THE FORGOTTEN PRAGMATIST AESTHETICS OF KATE GORDON AND HORACE M. KALLEN

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ABSTRACT: This article challenges the prevailing Dewey-centered historiography of pragmatist aesthetics by examining the aesthetic theories of Kate Gordon (1878–1963) and Horace M. Kallen (1882–1974). Both philosophers explicitly identified their aesthetic work as pragmatist. They rejected the separation of art from life and understood aesthetic experience as practical and transformative, emphasizing its natural and social functions rather than conceiving it as a purely contemplative or autonomous domain. Through an brief analysis of Gordon's *Metaphysics as a Branch of Art* (1906) and *Pragmatism in Aesthetics* (1908), alongside Kallen's *Art, Philosophy, and* Life (1913), *Indecency and the Seven Arts* (1930) and *Beauty and Use* (1939), the paper shows that pragmatist aesthetics in the early twentieth century was a plural field shaped by multiple voices. Recognizing these contributions calls for a revision of the standard narrative and expands the conceptual resources available for contemporary work in pragmatist aesthetics.

Keywords: Pragmatist aesthetics, Art, Horace M. Kallen, Kate Gordon, Aesthetic Experience.

"The final step in the application of the pragmatic method, it is, in the business of living, first."
Horace M. Kallen in "Art, Philosophy, and Life"

1. Introduction

The term *pragmatist aesthetics* has been employed in recent historiography in an ambivalent manner to designate two distinct objects. On the one hand, it has been used to group under a single label a plural tradition of reflections on aesthetics found in the writings of C.S. Peirce, William James, Alain Locke, John Dewey, and Jane Addams, among others (Shusterman 1999b; Shusterman 2011; Barrena 2015; Dreon 2021a; Vaamonde 2023). On the other hand, the term has also been used to refer almost exclusively to John Dewey's aesthetic theory, particularly the views elaborated in *Art as Experience* (1934), thus consolidating a narrative that identifies the history of pragmatist aesthetics with the Deweyan model (Shusterman 1992a; Kremer 2020; Dreon 2021b).

In this paper, the term *pragmatist aesthetics* is adopted in the first sense, emphasizing its historical plurality. The central hypothesis is that the concentration of the historiography of pragmatist aesthetics around Dewey has produced a homogenizing interpretative effect, obscuring important contributions by other philosophers working within the same pragmatic horizon. More specifically, this research aims to demonstrate that the aesthetic theories of Kate Gordon and Horace M. Kallen constitute autonomous and systematic pragmatist formulations that cannot be understood merely as anticipations of, or secondary derivations from, Dewey's aesthetics.

The justification for examining these two philosophers is not merely that they explicitly identified their aesthetic theories as pragmatist, a feature that is indeed rare among their contemporaries; rather, it lies in the fact that both directly investigated what it means to transpose the method and categories of pragmatism into the domain of aesthetics. This point is decisive: in Gordon and Kallen, the relationship between pragmatism and aesthetics is not a retrospective attribution made by historiography, but a problem consciously assumed by the philosophers themselves. Recovering their formulations, therefore, makes it possible to recognize that pragmatism also sought to think of itself as an aesthetic approach. Furthermore, incorporating these perspectives into the historiographical discussion reconfigures the interpretative map of pragmatist aesthetics, by demonstrating that its history is not reducible to the Deweyan model. Instead, it comprises multiple ways of conceiving aesthetic experience, the relation between perception and action, and the social function of art.

2. Kate Gordon's Pragmatist Aesthetic

Kate Gordon (1878–1963)[1] was one of the first philosophers to explicitly formulate an aesthetic theory from a self-declared

[1] Gordon was trained in philosophy and psychology at the University of Chicago, where she studied under John Dewey, and later

pragmatist standpoint. Although she held prominent academic positions and published widely in aesthetics in the early twentieth century, her contributions have been almost entirely omitted from the historiography of pragmatist aesthetics. Her name[2] is simply absent from most accounts of the tradition, and when it does appear, it is typically mentioned only in passing, as a marginal curiosity rather than as an important contributor (Shusterman, 2014; Ramazzotto, 2024).

Two short papers by Gordon are central to the present discussion: "Metaphysics as a Branch of Art" (1906) and "Pragmatism in Aesthetics" (1908). While the latter is usually mentioned as the first explicit formulation of a pragmatist aesthetics, I argue that the 1906 essay already articulates a distinctly pragmatist approach to aesthetic experience. Atherton (2012) has already suggested this point, however, its implications for the historiography of pragmatist aesthetics have not been fully noted.

In "Metaphysics as a Branch of Art"[3], Gordon advances the thesis that abstract concepts and metaphysical categories acquire meaning only insofar as they are embodied in motor attitudes, and that the consciousness of these attitudes forms the basis of our emotions, sentiments, and dispositions. This move aligns her directly with the pragmatist maxim that meaning must be understood in terms of its effects within experience. Her formulation, "the concept means the attitude" (Gordon, 1906: 368), places her in close dialogue with pragmatists such as James and Dewey, whom she explicitly mentioned in the essay. For Gordon, metaphysical categories such as space, time, and unity cannot be grasped at a purely theoretical level; they require translation into embodied attitudes to become genuinely intelligible.

According to Gordon, metaphysics, like art, concerns abstract ideals capable of orienting human conduct, even if not in a determinate or prescriptive manner. In other words, metaphysics does not instruct or demonstrate in the way science does; rather, it shapes dispositions, moods, and orientations of the lived experience. In the conclusion of the paper, Gordon makes this point explicit by reformulating the pragmatist question of consequences: "following the pragmatic method, let us ask of one or two metaphysical doctrines, what difference do they make? what shall one do about them?" (Gordon, 1906: 370). The effect of metaphysical system, she argues, is comparable to that of works of art such as *Prometheus Bound*, the *Book of Job,* or Michelangelo's *Moses*, all these works do not yield demonstrable truths, but generate a sense of "intolerable but inevitable law", shaping a general emotional that generates a particular attitude toward existence. Thus, the "truths" of art and of metaphysics are not propositional truths, but *felt* truths, registered at the level of response and disposition.

Gordon's 1906 paper can be regarded as one of the earliest articulations of a pragmatist aesthetics. What makes it significant is not merely that she mentions James and Dewey, but that she develops a theoretical framework in which the meaning of abstract concepts is understood through their embodied, affective consequences in experience. Gordon thus brings metaphysics and aesthetics onto the same plane of inquiry: both shape how we feel and orient ourselves in the world, and this is precisely where their meaning lies. Moreover, Gordon employs the term "aesthetics" in the modern sense of reflection on art, beauty, and experience, at a time when other pragmatists had not yet systematically addressed the field. For these reasons, the essay does not simply

continued her studies in Germany under Oswald Külpe. She held academic positions at institutions such as Mount Holyoke, Teachers College (Columbia), Bryn Mawr, Carnegie Institute of Technology, and the University of California, Los Angeles, Where she taught for several decades (Scarborough and Furumoto, 1987). She was an active member of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the American Psychological Association, and the American Philosophical Association, and served as president of the Western Psychological Association in the 1920s (Wayne, 2011). She died on October 5, 1963.

[2] It is worth noting that Atherton (2012) devoted a conference paper to revisiting Gordon's work, in a rare attempt at recovery. However, this effort does not appear to have generated immediate or sustained resonance in subsequent scholarship.

[3] This essay was written in response to Bernard C. Ewer's attempt to classify metaphysics as a scientific Rather than artistic activity, based on a strict opposition between Truth and Beauty. See Ewer (1903). For a detailed account of this Exchange, see Atherton (2012).

anticipate later development in Dewey; it constitutes an autonomous and theoretically coherent contribution to the formation of pragmatist aesthetics, one that has remained largely unacknowledged in the historiography.

Even though the 1906 essay already articulates a pragmatist approach to aesthetics, the paper that made Gordon recognizable to her contemporaries as a pragmatist was her subsequent essay of 1908, "Pragmatist in Aesthetics", published in the *Essays Philosophical and Psychological in Honor of William James*. The volume also included contributions from figures such as John Dewey, Arthur O. Lovejoy, and Edward L. Thorndike, which situates Gordon within an influential intellectual network at Columbia. As has been noted, *Pragmatism in Aesthetics* is the first published essay to explicitly place the term "pragmatism" in the title of an aesthetic work (Shusterman 2014, Ramazzotto 2024), a gesture that would remain uncommon in this tradition, with one of the few later echoes appearing in the work of Kallen.

In "Pragmatism in Aesthetics", Gordon opens by stating that aesthetic experience "illustrates and confirms the teachings of pragmatism" (Gordon, 1908: 462). Her aim is to determine what it means to apply the pragmatist method, already established in epistemology and logic, to the field of aesthetics. For Gordon, the meaning of beauty, like the meaning of truth, is found in concrete cases and is verified through action. Art, therefore, has a specific function: it creates new ways of experiencing the world. By grounding aesthetic value in the production and transformation of experience, Gordon articulates a conception of art as a mode of experiential renewal. This link between art and experience was later developed in different terms by Dewey, yet Gordon's formulation does not derive from Dewey but emerges from her own application of the pragmatist method. The presence of her 1908 essay among Dewey's reading materials from 1909–1910 (Dewey 1977) suggests that the influence was not unidirectional.

It is noteworthy that Gordon begins her 1908 essay by acknowledging the difficulties involved in defining pragmatism. She does not attempt to provide an exhaustive definition, arguing that pragmatism cannot be fully captured in a single formula. Instead, she adopts what she calls a disposition to "look for final explanations in terms of purpose, and for reality in experienced satisfactions" (Gordon, 1908: 463–464). This operational understanding of pragmatism is the standpoint from which she approaches aesthetics: aesthetic meaning, like all meaning, should be understood in terms of how it is lived and translated in concrete experience.

This paragraph is crucial because no other classical pragmatist offered such an explicit statement of a pragmatist standpoint in aesthetics, except for Kallen. This gives Gordon's essay a distinctive place in the history of this tradition. While many commentators have searched for aesthetic theories in pragmatist authors who did not directly address aesthetics, Gordon developed an aesthetic theory that explicitly identified itself as pragmatist. Yet her work has remained largely overlooked in the secondary literature, despite the clarity of her commitments to pragmatism.

It is worth noting that Gordon places the notion of aesthetic experience at the center of her account, analyzing it from the standpoint of both the creator and the perceiver, and emphasizing its formative role in shaping the very conditions of experience. A crucial dimension of her position concerns the function of art. According to her, although artistic works do not directly intervene in social circumstances, they cultivate the emotional dispositions that make transformation possible. In her words, "Art inspires merely the emotional stage of reform" (Gordon, 1908: 479). By presenting art not as a form of direct instruction but as a means of shaping and preparing emotional dispositions, Gordon delineates an aesthetic theory grounded in experience and oriented toward sensibility. In this framework, art is not understood as a mirror of life, but as a force that reorganizes the ways in which reality is perceived, felt, and inhabited.

A decisive point in Gordon's 1908 essay concerns the relation between art and life. She argues that aesthetic experience should not be understood as a final state or resolution, but as an open problem that initiates further modes of perceiving and acting. As she writes, "the pragmatic view of aesthetics recognizes the aesthetic moment as a problem, not as a solution, a beginning rather than an end. The pragmatic view of art, I should say, is this, that art is not essentially an imitation of life … but that life is a copy and imitation of art" (Gordon, 1908: 481). For Gordon, art does not merely imitate reality; rather, it shapes the very ways in which reality become available to us. In this formulation, art plays a constitutive role in the organization of perception, meaning and emotion, and actively participates in the formation of how the world is lived and understood.

Another essential point is that, for Gordon, art has a function that goes beyond preparing the emotional ground because it renews perception itself. Art reorients how the world is seen, felt, and valued. To illustrate this, she writes: "after seeing a Turner one sees more form and color in a sky. We see beauty in nature because we see it as a picture. The genre in art has given us an interest in common things; we can see them at last because we see that they are a pageant" (Gordon 1908: 481). In this account, art educates the senses by reorganizing the conditions of experience functioning as an instrument that precedes and shapes the experience of the world. As Gordon remarks, "life and nature are in a vital sense experienced as products of art" (Gordon 1908: 482). So, art does not merely reflect reality; it actively constitutes the modes through which reality becomes perceptible and, importantly, meaningful.

Based on the above-mentioned, it becomes evident that Gordon (1908) understands her project as a deliberate transposition of the pragmatist method into the field of aesthetics. This move allows art and aesthetic experience to be conceived in continuity with ordinary experience, rather than as isolated in an autonomous or disinterested sphere. Aesthetic experience, for Gordon, is a mode of intensifying and reorganizing experience, enriching perception and cultivating affective dispositions. Just as the pragmatist method requires that concepts be verified in lived experience, Gordon maintains that aesthetic experience must remain continuous with life to be meaningful. Only under this condition can aesthetic experience be "verified" and thus fulfill its function.

Taking together what has been presented, Gordon's writings of 1906 and 1908 articulate an aesthetic theory that is explicitly grounded in pragmatist principles. By conceiving aesthetic experience as a mode of reorganizing and intensifying experience, she advances a conception of art that is continuous with the practices and conditions of ordinary life, rather than detached from them. This position not only anticipates later developments within the pragmatist tradition but also demonstrates that the history of pragmatist aesthetics is broader and more diverse than the Dewey-centered narrative suggests. Recovering Gordon's contributions[4] it is an opportunity to reopen the conceptual field of pragmatist aesthetics and reveal dimensions that have long remained forgotten.

3. Horace Kallen's pragmatist aesthetics

Horace Meyer Kallen[5] occupies a paradoxical position within the history of pragmatism. On the one hand, he is commonly mentioned in broader accounts of the movement (Konvitz and Kennedy 1960; Shook 1998; Bernstein 2012; Spencer 2020), particularly in discussions of cultur-

[4] Gordon continued to publish in aesthetics after 1908, including an introductory textbook on the subject (Gordon 1909), which was generally well received (Pitkin 1910) his 1909 book served as an introductory text for her students in the field of aesthetics at universities. It is important to remember that aesthetics as a philosophical discipline was still struggling to establish itself in American universities during the early 20th century (Munro 1951). In the following decades, Gordon increasingly shifted toward psychology, and her contributions to aesthetics gradually diminished.

[5] Kallen was born in Germany in 1882 and immigrated to Boston as a child. He held academic appointments at Princeton, Harvard, and the University of Wisconsin before joining the New School for Social Research, where he taught until his retirement in 1969 and later become professor emeritus. He died in Palm Beach, Florida, in 1974 (Kronish 1982).

al pluralism and democratic theory. On the other hand, his aesthetic writings have remained almost entirely absent from historiographical narratives of pragmatist aesthetics. In major studies of the field (Shusterman 1992a; Małecki 2014), his name simply does not appear at all.

This silence is striking since Kallen explicitly identified his aesthetic theory as pragmatist, much like Gordon before him. The two constitute, in fact, the only classical pragmatist thinkers to self-designate their aesthetics in these terms. The absence of Kallen from the historiography of pragmatist aesthetics, therefore, cannot be explained by a lack of textual material, but rather by the force of a narrative that has centered the tradition almost exclusively around Dewey.

Kallen's relationship with pragmatism was long-standing, dating back to his undergraduate training at Harvard, where he studied under William James and George Santayana, and later continued his formation under F.C.S. Schiller at Oxford (Kronish 1982). His intellectual proximity to pragmatism was further reinforced through his sustained correspondence with John Dewey, particularly during the period in which he taught at the University of Wisconsin. This connection intensified when, in 1919, Kallen joined the newly founded New School for Social Research in New York, an institutional space that gathered several figures engaged with pragmatist inquiries, such as Sidney Hook and Morris R. Cohen (Konvitz 2016). Kallen developed an extensive philosophical interest, engaging with questions in politics, ethics, psychology, and social theory. His most influential contribution, however, is the concept of *cultural pluralism*[6], formulated in dialogue with Alain Locke in the first decade of the twentieth century (Ratner 1984).

One of the most sustained areas of Kallen's philosophical work was aesthetic theory. This is particularly remarkable because, although Kallen generally avoided affiliating himself with specific schools or traditions in his broader philosophical writings, he consistently identified his aesthetics as pragmatist. Contemporary reviewers recognized this affiliation, describing him as an heir to the pragmatist legacy of James and Dewey (McMahon and Buck 1930). More importantly, Kallen himself explicitly embraced this alignment, using terms such as "pragmatist" and "pragmatic" in the titles and introductions of several of his aesthetic works. His case is therefore exceptional within the history of classical pragmatism: like Gordon, he is not retrospectively labeled a pragmatist aesthetician but presents himself as one.

Kallen produced a substantial body of work in aesthetics, including at least ten books, twenty-eight articles, and five reviews. In several of these writings, pragmatism is present even when not explicitly named, as in the two-volume *Art and Freedom* (1943)[7]. The consistency with which pragmatist ideas shape his aesthetic theory, from his early publications through to his mature works, distinguishes his position within the history of pragmatist aesthetics. Indeed, although Dewey is the only classical pragmatist whose writings on aesthetic rival Kallen's in scope, Dewey did not explicitly adopt the pragmatist label in his aesthetic writings in the way Kallen repeatedly, and deliberately, did.

Although Kallen's pragmatism was never systematically elaborated, it remained remarkably consistent, since his aesthetic reflections evolved over nearly two decades. This body of work signaled that pragmatist aesthetics did not emerge suddenly or uniformly, rather, it developed through multiple trajectories and distinct conceptualizations. Recognizing Kallen's contributions, therefore, challenges the prevailing historiographical narrative and highlights the plurality that has characterized pragmatist thought from its early stages. Given the extensiveness of Kallen's aesthetic writings and the impossibility of examining them all here, I will focus on three works in which his

[6] For further information on Kallen's cultural pluralism, see Ratner (1984) and Spencer (2020).

[7] In the first volume of this work, Kallen writes: "The present study is a review and an interpretation of the record on the relations of Art and Freedom in the history of the Western World. Essentially, it is an essay, from the standpoint of an esthetic pragmatism, toward a philosophy of art, and as such concerned with the ideas familiar in esthetic doctrine…" (Kallen 1943: 15).

pragmatist orientation is most explicitly articulated. The first is the 1913 paper "Art, Philosophy, and Life", followed by two works from the 1930s: the 1930 book *Indecency and the Seven Arts: And Other Adventures of a Pragmatist in Aesthetics* and the 1939 article "Beauty and Use: A Pragmatic Interpretation."

One of the most important expressions of Kallen's pragmatist aesthetics appears in his 1913 essay "Art, Philosophy, and Life." There, Kallen argues that art arises directly from "naked experience," from spontaneous activities in which action unpredictably discloses new uses or meanings beyond mere functional need. Art, in its primary form, is therefore not a matter of detached contemplation, but a mode of doing in which expressive activity becomes significant. Once such expressive acts are repeated and stabilized as a routine procedure, they cease to be art in the strict sense and become craft. In this view, art marks the moment in which experience first discovers its own possibilities.

From this premise, Kallen argues that art and labor share the same origin "at bottom, therefore, art and labor are coincident; all labor is art, and all art is fine art" (Kallen 1913:40). This continuity forms the basis for the distinction he subsequently draws between art and philosophy. Art engages directly with the immediate material of experience, while philosophy, by contrast, reflects upon this experiential material and upon the practices that emerge from it. Yet, the important point here is that the reflective activity does not lead philosophy away from life into abstraction. On the contrary, reflection must return to practice. He writes, "conduct is the beginning and end of all philosophy" (Kallen 1913: 53).

Thus, from this perspective, aesthetic reflection, art, and philosophy do not culminate in a separate or autonomous realm; they are inseparable from the ongoing shaping and transformation of experience. As Kallen puts it, "this life in all its breadth and depth, as it expresses itself in social organization, religion and science as well as in art, we invoke, of necessity as art's measure" (Kallen 1913: 54). Art must therefore be evaluated not by criteria internal to an aesthetic domain isolated from life, but by its capacity to intensify, clarify, and enrich lived experience. In other words, the standard of artistic value is pragmatic: the extent to which a work contributes to the growth of experience. This inseparability of art and life is one of the most recurrent features in the writings of thinkers associated with the pragmatist aesthetics tradition.

Kallen's Indecency and the Seven Arts (1930) is an anthology that brings together essays he had previously written over nearly two decades. In the preface, Kallen states that the texts "consistently undertake to survey the field of Criticism and the Fine Arts from the pragmatic point of view" (Kallen 1930: XIV). The collection addresses numerous themes: two essays confront debates on past and contemporary censorship, while the remaining contributions explore questions of literary and artistic criticism, as well as different artistic schools and movements. The diversity of subjects is significant, because rather than presenting a unified aesthetic system, Kallen works through concrete problems and disputes. His pragmatism in aesthetics is thus not articulated as a set of abstract principles, but as an orientation that emerges in response to specific situations in which art and aesthetics acquire meaning.

Curiously, the term "pragmatism" appears in the title of the book and only once in the body of the text. Yet, pragmatist commitments are evident throughout the whole essays. This is clear, for instance, in the third essay, "What is an Elephant? A Fable for Critics." Here, Kallen challenges the compartmentalization of judgment that separates experience into distinct spheres. He writes: "to talk about 'aesthetic' as against 'ethical' judgment is an absurdity of the classifying habit of mind. In living experience there are no such compartments" (Kallen 1930: 63). He then adds that such divisions are merely "invented as methodological conveniences" (Kallen 1930: 64). Aesthetics, in this account, is not an autonomous domain but one dimension of a continuous field of experience. This

position aligns directly with the pragmatist commitment to meaning as immanent in lived conduct and to the critique of dualistic conceptual schemes.

Another element that echoes Kallen's pragmatist orientation is his emphasis on the social and communal character of aesthetic and art experience. This element appears, for example, in the fifth essay, "The Arts Under Dictatorship", where he argues that "for greatness, whether in painting or in music or in poetry or in architecture, is a reflection of a public interest, not the projection of a private power" (Kallen 1930: 111). The artist is therefore not a solitary genius detached from social life, but a participant in a shared cultural horizon whose work expresses the values, tensions, and aspirations of a community. As Kallen writes, art "consists of uttering the inward feeling and outer achievement – or failure – of a time or a civilization in moving and unmistakable symbols, symbols that reveal its own meaning to a people's heart" (Kallen 1930: 111). In this account, artistic creation is inseparable from the historical and social conditions that make it possible; it is the articulation of a collective form of life in material form.

It is worth remark that the pragmatism present in this 1930 volume appears in a more subtle and indirect form. This is partly due to the nature of the work itself, Kallen's primary aim was not to elaborate a systematic pragmatist aesthetic theory as I already mentioned, but to intervene critically in contemporary debates. The essays are addressed to a broader public and adopt a more flexible and accessible style. Even so, the conceptual commitments that inform Kallen's position, his rejection of rigid aesthetics dualism and his insistence on the social embeddedness of artistic expression, clearly align his work with the pragmatist tradition. For this reason, the book ought to be recognized as an integral contribution to the history of pragmatist aesthetics.

A more explicit formulation of Kallen's pragmatist aesthetics appears in his 1939 essay "Beauty and Use: A Pragmatic Interpretation". In contrast to most classical pragmatist accounts, which emphasize the concepts of art or aesthetic experience, Kallen returns to the category of beauty. This choice signals a deliberate effort to rethink one of the oldest problems of aesthetics through pragmatist principles. Rather than treating beauty as a metaphysical property or a purely subjective feeling, Kallen interprets it in terms of use and experience.

Kallen opens the essay by identifying what he regards as a central problem in aesthetic theory: the persistent tendency to separate art from life. This concern, already evident in his 1913 writings and in Gordon's work, now serves as the premise for his argument that traditional theories of beauty approach the aesthetic domain in abstraction, treating it as if it were detached from the concrete situations in which artworks are created, encountered, and experienced. As Kallen observes, discussions of beauty often proceed "without regard to the living situations in which art occurs and beauty and ugliness take place" (Kallen 1939: 316). This critique provides the point of departure for his own proposal: to reconceive beauty not as an isolated attribute but as a phenomenon emerging within the flux of lived experience.

Another striking point in the essay is Kallen's emphasis on naturalistic and biological foundations in developing his account of beauty. He argues that the origins of beauty are rooted in natural functions and uses, observable across the animal world as well as in human life. Beauty, in this view, is not a purely contemplative attribute, however one with a biological and social history. Within this orientation, beauty appears as a functional element in the processes through which life sustains and adapts itself.

In Kallen's view, beauty and ugliness should not be treated as pure or independent essences, nor as passive qualities that can be isolated and analyzed in a purely abstract or esoteric manner. Instead, he insists that "beauty and ugliness discover themselves as relations between the objects to which they are attributed" and should be judged according to the values they embody (Kallen 1939: 317).

Kallen summarizes his position in a formulation that paraphrases John Keats's well-known poem: "Almost it might be said, Beauty is use, use beauty; that is all we know or need to know" (Kallen 1939: 319). The central significance of beauty, for Kallen, is therefore not located in detached contemplation, but in its functioning within social life. Beauty appears through the practices that shape collective existence as religion, industry, war, education, finance, and government, and operates within them as a meaningful force. In this view, beauty is not an ornamental object set apart from everyday life; rather, it is a tool that acts across the full range of human activity.

At the end of his essay, Kallen explicitly acknowledges the fallibilism inherent in the concepts of beauty and ugliness. Beauty, he argues, is not an eternal truth or fixed essence, but rather the outcome of a creative use that changes as social conditions change. Consequently, new circumstances call forth new forms of response, perception, and valuation. Beauty is therefore not something that can ever be completed or finalized; it is a concept continually under construction, always open to revision.

Kallen's conception of beauty, understood in instrumentalist terms, grounded in aesthetic naturalism, and framed through a social and fallibilist perspective, positions his essay as an original contribution within the pragmatist tradition. His writings illuminate a broader and more plural genealogy of pragmatist aesthetics, one that does not converge exclusively on Dewey. Recovering Kallen is therefore not merely a matter of historical correction, but of expanding the conceptual resources of classical pragmatist aesthetics and the range of problems it can address today.

4. Conclusion

The analyses of Gordon and Kallen presented in this paper support the claim that the history of classical pragmatist aesthetics is broader and more diverse than the prevailing historiographical narrative suggests. Their writings articulate aesthetic theories grounded in pragmatist commitments, formulated independently and in dialogue with the same intellectual environment that shaped Dewey. Incorporating these figures into the canon is not simply a matter of recovering overlooked thinkers. It requires reshaping the conceptual and historical parameters through which pragmatist aesthetics has been understood. Recognizing Gordon and Kallen as contributors to this tradition therefore expands the scope of inquiry and demonstrates that pragmatist aesthetics was never the work of a single philosopher, but the product of a plurality of voices engaged in a shared philosophical method.

Recognizing Gordon and Kallen as contributors to this tradition makes it possible to correct interpretative omissions and to perceive pragmatist aesthetics as unfolding, in Papini's well-known image, like a corridor with many doors. Some of these doors have been opened repeatedly and are now thoroughly studied; others have been only partially explored. The aim of this paper has been to enter two of these less-visited rooms. Many more remain, awaiting further inquiry into the plurality that has always been a constitutive feature of this philosophical tradition.

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