

KANT AND PRAGMATISM

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Introduction

Several papers in this conference¹ are devoted to investigating the ways in which the pragmatist classics are studied and are philosophically relevant *today*. Mine might seem to be more historical, as I will focus on the relations between pragmatism and Immanuel Kant. However, I believe it is precisely the “Kantian” nature of pragmatism, as well as the ability of pragmatism to critically reinterpret and transform Kantian ideas, that makes pragmatism a highly valuable philosophical approach today – in discussions of realism and idealism, ethics and values, religion, and many other topics.

William James famously wanted to see philosophical progress as going “round” Kant instead of going “through” him.² However, pragmatism – even James’s own pragmatism – shares several crucial assumptions with Kant’s critical philosophy, to the extent that Murray Murphey was justified in calling the classical Cambridge pragmatists “Kant’s children”.³ I have previously examined the Kantian background of pragmatism and the affinities between pragmatism (both classical and more recent) and transcendental philosophical methodology on a number of occasions.⁴ In this presentation, I can hardly do justice to the richness of the question concerning the pragmatists’ relation to Kant – either historically or systematically. I

¹ I want to thank Emil Visnovsky for his kind invitation to present this paper in the CEPF 10th Anniversary conference, at Comenius University, Bratislava, on June 7, 2010. For valuable comments and suggestions, I am grateful to Vincent Colapietro, Don Morse, and John Ryder, in particular. I am also drawing on some material I presented at a plenary panel on American philosophy from non-American perspectives at the SAAP meeting in Charlotte, NC, on March 13, 2010; comments by Douglas Anderson were particularly helpful on that occasion. Finally, some parts of the paper were also presented in the 3rd Nordic Pragmatism Conference at the University of Uppsala, Sweden, on June 1, 2010, and again (with the title, “Pragmatism and Metaphysics”) in the Finnish-Russian Philosophy Symposium at the University of Helsinki, on June 14, 2010.

² William James, “The Pragmatic Method” (1898), in *Essays in Philosophy*, eds. Frederick H. Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers, and Ignas K. Skrupskelis (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1978), pp. 138-139.

³ Murray Murphey, “Kant’s Children: The Cambridge Pragmatists”, *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 4 (1966).

⁴ See, e.g., the following relatively recent works of mine: Sami Pihlström, *Naturalizing the Transcendental: A Pragmatic View* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus/Humanity Books, 2003); *Pragmatic Moral Realism: A Transcendental Defense* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005); “Synthesizing Traditions: Rewriting the History of Pragmatism and Transcendental Philosophy”, *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 23 (2006), 375-390; and *Pragmatist Metaphysics: An Essay on the Ethical Grounds of Ontology* (London: Continuum, 2009).

do try to shed light on this topic, however, by exploring this relation through the threefold structure of Kant's critical philosophy.

Kant summarized his three *Critiques* in terms of three central questions: (1) What can I know? (2) What ought I to do? (3) What may I hope? These questions can be regarded as opening up Kant's critical philosophy with respect to (1) *epistemology and metaphysics* (i.e., the core areas of "theoretical philosophy"), (2) *ethics* (i.e., "practical philosophy"), and (3) *philosophy of religion*, respectively.⁵ Both classical pragmatists – especially Charles S. Peirce, William James, and John Dewey – and late twentieth century neopragmatists – such as Hilary Putnam and Richard Rorty – have significantly contributed to all these fields of philosophy. If I had time to comment even on these five thinkers in any detail here, we might think of this paper as an attempt to fill in a 3x5 matrix: three "critical" Kantian questions and five major pragmatist philosophers responding, or at least reacting, to them, sometimes in more and sometimes in less Kantian ways. This could in a more comprehensive study easily be expanded into a 3xn matrix, adding other pragmatists' views.

As is well known, Kant sought compromises to various philosophical controversies of his times, critically synthesizing, e.g., rationalism and empiricism, realism and idealism, determinism and freedom, as well as nature and morality, among other problematic dichotomies. Similarly, pragmatism has often been put forward as a critical middle ground between implausibly one-sided extremes. For instance, for James, pragmatism is a mediator between various extreme positions that may contain some truth but are as such too narrow, in particular between the conflicting temperaments of the "tough-minded" and the "tender-minded". It is in this reconciliatory spirit that we should also undertake the task of finding some common ground between Kant and the pragmatists.

1. What can I know?

In epistemology and metaphysics, virtually all the classical pragmatists attempted to walk the middle path between strong *realism* and *idealism* (or what would today be called *constructivism*). The objects of experience and inquiry are not "ready-made" but are in an important sense constructed, or at least shaped, by us in the course of our inquiries. The neopragmatists have shared this attempt by attacking metaphysical realism and aiming at something like "pragmatic realism" instead. However, a deep tension between realism and idealism (constructivism) seems to characterize the pragmatist tradition. One key problem here is that the pragmatist view according to which reality is our pragmatic construction faces a dilemma: it seems to be *either* exciting but obviously false (if causally, empirically, or factually interpreted), *or* true but trivial and unexciting (if it just amounts to the thesis that we

⁵ I must ignore aesthetics here, though it is a central concern in the *Third Critique*. Moreover, Kant's and the pragmatists' (especially Dewey's) approaches are perhaps more divergent in aesthetics than in any other fields of philosophical inquiry. By no means do I wish to claim that the pragmatists would have followed Kant in all areas of philosophy – that would be stupid and preposterous.

construct the concepts we use for categorizing reality).⁶ What I am suggesting is *not* that pragmatist attempts to deal with this problem should just be reduced to Kant's, nor that pragmatists should start using the Kantian "transcendental" vocabulary, but that this problem will receive a considerably enriched and nuanced "redescription" (in a quasi-Rortyan sense) when it is rearticulated in a Kantian way, distinguishing between the *transcendental* and the *empirical* levels – even though *this* distinction itself must eventually be softened ("naturalized", hence also redescribed) according to the truly pragmatist Kantian thinker.

We may start this task of redescription by noting that several philosophers – not only pragmatists – have argued that the existence and/or identity of things (entities, facts, or whatever there is taken to be in the world) is in a way or another relative to, or dependent on, the human mind, linguistic frameworks, conceptual schemes, practices, language-games, forms of life, paradigms, points of view, or something similar. Among the historically influential advocates of key variations of this "dependence thesis" – starting already from the pre-history of pragmatism, including figures only marginally involved in pragmatism, and ending up with neopragmatism – are, in addition to Kant himself (for whom the empirical world is constituted by the transcendental faculties of the mind, i.e., the pure forms of intuition and the pure concepts or categories of the understanding), thinkers like James (whatever we may call a "thing" depends on our purposes and selective interests), F.C.S. Schiller (we "humanistically" construct the world and all truths about it within our purposive practices), Dewey (the objects of inquiry are constructed in and through inquiry, instead of existing as "ready-made" prior to inquiry), Rudolf Carnap (ontological questions about whether there are certain kinds of entities can only be settled within linguistic frameworks, "internally", whereas "external" questions concern the pragmatic criteria for choosing one or another linguistic framework), W.V. Quine (ontology is not absolute but relative to a theory, language, or translation scheme), Ludwig Wittgenstein (the "essence" of things lies in "grammar", thus in the language-games we engage in, instead of transcending our language-use and "form of life"), Putnam (there is no "ready-made world" but only scheme-internal objects), Nelson Goodman (we "make worlds", or "world versions", by employing our various symbol systems), Thomas S. Kuhn (different scientific paradigms constitute different "worlds"), Rorty (our "vocabularies" constitute the ways the world is for us, and we must "ethnocentrically" start from within the vocabularies we contingently possess), possibly even Wilfrid Sellars (the best-explaining scientific theories are the "measure" of what there is and what there is not), and others – not to forget, however, Donald Davidson's famous critique of such forms of relativism and the implicated distinction between a conceptual scheme and its allegedly scheme-neutral content, or other noteworthy criticisms of conceptual and ontological relativism.⁷

⁶ See Susan Haack, *Manifesto of a Passionate Moderate* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), especially ch. 9.

⁷ See, e.g., Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1781/1787), ed. Raymund Schmidt (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1990); William James, *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (1907), eds. Frederick H. Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers, and Ignas K. Skrupskelis (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1975); F.C.S. Schiller, *Pragmatism and Humanism: Selected Writings 1891-1939*, eds. John R. Shook and H.P. MacDonald (Amherst, NY: Prometheus/Humanity Books, 2008); John Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty: A Study on the Relation between Knowledge and Action* (1929) (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons,

In their distinctive ways, these and many other philosophers have suggested that there is no absolute world *an sich* that we could meaningfully conceptualize or cognize; if there even is such a world, as Kant held, it is a mere limit of our thought and experience, a problematic *Grenzbegriff*. What there is *for us* (*für uns*) is a world we have constructed, and are continuously constructing, relative to our schemes of categorization and inquiry. Pragmatists, however, generally follow – or at least *should* follow – Kant in embracing something like *empirical realism* (and naturalism) within a broader pragmatist position comparable to Kantian *transcendental idealism*. The pragmatist should not simply opt for antirealism or radical constructivism and relativism in ontology but, rather, seek a moderate pragmatic realism compatible with naturalism. The problem we now face is how to combine the (transcendental) scheme- or practice-*dependence* of entities⁸ with their pragmatically postulated scheme-*independence* (at the empirical level) in pragmatist metaphysics. This is, essentially, the pragmatist version of the Kantian problem of maintaining both empirical realism and transcendental idealism – both the empirical independence of things and their transcendental dependence on the ways we construct them through our practice-embedded schemes, which for pragmatists are *not* unique and universal (as in Kant) but more varied and reinterpretable. For Kant, spatio-temporal objects in the empirical world are really “outside us” (*ausser uns*) and in this sense exist empirically speaking mind- and scheme-independently. Nevertheless, they are transcendently dependent on us, because the spatio-temporal and categorial framework making them possible as objects of experience (appearances) arises from our cognitive faculties (i.e., sensibility and understanding). Replace the latter with human cognitive and conceptualizing *practices*, and you have the pragmatist issue of ontological (in)dependence.

Yes, there *is* such a thing as “pragmatist metaphysics”; it was not an accident that I just used that phrase. Acknowledging this is an important element of acknowledging the pragmatists’

1960); Rudolf Carnap, “Empiricism, Semantics, Ontology” (1950), anthologized in (e.g.) Jaegwon Kim and Ernest Sosa (eds.), *Metaphysics: An Anthology* (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 1998); W.V. Quine, “On What There Is” (1948), in *ibid.*; Quine, *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969); Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958); Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Putnam, *Realism with a Human Face*, ed. James Conant (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1990); Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1978); Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970 [1st ed. 1962]); Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979); Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Wilfrid Sellars, *Science, Perception and Reality* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963). For Davidson’s seminal critique of the scheme–content distinction and the resulting conceptual relativism, see Donald Davidson, “On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme” (1974), in Davidson, *Inquiries into Interpretation and Truth* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984); cf. also, e.g., Ilkka Niiniluoto’s vigorous attack on cognitive relativism in his *Critical Scientific Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁸ I am assuming an *ontological* sense of both dependence and independence here. Roughly, an entity *a* is ontologically dependent on another entity *b*, iff *a* cannot exist unless *b* exists, that is, *b*’s existence is required for *a*’s existence. This must be distinguished from *causal* (in)dependence (and of course *logical* (in)dependence). A table is causally dependent on its maker’s activities, but when made, it is ontologically independent of them (at least according to realist metaphysicians), because it could remain existing even if its maker disappeared from the world. For more detailed discussions of ontological dependence and independence, see E.J. Lowe, *The Possibility of Metaphysics: Substance, Identity and Time* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); and Lowe, *The Four-Category Ontology: A Metaphysical Foundation for Natural Science* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006).

Kantianism. Instead of understanding metaphysics as an inquiry into Being *qua* Being, the pragmatist may understand it as an inquiry into the fundamental – yet historically changing and reinterpretable – features of the human world, as it emerges in and through human practices (including the practices of inquiry itself). Pragmatists such as Putnam join, at least implicitly, Kantians like Henry Allison in insisting (with Kant) that we cannot know, or perhaps even form a coherent conception of, the world as it is in itself, independently of the *conditions* of human cognition and representation.⁹ Metaphysics in the form practiced by metaphysical realism, assuming what Putnam calls a “God’s-Eye View” on the absolute structure of the world, is therefore impossible, according to these pragmatists and Kantians. Contrary to what is often assumed, however, this approach does not renounce the possibility of an ontological inquiry into the structure of the (human) world, while it does require us to fundamentally reinterpret that inquiry. There is room for a *critical* conception of metaphysics within a more inclusive understanding of its status and tasks – of metaphysics reconceived as an examination of the basic features of a humanly categorized reality, of the practice-embedded conditions necessary for us to be able to experience an objective, structured world. It is (only) this human world, which for us is the only world there is, that we may hope to be able to metaphysically investigate.

It can be argued that pragmatism, when developed as an inquiry into the structure of the “human world”, ought to be seen as a naturalized and thereby reconceptualised form of Kantian transcendental philosophy (several pragmatists’ own reservations notwithstanding), and that both transcendental philosophy and pragmatism (and their combination, “transcendental pragmatism”, as one might call it)¹⁰ are metaphysically relevant, that is, not simply critical of metaphysics (though they are that, too). Pragmatism, thus modified, provides us with a *perspectival* approach to ontology, highly critical of metaphysical realism (and antirealism), yet affirming the seriousness of ontological inquiry into the ways the world must be taken by us to be, from within our practices. Such an ontologically serious pragmatism should not be reduced to a merely methodological perspective or constraint on inquiry; it is a method of inquiring into the way(s) the world (for us) *is*. The pragmatic method, developed by Peirce and James in their somewhat different ways, seeks to determine the true core of metaphysical disputes and theories by examining their conceivable practical results. According to pragmatist metaphysics, objects – and ontological categories or structures generally – emerge from human categorizing practices, just as they may in more traditional forms of transcendental philosophy be claimed to emerge from, or to be constitutively based upon, the conditions of possible experience (Kant), the transcendental structures of consciousness (phenomenology), or language-games embedded in forms of life (Wittgenstein).

⁹ See Henry E. Allison, *Kant’s Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense*, Revised and Enlarged Edition (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004; 1st ed. 1983).

¹⁰ Note, however, that my “transcendental pragmatism” is not directly connected with the transcendental pragmatics of language and communication familiar from Karl-Otto Apel’s and Jürgen Habermas’s writings, which, of course, have done a very important job in (re)connecting pragmatism and transcendental philosophy in the European context. See, e.g., Apel, *From a Transcendental-Semiotic Point of View* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).

The classical pragmatists' relations to these more obviously transcendental ways of thinking would of course require much more detailed scrutiny than is possible in this article. In any event, I hope it has become clear that it is primarily in the context of the *realism debate* – the on-going dispute concerning objectivity, truth, and reality – that pragmatism and the Kantian transcendental approach are natural companions, critically integrating a moderate form of realism with a full acknowledgment of the human constructive contribution in shaping the world into what it is for us.

2. What ought I to do?

Now, if we cannot expect metaphysics to be able to deliver a view of the world in itself, as assumed by metaphysical realists, we must carefully consider how exactly we humans contribute to “constituting” the world, to “structuring” it into what it is for us. If we take seriously the Kantian claim that our very notion of reality is, ineliminably, a function of our ways of constituting reality, extending this view to cover historically transformable categories instead of fixed a priori structures of cognition, in particular our human practices and habits of action – as pragmatists since James and Dewey have suggested – then the crucial question to be asked is to what extent these world-constituting practices involve not only semantic, conceptual, and epistemic but also *moral* elements.

With James, in particular, we are led to the relatively radical claim that metaphysics might not be possible at all without a connection to, or entanglement with, ethics. This is to say that we cannot arrive at any understanding of reality as we are able to experience it without paying due attention to the ways in which moral valuations and ethical commitments are constituents of that reality, insofar as it is humanly experienceable. Now, as the (Jamesian) pragmatist maintains that, when dealing with the world in any manner whatsoever (however theoretical), we are always, at least implicitly, making ethical choices, engaging in moral valuations, formulating our categorizations of reality from perspectives or standpoints always already laden with ethical ideals and assumptions, s/he should also maintain that reality *is*, for us, inevitably value-laden. A general question concerning the relations between metaphysics and ethics arises here, and the distinctness of these fields of inquiry cannot be taken for granted by the pragmatist metaphysician. The issue goes much deeper than the rather uncontroversial idea that different metaphysical positions may have different ethical implications. Our question is whether metaphysics, in the critical sense inherited in pragmatism, might be *grounded* in ethical considerations, or based on ethical premises, rather than vice versa.

In contemporary pragmatism, this topic is approached in terms of the *fact-value entanglement*. There are, according to Putnam, no value-independent facts (nor, for that matter, fact-independent values), but facts and values are, for us, deeply entangled.¹¹ A being

¹¹ See Hilary Putnam, *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2002); cf. Pihlström, *Pragmatic Moral Realism*; as well as Sami Pihlström, “Putnam’s Conception of Ontology”, *Contemporary Pragmatism* 3:2 (2006), 1-13 (with a response by Putnam in the same issue).

with no values would have no facts either, as Putnam puts it. On the other hand, Putnam arguably goes too far in the antimetaphysical direction, possibly as a result of his original logical empiricist inheritance (as a pupil of Carnap and Reichenbach), when he suggests that pragmatists should develop “ethics without ontology”.¹² The upshot of the pragmatist tradition in metaphysics, ranging from Peirce, James, Dewey, and others to the Putnamian critique of the metaphysical realism inherent in contemporary scientific realism and naturalism, is that we need not abandon metaphysics but must reinterpret in a pragmatic and, hence, inescapably value-laden manner. The value-ladenness of facts is, moreover, not just a contingent feature of the empirical world but a Kantian-like quasi-transcendentally necessary precondition for us to be able to *have* a world at all.

The pragmatist hoping to retain metaphysics in a revised and reinterpreted form may easily join Putnam in his defense of the fact-value entanglement, while rejecting his antimetaphysics. Metaphysics itself is a deeply valuational activity. Like the empirical world in general, our metaphysical problems and concepts come to us “screaming with values”. It is not just a value-neutral matter whether there are, say, human minds or cultural entities like institutions (or values, for that matter) in the world. Such metaphysical issues are valuational and call for an active interplay of theoretical and practical philosophy. Indeed, a reinterpretation of the traditional Kantian distinction between theoretical philosophy, including logic, metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of science, etc., and practical philosophy, including ethics as well as social and political philosophy, ought to be seen as a key pragmatist contribution to twentieth (and twenty-first) century metaphilosophy.

The fact-value entanglement does not exhaust the pragmatist contribution to a (naturalized) Kantian understanding of the nature of morality and values. Pragmatism is, among many other things, an attempt to understand both scientific and non-scientific rationality as parts of our human, inevitably ethically problematic existence. It adopts an agent’s perspective on our experience, thinking, and reason-use, reminding us that it is only through our practice-laden being-in-the-world that we may fully appreciate our cognitive and rational capacities. Thought – or language, or the mind – is not a “mirror of nature”, as Rorty put it,¹³ but arises out of our worldly engagements with our natural surroundings, being constantly in the service of human interests and needs.

This irreducibly practical starting point not only makes pragmatism a most significant framework for contemporary discussions of rationality, knowledge, morality, and value, but also again reconnects it with Kant’s critical project of understanding humanity’s relation to the world through the distinction (albeit *not* a pernicious dualism or dichotomy) between the perspectives of natural science and moral reasoning. Thus, the problem of how our scientific and ethical perspectives on the world ought to be reconciled is, in an important way, both a Kantian problem and a pragmatist one. Kant maintained that we must limit the scope of knowledge in order to make room for faith. In a manner strikingly similar to the later pragmatists, he wished to make sense of both scientific experience, which is the basis of reliable, empirically testable

¹² Hilary Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

¹³ Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979).

theories of nature, and moral experience, which leads to ethically motivated action (or at least ought to do so). Kant showed us how to make sense of our empirical cognitions of an objective world without giving up the objectivity (or at least rationally binding intersubjectivity) of ethical value judgments; the pragmatists have continued this project. Very much like Kant, most pragmatists insist – or should insist – on viewing human beings in a “double light”, *both* (empirically) as naturally emerging elements of the natural world *and* (transcendentally) as free, autonomous agents, whose agency, however, arises from that same nature while continuously (re)shaping it.

In sum, while it is probably correct to say that when it comes to moral philosophy most pragmatists have been consequentialists of some kind, usually quite far from Kant’s deontological ethics, there are deeply Kantian aspects to be found in pragmatist ethical reflections, including James’s continuous concern with the meaning and value of human life and even Dewey’s project of overcoming the nature vs. culture dualism. For James, in particular, ethics was the driving force of philosophical inquiry. Everything, including metaphysics, had to be examined from an ethical point of view. In more recent pragmatism, especially Putnam, this ethical grounding of metaphysics is examined by means of a devastating critique of the fact-value dichotomy, as we briefly saw. Accordingly, we may say that no pragmatist has been a proper Kantian in moral philosophy, but many of them have attempted to acknowledge the *seriousness* of our moral perspectives on the world in a manner not very dissimilar from Kant’s, while also endorsing and further developing the Kantian double vision of human beings as both natural (i.e., parts of the causal structure of the natural world) and free or autonomous (i.e., morally responsible denizens in the “kingdom of ends”).

3. What may I hope?

In the philosophy of religion, we may also speak about the Kantian aspects of pragmatic approaches to the problems of theism vs. atheism and evidentialism vs. fideism.¹⁴ For virtually no pragmatist can religious faith be said to be a strictly evidential issue on a par with scientific hypotheses. Evidence can play only a marginal role in religion. Rather, religion has to do with the way in which one understands and relates to one’s life as a whole. Both James’s and Dewey’s criticisms of the dogmatic religious (and anti-religious) outlooks of their times and Putnam’s Wittgensteinian defense of some insights in Jewish philosophy are examples of this, even though the explicit connections with Kant are scarce here. In Kant as well as pragmatism, religion must be intimately connected with morality. We can have a moral theology, no theological ethics.

The proposal I want to explore and go some way toward defending in this section is a reconceptualization of the theism vs. atheism and evidentialism vs. fideism issues in an explicitly ethical manner – though obviously only some selected perspectives on such an enormous task can be taken up here. Indeed, both evidentialism and fideism, arguably, turn

¹⁴ See Sami Pihlström, “Kantian Aspects of Pragmatic Theism”, *The Pluralist* 5 (2010), 110-139.; see also Pihlström, *Pragmatist Metaphysics*, chapter 7.

out to be insufficiently ethical responses to the problem of theism vs. atheism. The traditional alternatives themselves – that is, theism and atheism, when characterized as opposed metaphysical standpoints regarding the question of God’s existence – suffer from the same insufficiency. Philosophical debates over these matters have unfortunately often ignored the ethical, hence pragmatic, aspects of the problem of God’s existence; or, more precisely, philosophers of religion have traditionally been interested only in the ethical implications theism (or atheism) might have, instead of considering whether theism (or atheism) might itself be grounded in ethical premises, or whether such metaphysical issues might in the end be inevitably entangled with ethical ones. It is to these ethical issues at the heart of the theism debate that I suggest we should turn our attention. This suggestion, as we will see, amounts to a Kantian – and pragmatist – rearticulation of what the question is ultimately about.

I believe we can employ both Kantian and pragmatist insights in order to argue that the theism issue is not exhausted by the narrowly intellectual (evidentialist) considerations one might advance in favor of either theism or atheism. Accordingly, theism should not be reduced to the mere metaphysical theory that God exists. This is because we need the resources of what Kant called practical reason – the kind of ethically driven use of reason that James, Dewey, and the other classical pragmatists saw as (in a certain sense) pervading human reason-use more generally – in order to arrive at any humanly acceptable solution to this problem. It is, in short, not only philosophically narrow-sighted but downright *unethical* to leave the ethical aspect out of such a major metaphysical problem as the one of (a)theism. Theism *might*, I will be suggesting, be rationally acceptable in terms of practical reason, or more generally from the standpoint of the vital human needs and interests embedded in our practices of life, and this *is* a kind of rational justification for it; nevertheless, it is very different from the kind of justification standardly aimed at in evidentialist philosophy of religion. Moreover, justification in terms of practical reason – fully taking into account the pragmatic aspects of the theism issue – might be the *only* rational justification available for the religious believer. From a Kantian and pragmatist point of view, the religious believer’s faith in God need not be made scientifically acceptable, or warranted in terms of religiously neutral criteria of reason (that is, either empirically verifiable or epistemically justified in a broader sense), because it is ultimately not a matter of science or reason (at least not primarily); the important thing is to make it *ethically acceptable* in the face of evil and suffering that we, believers and unbelievers alike, experience in the world we live in.

We are not here interested in the details of Kant’s own religious and/or theological views, nor in his Christian (specifically Protestant) background, but in his *postulates of practical reason* (namely, the freedom of will, the existence of God, and the immortality of the soul). It is, in particular, from the perspective of my proposal to (re-)entangle ethics and metaphysics in the philosophy of religion (and elsewhere) that this Kantian topic deserves scrutiny. We may ask, for instance, whether the postulates are defended by Kant (in the second *Critique*) by means of a *transcendental argument*, and if so, how that argument differs from the arguments defending the categories and other “epistemic conditions”¹⁵ of objective cognition (as

¹⁵ Although I am employing Allison’s notion of epistemic conditions here (see Allison, *Kant’s Transcendental Idealism*, especially ch. 1), I am not implying that I would agree with him that the transcendental conditions for

presented in the first *Critique*). Even more importantly, we should ask whether the defense of the postulates in the Dialectics of the second *Critique* leads to a metaphysical position according to which God exists. I want to approach this question by suggesting that Kant's postulates are, again, *both* metaphysical *and* ethical – indeed, in a way in which their metaphysical and ethical aspects are inextricably intertwined.

Even a paradigmatic case of a metaphysics built on ethics can be found in Kant's doctrine of the postulates of practical reason. Although this is not Kant's own way of putting the matter, we might say that this doctrine presupposes transcendental idealism: the world is not absolutely independent of us but is responsive to our ethical (or more generally valuational) needs and interests, or "in the making" through such needs and interests – to put the matter in Jamesian terms.¹⁶ We structure reality in terms of what the moral law in us requires; there is no pre-structured, "ready-made" world that we could meaningfully engage with. Notably, what I am here labeling transcendental idealism is a broader doctrine than the one defended in the "Transcendental Aesthetic" of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, because I am not merely following Kant in regarding space and time as properties of appearances (rather than as properties of things as they are in themselves) but more widely suggesting that the reality we find ourselves living in is structured by us – not merely by our "cognitive faculty" but also by our various practical interests and purposes.¹⁷ But *is* this structuring really metaphysical, or should we simply confine ourselves to an ethical, "merely pragmatic", account of the Kantian postulates? Is there "really" a God, or are we just entitled to act "as if" there were one?

I cannot examine in any close detail the way in which Kant constructs his famous moral argument for the existence of God and the immortality of the soul in the "Canon of Pure Reason"¹⁸ and in the Dialectics of the second *Critique*.¹⁹ Rather, I will directly take up the question concerning the metaphysical status of Kant's postulates. It is clear that, as mere ideas of pure reason ("transcendental ideas"), the concepts of God and the soul lack

the possibility of experience, cognition, or representation that Kant is examining are *merely epistemic* in the sense of being *non-metaphysical*. Rather, I would once more urge that the critical philosophy, even in its core areas such as transcendental idealism, is (partly) a metaphysical project, though of course not "metaphysical" in the sense in which traditional pre-critical metaphysics was firmly rejected by Kant. Allison and some other interpreters – including, e.g., David Carr, *The Paradox of Subjectivity: The Self in the Transcendental Tradition* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) – in my view tend to read Kant too anti-metaphysically, construing transcendental idealism and transcendental philosophy more generally as merely methodological or epistemological views.

¹⁶ Peter Byrne, in his *The Moral Interpretation of Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), explicitly compares Kant's moral argument for God's existence with James's "will to believe" argument (see ch. 7). My approach is quite different, though, because I do not focus on "The Will to Believe" (but, rather, on *Pragmatism*) and because I view James's own ideas "transcendentally". Furthermore, a critic might point out that Hegel (as well as, possibly, the opposition between Hegel and Kierkegaard) would have to be taken into account when moving from Kant's philosophy of religion to James's. Again, I must simply note that not everything can be done in a single paper; the role played by Hegel at the background of pragmatist philosophy of religion deserves a separate study.

¹⁷ Or, to put the point in a more properly Jamesian manner, these needs, interests, and purposes are always already at work within our cognitive faculty itself; there is no pure cognition independently of practical orientation in the world. This is pretty much what pragmatism is all about: all experience, cognition, or representation is inseparably embedded in human practices, or habits of action.

¹⁸ See Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A795/B823ff.

¹⁹ See Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* (1788), in Kant, *Werke in Zehn Bänden*, ed. Wilhelm Weischedel (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1983), A223ff.

“objective reality”. At best, these ideas can be employed *regulatively*, not *constitutively*. This, however, is only the point of view that theoretical, speculative reason offers to the matter. From the perspective of practical reason – which, famously, is ultimately “prior to” theoretical reason in Kant’s system²⁰ – there is indeed some kind of “reality” corresponding to these concepts (or ideas). The epistemic status of these concepts, when transformed into postulates of practical reason, is, to be sure, quite different from the status of the actual constitutive, transcendental conditions of any humanly possible experience, such as the categories of understanding and the forms of pure intuition (space and time), explored in the “Transcendental Analytic” and the “Transcendental Aesthetic”. The latter kind of conditions necessarily structure, according to Kant, the (or any) human, experienceable, cognizable world, that is, any objects or events we may conceivably encounter in this world. There would be no world of objects at all, at least no world we would be able to cognitively represent, in the absence of such structuring principles and categories. However, the postulates of practical reason also structure – in an analogical though definitely not identical manner – the human world as a world of ethical concern, deliberation, and action. The key idea here is that this “structuring” is not “merely ethical” but also metaphysical. Another key idea is that this structuring is, because of its uniquely ethical and metaphysical status, also transcendental.

The metaphilosophical status of the issue of theism must, hence, be thoroughly rethought in terms of this metaphysics–ethics entanglement. To paraphrase Kant, a theistic (or, indeed, atheistic) metaphysics without ethics would be blind, whereas a merely ethical reconceptualization of the issue – in which the metaphysical element is totally lacking – would be empty. From a pragmatist point of view, as much as from the Kantian one, ethics and metaphysics are profoundly entangled here. Religion, or theism, is pragmatically legitimated as a postulate needed for morality, for our ethical life and practices. Yet, no theological ethics in the style of, say, divine command theory can be rationally accepted by a critical moral philosopher. It would amount to putting the cart before the horse to hold that ethics could be grounded in or based upon theology (or religious revelation). What we need, according to both Kant and James, is *moral theology* – a theology based on ethics, rather than vice versa. Any attempt to base ethics on theology, or religion, would (in Kantian terms) be an example of heteronomy instead of autonomy, but the only critical and rational way to provide a basis for theology is the ethical way.

There is a problem here, though. Is theism here practically (pragmatically) legitimated a priori, by reason’s capacities only (as it definitely is in Kant), or does it receive its legitimation empirically or psychologically, as an attitude de facto “energizing” moral life, because we are the kind of beings we are (as the matter seems to be in James and perhaps other pragmatists)? My suggestion here is that just as Kantian transcendental (critical) philosophy more generally synthesizes the pre-critically opposed epistemological doctrines of empiricism and rationalism, and just as pragmatism, as we have seen, attempts to bridge the

²⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, A215ff. Here, the word “ultimately” – my word in this context rather than Kant’s – is crucial, because we can observe the priority of practical reason only after having done some work of theoretical reason, that is, after having become convinced of the futility of the speculative theistic proofs and having thus seen the need for a different, pragmatic, approach. I will briefly revisit this “priority thesis” toward the end of this paper.

gap between facts and values, we should try to reconcile Kantian (transcendental) and Jamesian (pragmatist, empirical, psychological) ways of justifying theism ethically. I am not saying that such arguments will inevitably or immediately succeed; that would be a much more ambitious claim. What I am suggesting is that the Kantian perspective on theism needs pragmatic rearticulation, and that the thus rearticulated pragmatic aspects of theism must not be thoroughly disconnected from the Kantian transcendental work of practical reason. Both the Kantian and the pragmatist view theism as, primarily, a problem of human life. For both, the ultimate question is the moral basis of metaphysics. For neither can the theism issue, or other issues in the philosophy of religion, be resolved in total absence of ethical considerations.

Any “Kantian” or “pragmatist” philosophy of religion worth the name must, then, be an inseparable mixture of metaphysical and ethical commitments – or, better, it must be an ineliminably metaphysical position defended (and in the end only defensible) by means of ethical considerations starting from our moral practices and from the requirements morality sets us (that is, the moral law and the highest good, in Kant, and the need for a strenuous moral mood, in James – though none of this requires us to commit ourselves to the particular moral philosophies defended by these philosophers).²¹ It is from the perspective of the synthesis of ethics and metaphysics that I hope we might be able to view theism as a rationally justifiable option for a genuinely religiously inclined person in her/his individual life circumstances. This “aspectual” justification a believer might arrive at is very different from the kind of justification the evidentialist hopes to be able to provide. Theism can never be justified or rationally defended in terms of the same religiously neutral, fully objective general criteria of rationality that are used, for example, to ground our scientific theories about the empirical world. Theism can only, if at all, be “justified” from within the moral life.

This insight does not lead us to any unproblematic happy end in our reflections, of course. If it is only from within a life already experienced as morally demanding or challenging that we can so much as hope to reasonably defend theism (or *any* serious view in the philosophy of religion), then one might argue that only someone already committed to something like theism (in a Kantian or possibly Jamesian sense) can be sufficiently open to the arguments I have sketched. If morality is possible for beings like us only within a framework colored by the theistic assumption, then it might seem that anyone who really takes morality seriously will already have to be a theist, in which case the argumentation referring to the moral status of the theistic world-view would be futile. If, on the other hand, the argument is to be relevant from the perspective of a non-believer, then we must at least agree that the non-believer can take life morally seriously – even struggle to achieve the morally strenuous mood in her/his own secular way – in which case it is simply not true that theism is required for serious moral life, after all. This problem is closely connected with the problem of *relativism* in the philosophy of religion – a vast issue not to be further discussed here.

²¹ Because I want to maintain the metaphysical element of theism, though only through ethics, my remarks are implicitly oriented against the currently popular postmodern and “post-onto-theological” attempts to defend a form of religion completely independent of metaphysics. See, e.g., the essays in Mark A. Wrathall (ed.), *Religion after Metaphysics?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), featuring work by leading anti-metaphysical thinkers such as Rorty, as well as Gianni Vattimo.

Our picture of Kantian pragmatism in the philosophy of religion would have to be supplemented in many ways, by taking into account, say, Dewey's naturalized philosophy of religion, the concept of hope as elaborated (somewhat differently) by James, Dewey, and Rorty, or the Wittgenstein-inspired reflections on Judaism that Putnam offers in his recent work.²² Here, however, I have mainly focused on James, only as an illustrative case of the interpenetration of pragmatist and Kantian aspects of the issues of theism. No detailed readings of any pragmatist thinkers have been given in this sketchy presentation.

Conclusion

Had I been able to discuss the five most influential pragmatist figures at more length, we might summarize what has been said (but has now largely been left unsaid) by drawing, for example, the following table:

Question	What can I know?	What ought I to do?	What may I hope?
Philosopher			
Charles Peirce	realism & idealism: the truth is the "final opinion" of the scientific belief-fixation by the ideal community of inquirers; reality is the object of that opinion	sentiment, conservatism; ethics as a normative science	God's reality: "neglected argument", natural inclination; evolutionary love (as a piece of scientific metaphysics)
William James	pragmatic constructivism: reality is shaped by our practical interests and purposes; objects exist in relation to our purposeful practices	consequentialism, yet a Kantian aspect; the worry about the reality of the ethical – overcoming ethical nihilism – as an overarching issue (connected with the need to acknowledge other individuals' otherness); even metaphysics based on ethics	God's reality as ethically "energizing"; the "moral salvation" of the world, through a joint effort of human and superhuman powers

²² See Hilary Putnam, *Jewish Philosophy as a Guide to Life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008). Cf. also Sami Pihlström, "Dewey and Pragmatic Religious Naturalism", in Molly M. Cochran (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Dewey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 211-241.

John Dewey	naturalism & (limited) constructivism: science studies natural phenomena, yet scientific objects are constructed through inquiry instead of existing as “ready-made” prior to inquiry	naturalized, experimental ethics	naturalized religious experience; criticism of institutional religions (dogmatism, supernaturalism)
Hilary Putnam	pragmatic realism & critique of metaphysical realism: no “ready-made world”, but no radical relativism or constructivism either	overcoming the fact-value dualism: moral values at work in all encounters with reality	religion is not an evidential issue, not to be confused with scientific ones: religion is a way of life (cf. Judaism, Wittgenstein)
Richard Rorty	rejecting the “world well lost” of realists; hence antirealism, with language shaping reality – or perhaps, rather, physicalism, with language itself as a physical phenomenon?	no ethical theories (very far from Kant!) but imaginative literature & creative reconstruction of “vocabularies”	Deweyan naturalism; private vs. public religion; “romantic hope”

In this table, some boxes are quite strongly “Kantian”, others are not. For example, Peirce’s views on realism and idealism, James’s views on ethics and God, and Dewey’s ideas on hope might together yield a considerably “Kantian” form of pragmatism, while obviously non-Kantian combinations of views drawn from the pragmatists are also possible.

Most of what I have said is extremely simplifying. We must keep in mind that in many cases the pragmatists have *not* followed Kant’s ideas. This is most obvious in the case of Rortyan neopragmatism, but also Dewey’s version of classical pragmatism and pragmatic naturalism is in many ways very far from Kant. Yet, I hope I have been able to show, through exemplary case studies, that the pragmatists have shared, if not Kant’s views or doctrines, at least his central problems. In particular, the realism vs. idealism tension we find at the core of pragmatist metaphysics, with important implications to ethics and philosophy of religion, is undeniably profoundly Kantian, and so is the double perspective needed to understand our fully natural lives as genuinely ethically committed and responsible creatures.

Finally, two metaphilosophical issues need to be briefly clarified. First, the intimate relation between metaphysics and ethics, taken up above, should be seen as one unifying feature of pragmatism. In various ways, both classical and more recent pragmatists have argued that

metaphysical (and epistemological, as well as religious) pursuits must be guided by ethical values: we cannot just settle the metaphysical issues first and then see how the ethical ones fall into their place; on the contrary, our ethical perspectives are always already at play when we engage in metaphysical (or any) reflection on our place in the world. This corresponds to Kant's insistence on the primacy of practical reason in relation to theoretical reason. The ultimate task of human reason is practical, and even when reflecting on and ultimately deciding whether a given issue belongs to the realm of theoretical reason-use or to the realm of practical reason-use, we are operating at the level of practical reason. This "primacy of practice" – with practice understood in a deeply ethical sense – is a key combining characteristic of pragmatism and Kantian critical philosophy.²³

Secondly, and finally, Kant believed that his three questions – the questions that have structured this paper – can be summarized as one question: "What is man?" In the end, then, there is a sense in which Kant's entire philosophy amounts to philosophical anthropology, to an attempt to understand human existence in its various dimensions (theoretical, practical, religious, aesthetic, and others). In a strikingly similar way, all pragmatists are "philosophical anthropologists", investigating human life in a deeply human world, from an agent's perspective.²⁴ While the pragmatists have always wanted to steer clear of anything like the Kantian notion of a *transcendental subject* – a topic I have also avoided in this paper²⁵ – the *reflexivity* crucially characterizing that Kantian subject, manifested in human reason's self-critical turn toward its own activities, possibilities, and limits (ultimately guided by a practical interest), is something that pragmatism again shares with Kant. Or perhaps it is safe to say that a recognizable dimension of the pragmatist tradition, if not all pragmatists, does so. This reflexivity is itself an ethical process, something that real living human beings engage in. This, roughly, is what I mean by saying that both Kant's and the pragmatists' projects ultimately come down to philosophical anthropology.

²³ The primacy of practice in this sense is, of course, completely different from the naïve and crudely utilitarian or instrumentalist interpretations of pragmatism as a mere ideology of "cash value". This need not be pointed out to pragmatism scholars, but it is something that might have to be pointed out to some more orthodox Kantians.

²⁴ See Sami Pihlström, *Pragmatism and Philosophical Anthropology: Understanding Our Human Life in a Human World* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998).

²⁵ See, however, Sami Pihlström, "Pragmatism and Naturalized Transcendental Subjectivity", *Contemporary Pragmatism* 6:1 (2009), 1-13.