below).

<sup>4</sup> This is an issue on which Chomsky has made many pronouncements over the years; in addition to *ibid.*, see e.g. his (1990) and essay 3 in his (2000). A useful discussion of Chomsky's approach to language can be found in Collins (2008, ch. 6)

tually *consists in*—something which essentially involves communicating about a shared world. When it comes to meaning and communication, we need for Davidson to apply the model of *radical interpretation*, a process whereby an interpreter builds a Tarskian truth theory to interpret the speech behaviour of others (Davidson, 1984; more discussion of this view will follow). A complete such theory gives a *model* of linguistic competence, and knowledge of it would suffice for interpretation, but “claims about what would constitute a satisfactory theory are not [...] claims about the propositional knowledge of an interpreter, nor [...] about the details of the inner workings of some part of the brain” (Davidson, 1986, 438). More generally, Davidson holds the view associated with Frege and Wittgenstein, and accepted by many contemporary philosophers of language (however else they differ), that when speakers communicate there is something independent of both they literally *share*: it is not sufficient (or necessary) for communication that speakers’ individually construed competences—their brains or minds, in the relevant respects—are similar to a sufficient extent.<sup>5</sup> Both of these last two claims are rejected by Chomsky.<sup>6</sup>

In contemporary philosophy of language a good deal of energy has been expended in trying to resolve and adjudicate between the Chomskyan and the broadly Fregean conception of language (i.e. one that stresses irreducibly shared meaning) that is common in analytical philosophy and to which Davidson subscribes (see Stone & Davies, 2002, for an overview). As is often the case with disagreements of a more ideological nature, however, it seems little progress has been made towards a satisfactory resolution, arguments from either side tending to beg the question against the

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<sup>5</sup> This Fregean-cum-Wittgensteinian view of language was brought forcefully to the fore in contemporary debate by Michael Dummett (Dummett 1973). It is not an (obvious) implication of this view that what is shared must be something we are ontologically committed, such as “meanings”.

<sup>6</sup> For discussion, see Chomsky op.cit.; also his (1980) where the views are spelled out more fully in opposition to *inter alia* Quine’s philosophy of language, which Davidson builds on. One should be wary of thinking—as Davidson seems to—that there is really no conflict between the views under discussion here, insofar as Chomsky is dealing only with syntax, not semantics, and with causal not constitutive explanation (cf. e.g. Davidson, 2005b, 134). From Chomsky’s perspective there is a conflict precisely because he rejects all semantic approaches to language—i.e. those which understand it primarily or essentially in terms of relations to the world. For Chomsky any systematic study of “meaning” must itself be part of syntax, and thus ultimately a study of a certain property of the brain; moreover, this property is what language *is*. Davidson clearly rejects these claims.

other.<sup>7</sup> What I propose to do here is nevertheless to attempt such an argument, one that restricts itself to the ideological conflict between specifically Chomsky and Davidson, and builds on their fundamental agreement when it comes to scepticism towards shared languages. My target is Davidson's argument against shared languages, and by showing this fails (in a certain way) I aim to strengthen the overall Chomskyan line—at least, within the context of a Davidson-Chomsky debate. More specifically, what I will try to show is that Davidson's arguments against shared languages in "*A nice derangement. . .*" understood in relation to his conception of when we can be said to share a language in fact do not give him the no shared languages conclusion he is after. Davidson's considerations entail, I claim, not that there are *no* shared languages, but rather that there are many more than we standardly assume, and that we all speak very many such languages—in principle, as many as we have interpreters.

I take this demonstration to have a certain interest in its own right. I also think that as a substantive position it is absurd, and should be rejected. I conclude there must be something wrong with Davidson's overall or "ideological" approach to language and communication, and—assuming that the more general objections to shared languages proffered by Chomsky, and which I take Davidson would endorse, are essentially correct—that there is reason to think that Chomsky's overall view instead is on the right tracks.<sup>8</sup>

The remainder of the paper is for the most part a presentation and critique of Davidson's argument in "*A nice derangement. . .*" (along with

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<sup>7</sup> In the case of Davidson and Chomsky some might want to disagree with this, insofar as there have been attempts to incorporate a truth theoretical approach to natural language semantics within a Chomskyan, cognitivist framework: cf. e.g. Larsen & Segal (1995), Higginbotham (1989). It is unclear whether these attempts really preserve the intentions of the original thinkers sufficiently to be regarded as genuine syntheses. More importantly for our purposes, their main theoretical orientation is Chomskyan, with the Davidsonian metasemantical theses about radical interpretation and publicity of meaning being significantly downplayed or rejected altogether, and thus do not really engage with the ideological debate I am concerned with here.

<sup>8</sup> I am thus excluding from consideration here the view of Dummett, Lewis and others—i.e. of traditional philosophy of language more generally—on which there are shared languages like English and these are the appropriate object of study for a theory of language. I am also taking it that there are no significant alternatives to Davidson's and Chomsky's overall views when it comes to those which reject the idea of shared languages, but even if I am wrong about this, the stature of these two thinkers surely renders it significant to show that Chomsky's is at least preferable to Davidson's.

other, related papers and views of Davidson's).<sup>9</sup> In section 1, I outline Davidson's *argument from malapropisms*, and register some initial worries, plus connections to other views in the literature. In section 2, I present the argument more systematically in relation to Davidson's theory of radical interpretation, focussing on the *principle of the autonomy of literal meaning* and how Davidson aims to preserve this in spite of rejecting shared languages. I end the section with a specification of what conditions Davidson's examples have to satisfy in order to maintain his claim against shared languages. In section 3 I argue that no example can in fact be such as to satisfy these conditions simultaneously. In the conclusion I sketch how a Chomskyan view, fully cleansed of shared languages and indeed the very idea of "sharedness", might plausibly accommodate the phenomena we have been examining as a way of further cementing its preferability.

## 2. Davidson's Argument

The title of the paper of Davidson's we have been referring to—"A nice derangement of epitaphs"—is itself an example, uttered by Sheridan's character Mrs. Malaprop, of the kind of phenomenon Davidson thinks spells trouble for shared languages and traditional accounts of communication (such as e.g. Lewis, 1969). The problem posed by such malapropisms is that we can understand what a speaker means when she utters one, but must, obviously, do so in a way that flouts the shared conventions or rules which, according to these traditional accounts, govern what our words mean. It therefore looks as if these conventions are neither necessary nor sufficient to understand what a malaproping speaker says—even though, says Davidson, there is no reason to think she is not speaking literally; that her meaning is not basic or *primary* (we will return to this). Davidson's conclusion is that we must give up the idea of a language as something shared over time with other people in explaining linguistic communication. But this is just to give up on the notion of a language as it is traditionally understood.

Thus stated, Davidson's argument can seem rather blatantly fallacious. From the fact that the conventions for understanding *some* word are nei-

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<sup>9</sup> The emphasis is nevertheless on "A nice derangement..." and not on other aspects of Davidson's externalism about meaning (e.g. those concerning his theory of triangulation; see the essays in Davidson, 2001). This restriction strikes me legitimate insofar as Davidson continued to see linguistic communication as a vital element in explaining the possibility of meaning and thought.

ther necessary nor sufficient to understand it, it surely does not follow—even if the meaning thereby grasped is literal—that understanding of it would be possible in the absence of *all* shared conventions governing the way we understand *all* words. But this is in fact what Davidson is aiming to deny, and in the following I will try to spell out more fully why he thinks this, and exactly what it is he thinks. (Of course, what he really needs to deny is that these conventions as a whole are not necessary for communication, not that they are not sufficient; the latter thesis is barely controversial in view of indexical words like “I”, “here”, and “now”, as well as aspects of language which are more or less vague outwith concrete contexts of use.)

The initial reactions to Davidson’s rejection of shared languages, published as replies to “A nice derangements...”, bordered on incredulity. Davidson thus seemed to Ian Hacking to be committing philosophical suicide in view of his seminal contributions to semantics for natural languages like English (Hacking, 1986), whilst Michael Dummett mounted a defense of the continued need to refer to communal languages to preserve the broadly Fregean-Wittgensteinian picture of the social nature of meaning (Dummett, 1986).<sup>10</sup> Bjørn Ramberg, however, saw the rejection, neither as a philosophical suicide nor as infelicitous, but simply as the discarding of a further and unnecessary reification, on a par with the rejection of determinate meanings or relations of reference (Ramberg, 1989, 6 and 100ff.) A related view is Richard Rorty’s, who sees Davidson rejection of languages as coeval with his rejection of the idea of conceptual schemes (Davidson, 1994, essay 13; Rorty, 1989, ch. 1). In more recent years, the affinity with Chomsky’s views, discussed above, has been stressed by several authors (e.g. Pietrowski, 199 4; Smith, 1997).

There are many interesting connections and issues to be explored in this literature. What I will be arguing here, something that as far as I am aware no one else has done, is that Davidson’s argument is—at bottom—more or less as fallacious as I set it out above. Indeed, denying the notion of a shared language is not something he can consistently maintain—given his overall framework for understanding linguistic communication and competence. What he says establishes only that there are a lot more

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<sup>10</sup> Davidson has replied to Dummett in his (2005a) where he claims that what he really meant to argue was for a view on which idiolects are prior to shared languages and norms, things he sees as unnecessary for communication and meaning. As far as I can see, nothing in that article alters anything of substance in Davidson’s original rejection of shared languages, or speaks to what I have to say here.

languages than we are disposed to think: each of us speaks, in principle, as many as we have interpreters. It is this, I take it, absurd conclusion that I think should make us sceptical towards the Davidsonian approach to language, meaning and communication.

### 3. The Argument Explicated

First, however, we need to get Davidson's argument and views more clearly into view. As Ramberg stresses in his commentary, Davidson's rejection of language is not *meant* to be a wholesale rejection of his earlier philosophy of language and communication (Ramberg 1989). In particular, linguistic communication is still to be seen through the model of adducing a Tarskian truth theory for a speaker by a radical interpreter. Thus, we must view one who understands another as building a finitely axiomatised and recursive theory of sentences' truth conditions relating the speaker's linguistic behaviour to the public world of objects, properties and events. Moreover, this process is still wholly constitutive of linguistic meaning: there is no meaning in the absence of other speakers to interpret and be interpreted by (at least in principle). On the other hand, whereas the Tarskian truth theory was originally conceived as applying to a shared language, such as German or English (cf. Davidson, 1984), on the new position it is viewed as characterizing the understanding of individual speakers (what is sometimes called an *idiolect*)—and even, in some cases, how that understanding is at a given moment in time. For many this has seemed perplexing. In this section, I will sketch how Davidson's philosophical views of language and interpretation can be seen in this new light, starting out with a *prima facie* conflict between the no-languages view and a principle he endorses known as the *autonomy of literal (or "first") meaning*.

The autonomy of literal meaning is the intuitive idea that what a person means by using a word on a given occasion is in principle independent of what she intends to communicate or implicate by using that word.<sup>11</sup> Thus, Humpty Dumpty in Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* does not

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<sup>11</sup> The notion is explicated thus in Davidson's "Communication and convention" in *ibid*. The idea of "first meaning" is introduced in "A nice derangement..." to distinguish what Davidson is after from the conventional sense of "literal" which would tie the meanings of words to things like their dictionary definitions—something he obviously wants to bring into question. Since Davidson in any case sees such definitions as derivative on practice, I see no need to diverge from "literal", understood as contrasting with Paul Grice's notion of speaker meaning (something which Davidson sees as explanatorily posterior to literal meaning).

mean *That's a nice knock-down argument* by his words "There's glory for you!" simply because he intends them to be taken in that way. The principle is closely associated with the Fregean/Wittgensteinian view of language, to the effect that meaning is something social—something shared in communication, not a feature of any individual's mental state. (What a Chomskyan can say about the autonomy of meaning will be taken up in the conclusion.) Now if radical interpretation focuses primarily on the speech of an individual—an idiolect—it might initially seem difficult to see how the meanings of her words can be viewed as autonomous in this way. For the principle of autonomous literal meaning would seem to imply there is some objective or at least intersubjective fact of the matter about what one's words mean, determined by how things are *beyond* the compass of one's own mental states, including one's intentions. But if one cannot make reference to the language of the community and its conventions to play this determining role, what else can one appeal to?

Davidson's answer is that the appropriate constraints on a speaker's intentions can be socially determined even in the absence of a shared language by reference to the way in which she is *in fact* interpreted.<sup>12</sup> This is clearly something that is not up to her, and hence a gap opens up between what the speaker means by her words and what those same words can be said literally to mean, without having to resort to the canons set up by a linguistic community. To put it slightly formally: an expression, *e*, as uttered by a speaker, *S*, will have (a certain) autonomous meaning, *m*, if and only if *S* intends *e* to have *m* and *S*'s hearer *H* understands *e* to mean *m*. Since the condition is both necessary and sufficient, when Humpty Dumpty says "There's glory for you", he doesn't even mean *There's glory for you*: he simply *mouths off*. Language, meaning and communication thus remain social and non-individualistic for Davidson, for to mean something by a sentence or word, one must be attempting to communicate something *and* be interpreted accordingly.

The autonomy of literal meaning then does not as Davidson sees things require shared languages, for it simply falls out of the process of radical interpretation. But there is more to Davidson's view that we need to bring up. The theory of radical interpretation also involves a view of

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<sup>12</sup> Davidson never puts it quite this explicitly, but that something at least very close to this is in his mind is evident from the discussion of Humpty Dumpty's failure to mean *a nice knock-down argument* by "glory" on p. 440 of "A nice derangement...". See also Davidson (1988, 664–5); and for a slightly different understanding of the requirement that stresses *knowledge* of how one is interpreted, Higginbotham (op. cit.).

meaning as essentially *holistic*, since *systematic*: the meaning of each individual word is exhausted by the contribution it makes to the theorems of the theory—the formulæ whose left-hand sides match the held true sentences, and whose right hand sides state the conditions under which they were uttered, at least in the main.<sup>13</sup> The fact that meaning is both systematic in this way—that it finds its home in a recursive truth theory used for interpretation—and autonomous leads to the next step in Davidson's account of communication without languages. As already noted in the introduction, since all speakers are also interpreters, a truth theory that is empirically adequate in the way we have outlined may also be taken as a model of the competence of the speaker, as well as that of the hearer or interpreter (Davidson, 1986, 438).<sup>14</sup> Given this, we may then equate the intention that one's utterance will be interpreted in a given way—an intention of whose satisfaction I have no guarantee in advance—with the intention that one's hearer use the same theory to interpret it that one uses oneself in interpreting others. The theory that characterizes the competence of the speaker must then also characterize the competence of the hearer if they are to successfully communicate in any given case.

However—and here we reach a further and decisive point in Davidson's tirade against shared languages—the theories of the speaker and the hearer need not coincide *at any other point in time*. This claim is essential to Davidson's idea that we do not need shared languages to exppeaklain communication and autonomous meaning. To elucidate it, Davidson introduces a distinction between *prior* and *passing* theories. The hearer's prior theory "expresses how he is prepared in advance to interpret an utterance of the speaker, while the passing theory is how he *does* interpret the utterance" (ibid., 442). The speaker's prior theory "is what he *believes* the interpreter's theory to be, while the passing theory is the theory he *intends* the interpreter to use" (ibid.). Davidson argues that the prior theories need not coincide for communication to succeed: only the *passing* theories—what the speaker intends the hearer's theory to be, and how the hearer does interpret the speaker—need do so. Insofar as prior theories are what most resemble shared languages, the latter are not part of what is essential to linguistic meaning and communication.

What this discussion I hope now has shown is what Davidson must in fact establish if his rejection of shared languages is to be upheld. This can

<sup>13</sup> Cf. his "Truth and meaning" and "Radical Interpretation", in Davidson (1984).

<sup>14</sup> I stress again that this kind of competence should not be equated with a Chomskyan cognitive competence or I-language, which is something individualistic and not shared.

be expressed as follows: For a speaker, S, to mean something by uttering an expression, *e*, both she and her hearer, H, must have knowledge of the meaning of *e* that is:

- (a) systematically characterized;
- (b) shared by S and H; and moreover
- (c) shared at the point of communication, but *not necessarily before or thereafter*.<sup>15</sup>

If the communicants' knowledge is not systematic, then we will be left with no account of how understanding is achieved through radical interpretation. If their knowledge is not shared, then we will not be able to understand them as genuinely communicating, in accord with the Fregean-Wittgensteinian view. But if this shared understanding is necessarily shared before or thereafter (or both), then we will not have cut clean away from the notion of a shared language.

In the following section, I will argue that at least one of these three conditions—the *systematicity condition*, (a), the *sharedness condition*, (b), and the *momentariness condition* (c), as I shall refer to them—cannot be met in the kinds of examples Davidson uses to support his view that there are no such things as languages (and hence by implication that they cannot be met by any example, since the kinds Davidson gives are those which provide the most plausible case).

#### 4. Why Davidson's argument fails

Suppose that a speaker S says to a hearer H "the company's dealings were legal and overboard". H nevertheless understands S as meaning *the company's dealings were legal and above-board*, in accord with S's intention but contrary to the word's conventional meaning. According to Davidson, this is the kind of case that suggests shared languages aren't essential to communication. But can we actually construe it in such a way that this idea is upheld?

Now, however great the temptation, we cannot, if we are to give Davidson a run for his money, construe the example as a case of *error* on S's part in her use of the word "overboard"—at least in the semantically basic sense of "error", pertaining to literal meaning—that H then corrects for to

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 436.

retrieve something like S's speaker meaning. For something to go astray, there must be something for it to go astray *from*, and this latter is precisely what Davidson wants to bring into question as necessary for communication. In my terms, this construal immediately infringes the *momentariness* condition, (c).<sup>16</sup>

Nor, on pain of the same violation, can we plead Davidson's case by considering the more mundane instance of adding proper names to the language of a community (a phenomenon Davidson also uses to support his no languages thesis; cf. *ibid.*, 440). If I am unaware of a name, and then understand someone who utters a sentence using it, I add the name to my own language. But this is (surely) simply a case where shared language *evolves*—not where it *disappears*. One should also bear in mind that though I may not share a language with everyone in my community, I may for all Davidson has shown share it with those with whom I regularly communicate, and it is of course also with these I will tend to share my stock of proper names.

Let us then return to malapropisms. What Davidson wants to say is that S in the example above really does mean *above-board* by 'overboard', consonant with his account, given above, of what it is for an expression to have autonomous, literal meaning; but that this can happen even if S and H do not share prior theories. But describing things this way now seems to run into the problem of satisfying the *systematicity* condition. What H and S share in virtue of communicating will, as described by H, be given by the following truth-theoretic satisfaction clause:

"overboard" is true of an object x iff x is above-board

—and no doubt, in the ordinary way of things, H and S will share much more besides. Notwithstanding, if S and H can have completely different prior theories, then sharing knowledge of the above axiom would have to be regarded, not just as necessary, but also as sufficient for communication in principle. But that axiom cannot alone count as a theory, at least not in Davidson's sense, for the knowledge of meaning S and H share will not be systematic—we violate condition (a).

Davidson—of course—insists that knowledge of meaning must be systematic:

[W]hen a word or phrase temporally or locally takes over the role of some other word or phrase [as in malapropism]... the entire burden of

<sup>16</sup> George (*op. cit.*: § 1) is an example of one who succumbs to this temptation, in my opinion.

that role, with all its implications for logical relations to other words, phrases and sentences must be carried along by the passing theory.

Davidson, 1986, 443

Taking this to heart however, we now face contravening the second condition above: the *sharedness* condition. Davidson's motivation for the idea that meaning is systematic is as we have seen that it is constrained holistically; but if he can help himself to holism to motivate the idea that local changes in the prior theory one uses to communicate on that occasion ramify throughout the whole of that theory in its conversion to a passing theory, then surely he must also accept that these changes ramify *differently* through *different* people's prior theories—since these can and will, *ex hypothesi*, vary. In such cases, what someone means by using an expression on a given occasion may be systematically characterized, but it will not be shared by her hearer—condition (b). Passing theories will be no more shared than prior ones.

It seems, then, that malapropisms do not after all give us examples of speech acts which involve shared, systematic but mere momentary meaning after all. I will now consider two replies that might be made the previous two arguments, an exercise that will serve to underline exactly the kind of picture Davidson is committed to.

To the point that meaning will not be systematic if based on just a single shared clause, it might be retorted that S's and H's prior theories need only diverge to a minimal degree, maybe only in point of the axiom for the malapropism, for Davidson's argument to go through. So the passing theory that includes the non-homophonic axiom clause may be regarded as systematic as well, since everything or nearly everything that surrounds that axiom will be carried over from the prior theories of H and S to the shared passing theory. It is just that this passing theory may be systematic to a lesser or greater extent.

To my last argument against Davidson, it might be objected that I am invoking a notion of semantic holism with which Davidson need have no truck—a notion which may be germane in relation to so-called "conceptual-role" semantics (cf. Block, 1986), but is unnecessarily strong for Davidson's purposes. Here is Jane Heal, contrasting her Davidsonian rendition of meaning holism with that of the conceptual-role theorists:

The crucial difference [between them] is that our holism claims only that for a certain meaning to be expressed, the whole constituted by the person's utterances must be suitable. . . . But we have not said that there will be only one suitable setting in which a given meaning can

occur, so we are not committed to the view that any difference between the two wholes must make every meaning expressed in the one differ from every meaning expressed in the other.

Heal, 1989, 91

So S can express her meaning *overboard* and H can understand her without them having to share the theories they know in point of every detail. Their passing theories need not *completely* coincide. So meaning can, after all, be systematic *and* shared.

For the sake of argument, I shall assume these two retorts are correct in what they say. But they get Davidson nowhere, because they still violate the *momentariness* condition. The first clearly does this. If what is systematic for S and H at the point of communication—at the point where they *share* theories—is so in virtue of what is systematic about their *prior* theories, then their competencies before and thereafter will also be, largely, shared. Davidson could say, if he wanted, that they will still be different. But what he must establish—at least if he is to uphold his no languages view consonant with the Fregean-Wittgenstein constraint of sharedness—is that communication can proceed without shared language of any kind; whereas the plausibility of this first retort rests on precisely the idea that S and H will share something over time to a very large extent.

The second retort does not violate the momentariness condition quite so directly. For it *seems* to be an open possibility that the prior theories of our protagonists H and S might diverge quite wildly as long as *enough* were together at the moment of communication to constitute a systematic passing theory. Thus imagine that H and S speak, as we might commonsensically put it, quite different dialects of a given language, or even two different languages. They might still, it seems, communicate on a given occasion if circumstances were sufficiently felicitous. However, given that what they do when they do so is to construct a theory, the very idea that genuine malapropism could involve genuine communication—which is what Davidson needs for his argument for work—simply palls. For if H is conversing with someone, S, who does not share his prior theory to any degree, what is characteristic of H's understanding of S's malapropisms—namely, non-homophonic interpretation—will be characteristic of his understanding *everything* she says. If H developed his theory of S, the idea that S "malaproped" at some point in the past might become a meaningful hypothesis for H; but it could only do so if construed as an error, or else as a recurrent, albeit idiosyncratic, feature of S's idiolect. In the former case, we defer immediately to a shared language (cf. the second paragraph of

this section). In the latter case, we have, not a case of malapropism, but simply a divergence of S's prior theory from some or other communal norm. But this does not mean that S and H *between themselves* do not share this "idiolect"—or dialect as I am arguing it would have to be. It might be retorted that, in the course of coming to understand S, H's developing prior theory need at no point have included the non-homophonic axiom which S's includes, but that H could nevertheless have interpreted S each time she used a malapropism, in a one-off manner. But this is not in fact possible. Looking back at the course of coming to understand S, H will only have two ways of describing what happened during theory construction. If an expression was added to the theory, then it was understood; if it was not added to the theory, then it was not understood. That is the only rational reconstruction available in the situation we are imagining. There is no room for something that is both understood and yet not added to the theory; no room, that is, for malapropisms.

In effect, the situation we are envisaging, in which H and S do not "share a language" in the everyday sense and are learning to understand one another, is one in which they do nevertheless share some theory, and hence in fact, by Davidson's standards, a language—one that may be rather expressively restricted and that will change more drastically over time than more standard languages, it is true, but shared all the same. Thus the momentariness condition is, in the end, violated by the second retort. For the understanding H shares with S when they communicate depends on *something* shared over time between them, even though what we might call their broader linguistic competence differs. If and when these broader competencies cease to differ, then we will be able to make sense of malapropisms—but then of course also, now in a different way, of the notion of a shared language.

The conclusion we reach is that S and H, if their mutual understanding is to be systematic and shared, must share a language—that is, must share a theory before and after the occasion of understanding. Of course, nothing has required that this language should extend beyond what they have grown to know about one another, and Davidson can still reject the traditional notion of shared language, on which English and Norwegian are languages—as we have seen that there is good, independent reason for doing from Chomsky. Nevertheless, shared languages do survive for Davidson; indeed, his view seems to entail that in principle we must all be seen as speaking as many languages as we have successful interpreters, insofar as these all will have somewhat different experiences of the world,

and thus different linguistic dispositions. But such a view of our linguistic competence is surely absurd. Our only conclusion can be that there is something wrong with the framework that generated it—Davidson's overall philosophy of language and communication.

Someone might reply to this that Davidson can define "shared language" as he wants, and that he can therefore choose a definition on which his arguments still show shared languages don't exist. However, it would be hard to see this as anything other than an *ad hoc* dialectical reaction to the arguments I have provided above—and one that moreover fails to see the depth of the problem. In the 1960s and '70s, Davidson was taken as, and took himself to be, developing semantic theories for shared languages in the traditional sense, an idea which was tacitly assumed to mesh with his conception of communication as something essentially public and steered by radical interpretation. In "A nice derangement... ", Davidson rejects this conception of what semantic theories apply to and hence—he intends—the need for shared languages. I take it then that it would at least be very uncomfortable for this view if it turned out that these theories continued to pick out "shared languages", only of *another* kind than English, Swahili etc. If the traditional notion of shared language is meant to go, then so surely should shared languages generally. I thus take my arguments to constitute a genuine *reductio* of Davidson's overall approach to what language, meaning and communication *qua* phenomena are.

## 5. Conclusion

In the context of an ideological debate between Chomsky and Davidson on language, I take the above to provide a serious objection to the latter and a corresponding lift for the former. Of course, in a wider context, other thinkers might see the problems Davidson faces as a symptom of his rejection of shared languages like English, and thus see my arguments as a reason not to reject the latter. But if we are convinced, with Chomsky and—I take it—Davidson, that such constructs have no scientific legitimacy, we will be more inclined to look instead at what the Chomskyan picture can provide by way of an account of linguistic communication.

In very rough outline, this picture is one that simply rejects the idea of shared meaning in favour of an account that stresses *de facto* similarity in individualistic linguistic competencies as well other aspects of our mental and biological make-up; and hence the idea that there really is anything

to be characterised by what Davidson calls a "passing theory". "Communication" says Chomsky "does not require shared 'public meanings' any more than it requires 'public pronunciations'" (1993, 21).<sup>17</sup> Linguistic communication is successful to the extent that it is because we are similar—biologically, culturally and more narrowly linguistically—but there is no common, abstract currency guaranteeing "a meeting of minds". It would not be feasible for me to provide a fully developed account of this position and to tackle all the various objections to it in this paper—my remit has been first and foremost to show the lacking in another account, Davidson's, which otherwise can be seen as having a strong affinity with the Chomskyan line. In closing, however, I do want to mention a couple of points that any serious development of the latter should in my view stress.

The first is that though the idea of autonomous meaning in the traditional sense of something public falls away, a Chomskyan view of language can naturally do justice to and indeed explain many of the phenomena that traditionally have been seen as exemplifying so-called 'autonomous meaning'. Consider the following sentences:

- (1) He thinks the young man is a genius
- (2) The young man thinks he is a genius
- (3) His mother thinks the young man is a genius

In uttering (1), but not (2) and (3), I would ordinarily be taken to have to be referring to two different males. This feature of language, much discussed over the years, seems to be a function of syntactical constraints that are deeply embedded in the structure of any natural language. In view of this, it seems we cannot refer to the young man in question twice in (1) simply by intending to do so and getting someone else to understand this intention. In this way, language itself—that is, each individual's

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<sup>17</sup> Paul Pietrowski (op. cit.) seems to miss this point in his Chomsky-friendly defence of "A nice derangements...". Pietrowski writes that "successful communication is always a matter of converging *passing* theories; and general intelligence is always implicated here, if only by giving 'tacit approval' to the deliverances of prior theories." (p. 13 of web version, see <http://terpconnect.umd.edu/pietro/research/papers/derange.pdf>, retrieved August 28th 2015). Pietrowski claims there is a categorical difference between passing and prior theories—it is *in virtue of* the latter only that we communicate—in spite of admitting the necessarily strong involvement of the latter in shaping the former. I fail to see what this categorical difference amounts to, apart from a wish to vindicate a Davidsonian line which Pietrowski really, as a Chomskyan, has no reason to do.

I-language—provides constraints on meaning (or reference) that are reasonable to describe as autonomous—even though these constraints need not and for Chomskyans are not literally shared in communication.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, it should be stressed that nothing in the Chomskyan account commits one to a view on which thought and/or language are to be understood on the model of the *representation* of outer worldly items in some inner, neural code. Many influential thinkers, including Davidson, find such *representationalism* suspect and even of dubious coherence, and I am inclined to concur in this pragmatist line.<sup>19</sup> Now talk of “representations” is of course common in all of cognitive science, but in recent years in particular it has been gradually better appreciated—not least by Chomsky<sup>20</sup>—that this can concern first and foremost higher level mental structures, and does not necessarily have any role to play in explaining “thought about the world”, at least in the sense proprietary to the representationalist paradigm. The Chomskyan view seeks only to understand language as a natural phenomenon, insisting that it is a specific neural capacity of human beings that manifests itself in our behaviour and our conscious intuitions. Whether language is representational is thus a moot issue. What should not be moot is that though there are no languages in the traditional sense, at least for serious scientific purposes, there is definitely a specific capacity we humans possess that underlies our use of language, and that can be studied scientifically.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> The example is from Chomsky ‘Explaining language use’ in his (2000), p. 35. The idea of connecting this kind of phenomenon to the notion of autonomous meaning *per se* is due to Higginbotham (op. cit.) The example illustrates just one of several phenomena that exhibit autonomous meaning in this “syntactical” sense.

<sup>19</sup> Other prominent thinkers in the contemporary analytic debate who share this overall scepticism towards representationalism are Rorty, Hilary Putnam, Robert Brandom and Huw Price (see especially the latter’s 2011).

<sup>20</sup> Chomsky makes clear his opposition to a semantic or representationalist understanding of meaning and language in ‘Language as a natural object’ and ‘Language from an internalistic perspective’ in his (2000).

<sup>21</sup> I thank Martin Davies, Olav Gjelsvik, Terje Lohndal, Eivind Balsvik and Janne Johannessen for feedback on and discussion of the ideas in this piece. An earlier version was presented at the Joint Session of the Aristotelian Society and the Mind Association in Reading in 2002. A Norwegian version of the paper is published as Knowles (2011).

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