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Foreword

Together with the members and promoters of the Associazione Culturale Pragma, we very pleased to celebrate the third anniversary of its foundation with the launching of a new journal devoted to the study of American philosophy, the *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*. It is, in fact, a particularly important achievement which comes to strengthen our confidence in the positive relationships among a wide international group of academics and scholars that already produced a number of philosophical conferences and interdisciplinary seminars.

The *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*'s cultural project naturally reflects the guidelines of Pragma, and more specifically - as announced in the 'welcome' of the journal's web site - it provides a forum for exchanging ideas and framing interdisciplinary research networks within pragmatist tradition and its relationship with European philosophy.

In this first issue of the journal, such a project is implemented with a number of essays by members of the scientific board, forming the SYMPOSIA section, while the ESSAYS section hosts a paper by Rosaria Egidi – a distinguished analytical philosopher, whose contribution is reflective of the interactions between this movement of thought and American classical philosophy. The improvement of the dialogue among different philosophical traditions is, in fact, one of the main purposes of EJPAP, evidently carried out in the varieties of subjects and field of inquiry represented in each essay of the present issue.

We all look forward to creative and productive developments.

Rosa M. Calcaterra (General Editor)
Roberto Frega (Executive Editor)
Giovanni Maddalena (Executive Editor)



Vincent Colapietro

A Revised Portrait of Human Agency: A Critical Engagement with Hans Joas's Creative Appropriation of the Pragmatic Approach

Anthony Giddens, Hans Joas, Margaret Archer, Norbert Wiley, and Eugene Halton (to name but a handful of such figures) are social theorists whose philosophical importance is all too often missed (or ignored) by professional philosophers. The main reason for this is obvious: they are by training and appointment social scientists, while professional philosophy tends to be an insular discipline.¹ Disciplinary purity, like most other forms of this misplaced ideal, tends to insure insularity and vitiate vitality. The ideal of keeping philosophy pure from the taint of other disciplines remains, for the most part, in place (cf. Rorty 1982, chapter 2). A too fastidious sense of disciplinary boundaries is, however, antithetical to philosophical pragmatism² and, more generally, theoretical vitality. I am by no means advocating an ethos of facile trans-disciplinarity, much less “transgression,” only a commitment to what Richard J. Bernstein calls “engaged pluralism.”³ The inevitably overlapping practices of diversely situated actors (including those representing institutionally separated disciplines) invite a critical engagement with social practices other than those in which we are most at home. Regarding action and agency especially, professional philosophers have much to learn from the human sciences, especially from such erudite and sophisticated theorists as Giddens, Joas, Archer, Wiley, and Halton.

On this occasion, I would like to call attention to Hans Joas's *The Creativity of Action* (1996). This study is a significant contribution to social theory in an inclusive sense (thus, potentially an extremely noteworthy contribution to social *philosophy*). It is, moreover, itself a creative appropriation of some of the most important insights of the pragmatic tradition. Finally, Joas's appropriation of pragmatism bears directly on our conception of our selves. Though his focus is on action, the implications of his investigation for a portrait of agency are hard to miss. Human beings are portrayed by the classical pragmatists as situated actors and, as such, as creatively responsive beings. The work of Joas and others details this portrait beyond anything accomplished by these pragmatists themselves.

¹ This might even be said of pragmatism today. “The renaissance of pragmatism in American philosophy,” Hans Joas suggests, “has admittedly been restricted to traditional core areas of philosophy. In philosophy of science and epistemology, in aesthetics and ethics, one can discern contributions that are ‘neopragmatist’ in nature. By contrast, only rarely are links established to political philosophy and social philosophy. And, aside from Richard Bernstein, there is an even greater distance from discussions of sociological theory. A book such as Richard Rorty's *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* moves with the greatest elegance between the philosophical and literary discourses; however, a discourse in the social sciences is so conspicuously absent that one could be forgiven thinking that it does not exist at all” (1993, 2). This however could not be written today. It is not altogether accurate of the scene at the time it was written, though there is almost certainly greater truth in Joas's assessment than most academic pragmatists would be disposed to admit.

² In his efforts to offer a detailed classification of the sciences and, as part of this endeavor, to identify the distinct disciplines of responsible inquiry, C. S. Peirce would appear to be a clear exception to my claim. To some extent, this is indeed true. But, in this very endeavor, Peirce was striving to show in detail how the different branches of investigation can fruitfully draw upon, and appeal to, one another. In the end, the interconnections among these branches is near (if not at) the center of Peirce's concern.

³ While Bernstein is arguing for the adoption of such pluralism primarily within the discipline of philosophy, I am advocating here across disciplines.

I. Creative Action and Human Agency

Hence, the revised portrait of human agency sketched mostly in broad, bold, but arresting strokes by Peirce, James, Dewey, and Mead (see Colapietro 1992, also 1988) is, in the work of such contemporary theorists as Joas, Archer, Wiley, and Halton, further revised. (I omit Giddens because, unlike these theorists, he does not draw upon the pragmatists.) This portrait is revised in such a way as to make the pragmatist account of creative actors even more relevant to contemporary theorizing and (of far greater moment) the actual conditions of our historical world than the sketch originally offered by Peirce, James, Dewey, and Mead. As instructive and illuminating as I find the work of Archer, Wiley, and Halton, I want on this occasion to focus exclusively on the contribution of Joas in developing some central insights of American pragmatism. I want to do so above all because such an engagement with this theorist seems especially appropriate for the inaugural issue of this newly founded journal.

In the end, however, my interest is not in this or that theorist. It is not even in this or that tradition (including the tradition of pragmatism). Rather my interest is in the question of agency. My consideration of the pragmatic perspective, as creatively appropriated by Joas in *The Creativity of Action* and, indeed, in his other writings,⁴ is prompted by the judgment that there is something not only truly novel but also theoretically fruitful in what I am disposed to identify as the revised portrait of human agency. In particular, his focus on situation, corporeality, and sociality as the most fundamental emphases of a theory of creative action (or situated creativity) can be taken to provide nothing less than a revised draft of what itself was a dramatic revision of the traditional depiction of human beings.⁵ In other words, his theory of creative action is, by implication, a portrait of creative actors. Hence, my chosen task on this auspicious occasion is to recall this theory for the purpose of portraying such actors.

II. Joas's Creative Appropriation of the Pragmatic Approach to Human Action

For the purposes of his inquiry, Joas focuses in the first instance on sociological (rather than narrowly philosophical) theories of action (1996, 4). His reason for doing so, however, should make this focus attractive to philosophical pragmatists (philosophers and indeed others who are working out of the rich tradition of American pragmatism). He states this reason succinctly:

By contrast analytic philosophy, which has taken a fruitful methodological path of its own, is at a disadvantage compared with sociology, for it has contributed little to defining the social character of action and the orientation of actors to one another; the reason here is that analytical philosophy takes the individual actions of an individual actor as its starting point. (4)

Joas acknowledges that his methodological decision to focus on sociological theories “is not absolutely compelling,” but he trusts that it “should at least be comprehensible for those whose thought is shaped by other disciplines” (4). Whatever else human agents are, they are not only social beings but also social actors – precisely in their role as agents, humans

⁴ In this connection, *The Genesis of Values* is especially pertinent. Even when I do not explicitly refer to this book, my reading of Joas's *The Creativity of Action* is informed by it.

⁵ Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Paul Ricoeur and numerous other thinkers, in Europe and the Americas as well as elsewhere, have devoted themselves to just this task.

do not just happen to be social but sociality is woven into the very fabric of their agency. (As we will stress later, sociality and corporeality are, on Joas's account, as integral features of human activity as is creativity.) As the title of Talcott Parsons's book (a work to which Joas devotes considerable attention) implies, the structure of human action is the structure of social action.⁶ Any approach that does not take as its starting point the social character of human action is doomed from the outset to offer a fatally flawed account of human agency and, indeed, of much else.

This relates directly to pragmatism. "The whole originality of pragmatism, the whole point in it, is," William James stressed, "its use of the concrete way of seeing. It begins with concreteness, and returns and ends with it" (*MT*, 281-82). It is instructive to recall here that, in the controversies regarding his pragmatism as an account of truth, James traced the root of the dispute between pragmatists and anti-pragmatists to the difference between those who are committed to concrete ways of approaching phenomena and those who are ensnared in abstractions without realizing it (i.e., those who habitually commit what A. N. Whitehead calls "the fallacy of misplaced concreteness" (cf. James, *MT*, 301; 325). Already in his *Principles of Psychology* (1890), James observed: "Life is one long struggle between conclusions based on abstract ways of conceiving cases, and opposite conclusions prompted by our instinctive perception of them as individual facts" (1266). From his perspective, the debate regarding pragmatism, as a theory of truth, quickly became one intense struggle between just these two propensities. In a tone of exasperation, James insists: "[...] when the pragmatist speaks of opinions, does he mean any such insulated and unmotivated abstractions as are here supposed [by the critics]?" He however does not allow this to stand simply as a rhetorical question, immediately adding: "Of course not, he means men's opinions in the flesh, as they have really formed themselves, opinions surrounded by their grounds and the influences they obey and exert, and along with the whole environment of social communication in which they are a part and out of which they take their rise" (*MT*, 310-11).

What James asserts here regarding opinions might with at least equal force be said of action or activity, when conceived pragmatically. There is an irony in James's own failure to stress sufficiently the inescapable environment of social communication in which human opinions acquire their function, force, and status (including the status or standing of some of them *as* true, i.e., as worthy of our commitment or reliance). But, in reference to action, none of the pragmatists failed to stress the inescapable environment of social life. Human action is, even in the innermost recesses of our solitary musings and reflections, a performance by a social actor whose reliance upon linguistic competencies and other shared human practices would be too obvious to note were it not for their habitual neglect by all too many theorists.⁷

⁶ "No one has linked the different dimensions of the issues entailed in action theory as Talcott Parsons in *The Structure of Social Action*, which first appeared in 1937. One could term the book the little-known classic of the little known discipline. Sociology is, of course, not unknown as such and – needless to say – Parsons is well known within the bounds of the subject. However, in other subjects and among the public as a whole sociology is frequently regarded merely as a source of empirical information relating to social problems and social developments" (7). It "took until the fifties for the work [*The Structure of Social Action*] to acquire the reputation of a decisive theoretical achievement." Even then, it is doubtful the book was widely read at the time (1996, 7). Even so, Joas takes there to be "no better way of introducing the discourse on the theory of action than to study Parson's arguments and the possible objections to them" (1996, 8).

⁷ In a theme sounded throughout his life, John Dewey in a very late manuscript, now available as an Appendix to volume 1 of *The Later Works*, asserts: "The excuse for saying obvious things is that much now that passes for empiricism is but a dialectical elaboration of data taken from physiology" (*LW* 1, 368). In "The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy" (1917), he stresses: "This description of experience [the one he has just offered in his

For pragmatism, then, the need to make explicit the depth to which sociality penetrates the espousal of our most personal beliefs, without thereby eliminating the truly decisive role of individual agents, is matched by the need to make explicit just this depth regarding our singularly expressive actions (those deeds in which we most uniquely express and define our selves).⁸ Insofar as the dominant theories of action in analytic philosophy abstract from the social character of human action – also from the situated, corporeal, and creative dimensions of human activity – it would be, on pragmatist grounds, methodologically advantageous to turn aside from this tradition of theorizing and to turn toward those traditions in which this character is the matter of utmost concern. This is true even if some of those traditions fall outside of philosophy. So, at least, is the decision orienting Joas's project in *The Creativity of Action*. From a pragmatist perspective, moreover, the cultivation of the sociological imagination is a theoretical exigency for philosophical inquirers no less than social scientists or, more narrowly, sociological theorists.⁹

But matters cut in the opposite direct as well. What Parsons was unable to see or unwilling to admit is what Joas himself sees clearly and grants forthrightly. "Parsons failed," Joas stresses, "to recognize that the classical thinkers of sociology [such figures as Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Georg Simmel, and Ferdinand Tönnies] were not attempting to erect the new discipline on traditional philosophical foundations, but that sociology was itself a philosophical project" (1996, 69). This is nowhere more evident than in the attempts of these figures to articulate an adequate theory of human action. "Notions of the creativity of human action," Joas readily acknowledges, played a clearly constitutive role in the work of these authors" (69). Even so, none of them "succeeded in smoothly integrating their thoughts on a theory of creativity into the rest of their work" (69). When we turn to theorists for whom creativity occupies a pivotal role in their accounts of human activity – when we turn (as Joas does in Chapter 2 – "Metaphors of Creativity") to Johann Gottfried Herder on expression, Karl Marx on both production and revolution, or Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche on the surging force of a creative will – we encounter rich resources for understanding human creativity. At the same time, however, we are confronted with the deep-rooted tendency to mark off creative action as a separate category (in effect perpetuating the dualism between the blindly routine exertions of human actors in their everyday circumstances and the genuinely creative achievements of remarkably unique agents). What distinguishes Joas's efforts as much as anything else is his resolute refusal to posit a residual category of creative action. Following the pragmatists (especially Dewey), he makes creative activity – the improvisational responses of human beings to the concrete situations in which they are implicated (cf. *LW* 1, 67) – the

own name] would be but a rhapsodic celebration of the commonplace were it not in marked contrast to orthodox philosophical accounts. The contrast indicates that traditional accounts have not been empirical, but have been deductions, from unnamed premises, of what experience *must* be. Historic empiricism has been empirical in a technical and controversial sense. It has said, Lord, Lord, Experience, Experience; but in practice it has served ideas *forced into* experience, not *gathered from it*" (*MW* 10, 10-11). In contrast, the features of action identified by Joas, following the suggestions of Dewey and other pragmatists, are precisely ones gathered from the practical experience of situated agents (the experience such agents enact and acquire in and through their participation in a variety of practices, including the theoretical practices of experimental inquiry).

⁸ As Dewey asserts in his *Ethics* and other writings, our actions simultaneously disclose who we are at the time and define who we will be. The question of "What are we to do in this situation?" is, for him, inseparable from the question, "Who are we to be?"

⁹ The expression sociological imagination is an allusion to C. Wright Mills, a figure who (while critical of various facets of the pragmatist movement) can more or less fairly be read as an integral part of this intellectual tradition. Cornel West is especially instructive on this point (see, e.g., 1989, 124-38).

most basic form of human action. Rationality, intentionality, and various other matters are to be approached in terms of the *situated creativity* of human beings, rather than such creativity being approached in terms of abstract and, hence, ahistoric conceptions of reason, intention, and a host of other traditional explanatory categories.

III. A Pragmatist Alternative to the Two Regnant Models of Human Action

Joas's intention is to provide "a fundamental restructuring of the principles underlying mainstream action theory" (1996, 144). He is not trying to add a category or set of categories to those already in place; rather he is striving to restructure at the most fundamental level our understanding of human activity.¹⁰ He takes these principles underlying our mainstream understanding to be embodied in each one of the two regnant models of human action. For his purpose, then, the various differences between the *model of rational action* and *that of normatively oriented action* are far less significant than their basic agreement regarding three critical points.¹¹ "The true alternative to taking rational action as our starting point, and thereby creating a residual category, therefore lies ... in the *reconstructive introduction* of the concept of rational action" (147).¹² In other words, what is needed is a category of intelligent, creative activity *to replace* the regnant model of rational action and the supplemental models of non-rational action.

The "tacit assumptions behind ideas of rational action," as these have defined the field of inquiry, are in the first instance what most need to be identified. Above all, they are rooted in three presuppositions. All of the theories being subjected to critique by Joas "presuppose firstly that the actor is capable of purposive action, secondly that he has control over his own body, and thirdly that he is autonomous vis-à-vis his fellow human beings and environment" (147). At first blush (perhaps even after more extended consideration), these assumptions are likely to appear, to many inquirers, to be entirely innocent and, indeed, reasonable. But each one tends to suppress an adequate recognition of situated creativity as the primordial form of human action. As a consequence, Joas feels compelled to call into question these seemingly innocent and undeniable truths about the exercise of our agency. He thus offers a non-teleological interpretation of the intentionality of action (148-67), a highly suggestive account of the constitution of the body schema (167-84), and finally a more abridged yet even more compelling description of the primordial

¹⁰ Among other things, the task of restructuring this understanding entails not the addition of a new category (or set of such categories), but a transformation of the very category of rational action. In turn, this means restructuring our understanding of rationality itself. As a result of this reconstruction, rationality comes to be seen as irreducibly situational, corporeal, and social, in a manner and measure not acknowledged by virtually any theorists but the pragmatists. Other traditions of theorizing, however, have a great deal to contribute to the task of understanding each one of these three traits of rationality (Joas 1996, 147).

¹¹ While the model of rational action is the one principally defended in economic theory, that of normatively structured action is the one arising in sociological theory. But, as we will see, the predominantly economic model of rational action has a significance and influence far beyond the borders of economics. Indeed, this model is, in certain respects, *the* model (the pivotal model) of human action, around which the supplemental models turn.

¹² Joas takes the model of rational action as the main target of his critique because the advocates of the other regnant model (that of normatively structured and oriented action) have done so before him and, in doing so, have in effect grounded action theory in the presuppositions underlying the model of rational action. This might not appear to follow, but the thrust of Joas's argument is that this critique does not displace the model of rational action; rather it simply generates residual negative categories of human activity (non-rational, no logical, or non-instrumental ones). What however is needed is a category of intelligent, creative activity, as a radical alternative to the regnant model of rational action. Accordingly, "the narrow conception of rationality" embedded in traditional theories of human action will be replaced by a more comprehensive and, indeed, more humane understanding of human reasonableness.

sociality of human life and, hence, human agency (184-95).¹³ While I will touch upon all three of these contributions to our understanding of action, I will focus primarily on the first one (Joas's pragmatist critique of the traditional forms of teleological explanation). But, even before doing so, other matters require attention.

The first such matter concerns the most basic differences between the two regnant models. While the affinities are, ultimately, of importance, the differences are hardly negligible. The model of rational action, so dominant in economic theorizing, was the object of sociological critique. The tendency on the part of sociologists, in their role as theorists of action, however, was to grant legitimacy to this model and then to supplement it by identifying other categories of human exertion or engagement (e.g., in Weber's typology of action, instrumentally rational actions [*zweckrational*] are juxtaposed to value-rational [*wertrational*], affectual, and traditional actions, whereas we witness, in Vilfredo Pareto's work, a conscientious attempt to recognize "non-economic spheres of society" [Joas 1996, 38]). The result is, however, to assign "all those forms of action [other than rational or, in Pareto's language, "logical" action] ... to a negatively defined residual category (that of *non-rational* or *non-logical* actions).

As already indicated, for virtually all of the sociologists under consideration by Joas, the legitimacy of the model of rational action for explaining phenomena in the methodologically distinct domain of economic activity went either altogether unchallenged or only superficially challenged. Indeed, the critique of this highly influential model tended to leave unchallenged the most basic assumptions of this model. A sociological theory of action would need to be more encompassing than the conception (allegedly) adequate for explaining our economic activities. But, both for the narrow purpose of explaining the behavior of economic actors and the far more comprehensive one of providing the most basic terms in which to conceive rational agency, the model of rational action occupies the default position. Ironically, then, the sociological critics unwittingly espoused the assumptions of the very model of action that these critics imagined they were subjecting to radical criticism.

Taking Parsons as a (if not *the*) paradigm of a sociological theorist who tried to subject the model of rational action to a thoroughgoing critique, Joas argues: "Although we must agree with Parsons in distancing ourselves from the model of rational action, it does not follow that we must agree with his solution, namely the development of a normativist conception of action, is really the best way to lay the foundations for an approach that goes beyond the rational model" (1996, 44). Parsons' "alternative consists in assuming that social order is guaranteed by mutually formed values and in maintaining that the model of rational action can be overcome [only] by considering those normative orientations which are involved in the constitution of goals and the choice of means" (1996, 14). Adherents of the model of rational action must presuppose a normatively structured society in which rational agents set goals for themselves and, moreover, identify the means most effective for the realization of their aims. But these theorists have no way of accounting for society in this sense. That is, rational action on their understanding makes sense only in such a social world, but the only kind of action recognized by them cannot generate or maintain such a world.¹⁴The structure of human action must be conceived in terms of the structure of

¹³ At the outset of his study, Joas goes so far as to suggest, "... these tacit assumptions are characteristic not only of action theory but of the discourse of modernity as such ...:" (1996, 5). His critique of these assumptions accordingly turns out to be nothing less than a critique of the discourse of modernity.

¹⁴ It however turns out that this is also true of such theorists as Parsons (i.e., advocates of the model of normatively structured and oriented action). As Joas notes, "Parsons never set out to explain the existence of

social action and, in turn, the conception of social action being advocated by Parsons is one in which the norms constitutive of a given social order are, at the same time, definitive of social action as such (see, e.g., Joas 1996, 14). In other words, “only a normatively oriented theory of actions” – a theory in which the irreducibly normative structure of the social order provides the framework for understanding the irreducibly normative orientation of human activity – gives Parsons an adequate conceptualization of such activity (cf. Joas 1996, 24).

It is, however, far from insignificant that Parsons “completely ignored the philosophical schools, be they pragmatism or the philosophy of life, which were emerging contemporaneously with classical sociological thought and which doubtless had a major impact on the thinkers he discusses” (1996, 44). In general, he tended to isolate the figures upon whom he was drawing and those to whom he was responding (often the very same figures – e.g., Weber, Durkheim, Simmel, and Tönnies) “from their philosophical and cultural background” (Joas 1996, 66). The deeply philosophical import of the distinctive contributions of these sociological theorists is thereby erased or, at least, concealed. (Part of the value of Joas’s *The Creativity of Action* is that he relates in a detailed manner sociological theorists to their philosophical background.) Even worse, “Parsons paid a high price for the greater integrity of his normatively oriented theory of action” (1996, 34). This can be seen if we realize that his efforts at integrating what he took to be the deepest insights of his theoretical precursors resulted in a comprehensive understanding of human action, with one glaring exception. In ignoring the pragmatist as well as Nietzschean contributions to the debates regarding the forms, functions, and efficacy of human action, Parsons all too hastily overlooked “any consideration of the creative dimension of action” (Joas 1996, 34). This was the price, the extremely high price, he ended up paying for his neglect of especially the pragmatists.

The point is not to make Parsons into a whipping boy. This is certainly not Joas’s objective in his nuanced and informed treatment of this theorist; nor is it any part of my aim. Rather the point is to highlight the way in which the neglect of certain pivotal figures in late modern thought – e.g., Herder, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Bergson on one side of the Atlantic Ocean, Peirce, James, Dewey, and Mead on the other side – can be overlooked only at the risk of missing what is, especially at this historical juncture, most critical for our self-understanding. One of the deepest ironies regarding American pragmatism is, despite the largely inexplicable persistence of what is an altogether unjust criticism (how many times can the representatives of a tradition correct a misinterpretation of their position and still go unheeded or unheard?), the very opposite of the charge is true: “Dewey and the other pragmatists were concerned not to interpret all action according to the model of instrumental action, but, *on the contrary*, to offer a critique of the overly narrow ‘practical’ orientation of American life” (Joas 1996, 132; emphasis added). The world is not reduced by the pragmatists to an amorphous stuff more or less amenable to the ingenious efforts of human agents to recast it in more humanly satisfying forms; rather human beings can discover and appropriate the world, from the pragmatist perspective, only through their actions. That is, “the pragmatists attempt to anchor creativity in the actions of human

social order: rather, he want to make its existence, as a fact confirmed by experience, the starting point for reflection” (1996, 15). Though this is hardly explicit in his own approach to the topic, Joas provides us with some of the conceptions with which we might explain the emergence of various forms of social order. While the primary sociality of human life is, in a sense, a given (there is no possibility of getting behind – or underneath – the actual forms of human togetherness, of our *being with others* [Glendinning 1998]), the implicit, incipient, inchoate norms constitutive of such sociality and, then, the complex evolution of human associations suggest a broadly evolutionary explanation of any social order in which human agents are implicated.

beings in their natural and social environment” (1996, 132). This makes of pragmatism never anything less than a “*theory of situated creativity*” (133). Such creativity is irrepressibly operative in any situation into which human actors have been historically thrown, also in any situation into which such agents deliberately insert themselves.

Let us, however, return more directly to the rival accounts of human action being evaluated by Joas in *The Creativity of Action*. The “central thesis” of this magisterial study is that “a third model of action should be added to the two predominant models of action” (i.e., to those of *rational* action and *normatively oriented* action). [Cf. 1996, 6] This third model is one “that emphasizes the *creative* character of human action” (Joas 1996, 4). In Joas’s judgment, this model overarches the other two, by which I take him to me encompasses the model of *rational* action and *normatively oriented* action. This model is, in other words, theoretically more comprehensive than the other two; indeed, “only by introducing a concept of action which consistently takes account of this creative dimension [of human activity] can the other models of action be assigned their proper logical place” (5). The pragmatist model of situated creativity can make sense out of the range of phenomena for which the other dominant models have been designed in a manner in which these models cannot account for creativity.

In fact, Joas goes even farther than this: only by making creativity constitutive of our responses to situations (as this implies, only by envisioning actions as responses to situations whose meaning is inherent in these situation themselves), he contends, “can the wealth of concepts involved in the concept of action, such as intention, norm, identity, role, definition of the situation, institution, routine, etc., be defined consistently” (1996, 5). In addition, only by doing so can we ascertain adequately the import of these conceptions. The primary referent of intentionality is to be gathered from the improvisational responses of situated actors to the various and variable contexts in which they are called upon to act, not from antecedently fixed ends or especially from rigidly hierarchical orders (or arrangements) of such ends.¹⁵ Human agency is inseparable from human improvisation and ingenuity, thus from human creativity. Action not only unfolds in situations, but is constituted by them.¹⁶

IV. *The Improvisational Responses of Situated Actors*

For Joas’s purpose, then, the most important point is to articulate a nuanced understanding of human activity in which the “creative dimension to *all* human action” is

¹⁵ The habits and ultimately the character brought by agents to situations unquestionably have a significant bearing what these situations are. In turn, these situations contribute to the functioning of these habits but, in some respects, at least potentially to their transformation. As Dewey notes in *Art as Experience*, experience in its most vital sense “is defined by those situations and episodes that we spontaneously refer to as being ‘real experiences’; those things of which we say in recalling them, ‘that *was* an experience.’ It may have been something of tremendous importance – q quarrel with one who was once an intimate, a catastrophe finally averted by a hair’s breadth. Or it may have been something that in comparison was slight – and which perhaps because of its very slightness illustrates all the better what it is to be an experience. There is that meal in a Paris restaurant of which one says ‘that *was* an experience.’ It stands out as an enduring memorial of what food may be” (LW 10, 43). Note that these are aesthetically demarcated situations or episodes: they have their integrity and hence their identity by virtue of a pervasive, unifying quality.

¹⁶ “Habits,” Dewey stresses, “enter into the constitution of situations; they are in and of it, not ... something outside of it. Here ... is a unique relation of self and things, but it is unique, not in being wholly incomparable to all natural relations among events, but in the sense of being distinction, or just the relation that it is” (1911 [1977], 105). See my “Habit, Competence, and Purpose” (forthcoming in *The Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*).

shown to be a salient and, indeed, defining feature of human activity as such (4; emphasis added). Creative activity is, accordingly, not a residual category, but a ubiquitous trait of human agency. There is unquestionably a continuum: the ideal limit of this continuum is, on one side, the vast range of more or less routine responses to familiar situations, while the ideal limit is, on the other side, those paradigmatic cases or exemplary instances of creative intelligence. The political implications of such an undertaking are, at least, as significant as the theoretical implications. The concluding chapter of this wide-ranging, deep-cutting study is, after all, entitled “Creative Democracy.” The situated creativity of human actors, as exhibited in the overlapping situations into which such agents are historically thrown and, given their historical situatedness, so often deliberately move, defines political actors no less than artists, scientists, or inventors. This is as true of ordinary citizens in their collective undertakings as it is of such notable figures as Abraham Lincoln, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and Barack Obama in their seemingly most singular decisions. As important as the political implications of Joas’s pragmatist theorizing is, however, my main concern here is with its theoretical underpinnings.

We need, Joas believes, nothing less than a comprehensive model of human activity, one in which the most important domains of human endeavor (the distinguishable yet inevitably – if only partly – overlapping contexts of such affairs as religious worship, artistic innovation, aesthetic engagement, everyday life, and scientific investigation) are not relegated to residual negative categories. “Intellectual history already provides us,” Joas claims, “with the essential basis for such a comprehensive model” of human activity. This model is none other than the one articulated and defended by Peirce, James, Mead, and Dewey. The critical part of Joas’s task is executed mainly in Chapter 1 (“The Emergence of a Theory of Action”) and Chapter 2 (“Models of Creativity”), although already in the last section of the second chapter (“Intelligence and Reconstruction”) the creative part of his project is launched. Though I have already indicated it, the creative part of his task is important enough to recall here: In Chapter 3 (“Situation – Corporeality – Sociality: The Fundamentals of a Theory of the Creativity of Action”), however, the reconstructive and, indeed, truly creative task is fully joined by Joas.

The extent to which the pragmatists reconstructed, rather than jettisoned, a teleological interpretation of human action is certainly a question worthy of careful consideration. I however cannot take up this question here in any detailed manner. But I must nonetheless touch upon the issue of the extent to which the pragmatists jettisoned a teleological interpretation of human activity.¹⁷ Of course, everything turns on the meaning ascribed to teleology. In a vague sense, each one of the classical pragmatists argued for what at least appears to be a form of teleology. The very vagueness and hence indeterminacy of the operative ends characteristically acknowledged by these pragmatists, however, might be part of what distinguishes their conception of ends from more traditional versions of teleological interpretation. In any event, James in his *Principles* famously characterized human consciousness in emphatically teleological terms: “Every actually existing consciousness seems to itself at any rate to be a *fighter for ends*, of which many, but for its presence, would not be ends at all” (1890 [1981], 144). Or, in “The Law of Mind,” Peirce

¹⁷ Of course, everything turns on the meaning ascribed to teleology. It is not clear to me whether the Peircean notion of development teleology goes far enough for Joas’s purpose. In this connection, however, it is likely pertinent to call attention to the work of T. L. Short who has done more than anyone else to show how the pragmatic approach and a teleological understanding of human activity are not only compatible but also (at least, in the case of Peirce) intertwined with one another. See especially Short 2007 (but also 1981, 1983, and 2002).

argued, “in the case of personality this teleology is more than a mere purposive pursuit of a predetermined end; it is a developmental teleology” (*EP* 1, 331).

None of this however touches the core of Joas’s critique of what he identifies as “teleology.” His concern is not to show that the pragmatists abandoned every notion of end (indeed, he attends insightfully to the Deweyan notion of ends-in-view as themselves means for remaking situations). His concern is rather to expose the fatal flaws in those historically influential forms of teleological understanding of human activity so deeply enshrined in both our everyday understanding and theoretical discourses. What Joas appreciates as deeply as any interpreter of Dewey is that (in Dewey’s own words) “the ‘goals’ of action ... are ways of defining and deepening the meaning of activity” (*MW* 14, 156). “Having an end or aim is,” Dewey immediately adds, “thus a characteristic of *present* activity. It is the means by which an activity becomes adapted, when otherwise it would be blind and disorderly.” The conclusion drawn by Dewey and stressed by Joas is that “an end-in-view is a *means* in present action; present action is not a means to a remote end” (*ibid.*). That is, the traditional subordination of present activity to transcendent ideals or antecedent goals belies a fatally flawed understanding of the function and status of ends, also the significance and thickness of the present.

In various ways, the classical pragmatists contest this traditional subordination. The Peircean conception of developmental teleology might be taken as central to the pragmatist portrait of human agency. But this form of teleology marks a decisive shift from antecedently fixed goals and values to historically emerging ends and meanings (see Colapietro 2004). There are, of course, inherited goals and, as such, antecedently fixed ones; but these goals themselves have attained their status in the course of history and, moreover, they prove themselves worthy of our abiding allegiance by virtue of their efficacy to assist our situated creativity in enhancing the possible meanings in an overlapping series of continuous yet distinct situations.¹⁸ Such goals or ends are, hence, not absolutely or immutably fixed, but historically evolved and evolving.

Joas however does not refer to the Peircean conception of developmental teleology, but rather focuses on the form in which teleological interpretations of human action is encountered in contemporary theories, especially in the social sciences. The bias of such interpretations is to abstract agents and their goals from the situations in which they are called upon to *respond to* shifting and often conflicting demands. For the purpose of understanding the relationship between our agency and the situations in and through which our agency not only assumes its determinate form but also exercises its irrepressible creativity, Joas calls upon the insights of Dietrich Böhler, quoting him at length:

By ‘situation’ we – that is, ‘we’ as human beings who act and who know about action – understand a relationship between human beings and to objects, or between a human being and objects, which already precedes the particular action under consideration and which is therefore in each case already understood by the person or people concerned as a challenge either to do or alternatively not to do something. In colloquial speech we talk about ‘getting into’ situations; they ‘befall’ us, ‘happen to’ us, and we find ourselves ‘confronted’ by them. These are ways of expressing that a situation is something which precedes our action (or inaction) but which also provokes action because it ‘affects’ us, ‘interests’ us, or ‘concerns’ us. (Quoted in Joas 1996, 160).

¹⁸ In *Experience and Education*, Dewey stresses both the continuity of experience (or experience as a continuum) and the manner in which interactions tend to take the form of scenes or episodes.

Böhler uses the term “quasi-dialogical” to designate “the relationship between action and situation” (ibid.). This “quasi-dialogical” conception of situation is taken by Joas to provide a non-teleological conception of action. The intentionality of the situated responses of improvisational actors is one thing, the intentionality of pre-established purposes, conceived in abstraction from the histories in which these purposes have taken shape and are yet taking shape, is quite another thing.

So, it should not be surprising that Joas offers the Deweyan understanding of situation as an alternative to the traditional emphasis on teleology, in this restricted sense. In his own words, he is striving to offer a non-teleological interpretation of the intentionality of action. The phenomenon to be illuminated is, in this context, the intentionality of action.

Such intentionality seems to make the teleological interpretation of human action inescapable. But, in Joas’s judgment, such an inference is invalid: we might account for this intentionality by means other than teleology. Stated positively, the various and shifting *situations* in which we as improvisational actors are implicated provides a genuine alternative to the teleological interpretation. As already suggested, what Joas finds objectionable about teleological interpretations of human action is (at least, in large measure) the assumption of antecedently fixed ends.

Situations are the sites in which historically authoritative ends are often discredited, at least neutralized, and ones in which humanly novel purposes are envisioned and enacted. The very identity of situations depends, in part, on the habits and (arguably) purposes of the agents entangled in these situations, but the deep-cutting implications of the revised portrait of human actors as *situated* improvisers are all too easy to miss. Because agents can so often fluently and thus effectively move from one situation to another, our understanding of situations as *external* scenes of human engagement – that is, as sites through which such agents move, but not ones in and through which human beings are constituted as creative actors – seems a faithful rendering of our trans-situational agency. It is, indeed, impossible to miss how agents move from one situation into another (e.g., one leaves the dining hall, having concluded a breakfast with several friends or acquaintances, and then briskly walks across campus to attend a meeting with colleagues, then eventually enters a class for the purpose of meeting with the students in one’s seminar). But is (as just noted) all too easy to miss how situations are inherent to, thus constitutive of, agency. It is one thing for us to be teleologically oriented actors, another to be situationally implicated agents – or so Joas argues.

The means-end schema of interpreting human action might have a far more restricted scope than a meaning-situation schema. The enhancement of meaning in unfolding situations, as the very possibilities for such enhancement are taken by actors *in situ* to define and, not infrequently, emerge in the course of engagement to redefine these situations, might turn out to be a more adequate account of human activity¹⁹ than any possible variant of the teleological interpretation. Situations are inherently meaningful, even if the fuller or deeper saliences are far from manifest to the actors implicated in these situations. A confusing or baffling situation is just that – its meaning is overwhelmingly

¹⁹ It is perhaps helpful to draw a distinction between human action and human activity. Such a distinction might be drawn in terms of an identifiable deed within an unfolding drama (an action in contrast to the ongoing, open-ended activity) and the unfolding drama conceived precisely as an open-ended affair. In such a drama, the significance and importance of deeds of actions are, more often than not, fundamentally altered or transformed in the course of the activity itself. In part, this means that the later deeds and events explain (or throw light on) earlier ones. Unquestionably, earlier events and actions illuminate and explain, in some manner and measure, later ones, but the reality of time is such that the present is a site in which the past is continually being re-drafted or re-written (cf. Mead [1959, 11]; also Dewey’s “Time and Individuality” [LW 14]).

lost on us and our being implicated in a situation is properly, understandably, bafflement and confusion. To repeat, situations are inherently meaningful, though the contours and trajectories of significance defining any situation are neither fully manifest to the participants nor fully circumscribed in the present. In turn, meanings are necessarily contextual, even when the forms of significance and salience have evolved to the point where they lend themselves to an ever expanding range of trans-contextual applicability. In this context (!), what *trans-contextuality* means is not that these forms ever exist apart from any situation or context, only that their presence in one context does not preclude their presence in other situations. The presence of meaning in this or that situation hardly rules out the prolongation of this meaning in an indefinite number of other contexts is very far from being the case; rather what we discern in any situation is always “the operative presence of a *continuum* of meanings” (*LW* 1, 232; emphasis added). Moreover, this dynamic points toward a distinct sense of relevant context in which the forms of significance need to be located, in order to be in a position to move toward an adequate appreciation of the dynamics of significance.

The word *situation* means what it does in this discursive and polemical context because it means what it does both in English generally and in the writings of Dewey and other pragmatist more specifically. The immediate context of our particular discussion of this admittedly elusive notion needs itself to be set in an inclusive linguistic context and the narrower (but still large) philosophical context of pragmatist discourse. Of course, the relevant contexts are matters about which reasonable disagreements might take place. The politics of meaning involves the possibilities of re-contextualization, just as the meaning of politics invites re-contextualizing, at the level of theory, the play of power (e.g., seeing the personal domains of our everyday existence as ones in which the play of power is discernible). But what is most important for our purpose is that context is an elastic notion. The elasticity of this notion allows us to stretch the conception of context to include ever wider and also fundamentally different contexts than the ones to which our attention, as situated agents, is ineluctably drawn (e.g., a familial quarrel is by definition a disagreement taking place within a given set of social relationships but it is, arguably, always taking place in a more extensive and complex network of relationships; so, too, the conflicts among various ethnic groups, as such groups are identified by the conflicting actors themselves, are, arguably, inseparable from other social relationships and structures, histories and institutions).

The possibilities of meaning *inherent in* a situation are, for the advocates of the meaning-situation schema of human action in contrast to the proponents of the means-end schema (i.e., the teleological interpretation), far more salient than the opportunities provided by situations for the enactment or realization of antecedently established goals. Immediate, intrinsic, on inherent value is one thing, inherent meaning another. “Dewey’s resistance in his theory of value to any talk of ‘inherent’, ‘intrinsic’ or ‘immediate’ values can only be understood against this background” – his rejection of those forms in idealism in effect committed to celebrating ideals in abstraction from the situations in which humans are ineluctably implicated. Dewey suspects, Joas contends (and, in my judgment, rightly contends), “in all such language a tendency to remove values from the means-ends chain [or continuum] of human action, to oppose them in particular to the realm of means, thereby devaluing them” (Joas 2000, 106). To abstract values, ideals, and meanings from this continuum inevitably slights of “the concepts of human maturity and personal wisdom we employ” (106).

The creativity of action is nowhere more apparent than the imaginative transfiguration of the actual scenes and dramas in which everyday actors are caught up. The goals or ends animating and orienting actors *in situ* are, as Dewey stresses, means – means for identifying and enhancing the possibilities of meaning inherent in some situation. The means-end continuum entails not only a radical revision of our understanding of the relationship between means and ends but also an equally radical revision of our understanding of human action as human activity, as an ongoing, creative process in which the very terms of identification and description (e.g., a basic action or a rational action) cannot be defined either in advance of the process (i.e., a priori) or apart from the process of ongoing activity. Of course, our inherited ideas regarding human action (e.g., Max Weber, Talcott Parsons, Niklas Luhmann, or Jürgen Habermas) might certainly prove themselves to be applicable to some circumscribed field of human endeavor. They however cannot provide adequate means for the illuminating articulation of emerging meanings (and, paradoxically, this extends to nothing less than such notions as emergence and activity, as they are being used here).

Part of the reason why this is so concerns the very nature of time, while part of it concerns more specifically the character of human action as ongoing activity. The past does not write the future, however much the past serves as prologue to whatever follows it and, to some degree, flows from it. It is, as G. H. Mead suggests, much rather the case that the present rewrites the past, making of time a ceaseless and irrepressible process of re-signification and re-narration. But, in addition to this facet of temporality, the character of activity as situated, corporeal, and social imposes the task of beginning ever anew to identify and describe the situation from within the contours of that situation itself. There is never any question of absolute novelty, though there is always a question of genuine emergent. The extent to which the present is identified, described, interpreted, and narrated in terms indifferent to its differences from the past is almost certainly a guarantee that the historical present as a dramatic site of genuine emergence and, hence, irreducible novelty will be covered over with the dominant modes of traditional understanding, rather than illuminated *on its own terms*. This concerns not primarily the general structure of temporality, but mainly the specific character of our activity. The present is the site in which the past is being re-written, thus one in which the possibilities of the future are being re-envisioned. The efficacious character of our situated creativity is nowhere more apparent than in the ongoing work of such revision and re-envisionment.

V. Body Schema and Primary Sociality, Very Briefly Noted

On this occasion, I will treat far more briefly the other two fundamental features of human action, as these are identified by Joas. On another occasion, however, I hope to be able to offer a fuller account of Joas's nuanced approach to our situated creativity, also a more detailed critique.²⁰

²⁰ Early in his discussion of corporeality, Joas suggests, "action theory must defend itself against the accusation that it intrinsically leans more heavily in favour of an *activistic relationship to the world*, which is evidently culture-specific, if not gender-specific, and thus does not fulfill its claim to universality" (1996, 167). Such a presumption, however, allegedly "tends to obscure or to downgrade both the cultivation of an aesthetic sensibility that is not linked to action and the willingness to accept fate, that is, the unintended and unexpected events of life" (168). But it is, at least for me, difficult to read Dewey's "The Reflex Arc Concept" and other writings as anything but texts in which this pragmatist emphatically asserts the irrepressible activity of the human organism. How, then, does Dewey's own pragmatist account of human activity, with such an emphasis, avoid

Joas is quick to point out, “the body does not appear explicitly in most theories of action” (Joas 1996, 167). There is, Joas suggests, “an unstable equilibrium between the body’s instrumentalization [the mastery of the body as an instrument of action] and other non-instrumental relations with the body” (1996, 168-69). He eloquently makes this point when he writes: “Control of the body on the stage of life is always accompanied by the periodic relaxation of body when we go backstage” (169). The body is, for each one of us, more than an instrument of action. Moreover, the shaping of the body to serve as such an instrument needs to be understood historically, especially when severely reductivist accounts of somatic instrumentalization become the default position for understanding our embodied agency – better, our embodied being. As Joas notes, “human biological preconditions must obtain in order for action to be possible” (172). Among other preconditions, there is in the case of *Homo sapiens* a break with instinct (173). Joas supplements the pragmatist account of our embodied agency by incorporating (!) into his creative appropriation insights derived from such theorists as Arnold Gehlen, Axel Honneth, and Helmuth Plessner.²¹ If undertaken in the spirit of pragmatism, the radical reconstruction of our understanding of human activity must drive in the direction of offering a detailed account of human activity as a concretely embodied affair and, by implication, an equally detailed portrait of human agents as embodied beings. In the section of Chapter 3 (“Situation – Corporeality – Sociality”) entitled “The Constitution of the Body Schema” Joas does more than anyone else thus far to offer such an account of human action and, by implication, such a portrait of human agency. The specific ways in which the pragmatist tradition might be enriched and deepened by a critical engagement with certain psychoanalytic and phenomenological theorists (e.g., Paul Shilder and Maurice Merleau-Ponty) deserve especially to be highlighted.

The main focus of Joas’s discussion of the corporeal character of human activity is on body schema. “The concepts of ‘body schema’ or ‘body image’ refer to the fact that the body is subjectively present for the actor” (1996, 175). He is quick to point out the human body is more than this; it is, indeed, “one entity among others in the world, but by virtue of being one’s own body it is radically different from all other things” (ibid.). This is certainly true. It is however not clear – at least, to me – why the topic of corporeality is taken more or less as the equivalent of the constitution of a bodily schema. As important as the constitution of such a schema is for understanding the corporeal constitution of human action, corporeality in its bearing on action extends beyond this topic. The functional integration of the multiple facets of the human organism requisite for the exercise of situated creativity, accordingly, involves more than the constitution of our body schema. But any account of the integration of these factors must attend in detail to just this constitution. Consequently, Joas’s treatment of this topic is, at the very least, an indispensable starting point for this pressing task. It is however not likely the whole of this task.

There is, in addition to our situatedness and corporeality, “a *primary sociality* which has not been generated by conscious intentionality but has preceded such, in other words [,] a structure of common action which initially consists solely of our interaction with other bodies” (184). Such a sociality needs, as much as anything else, to be explained in terms of

such an activist presumption? This is but one of a handful of other criticisms or questions that I would be inclined to voice in a fuller treatment of Joas’s nuanced account of human action.

²¹ It is surprising to me that the work of Pierre Bourdieu – in particular, his conception of *habitus* – is not integrated into Joas’s discussion of either corporeality or sociality. Of course, a theorist cannot treat everyone. But Bourdieu’s work seems especially relevant to the issues under consideration in *The Creativity of Action*.

the *natality* constitutive of our humanity (Joas 1996, 140). The primordial forms in which human beings are with one another, forms rooted in their natalty, are (as much as anything else) what most deserves to be identified as their primordial sociality. Joas sheds much light on the condition and indeed fate of being with others. His account of our primary sociality is, in my judgment, even more illuminating than his treatment of body schema. But his central insight into our situated creativity is, above all, a consequence of his creative appropriation of central insights from classical pragmatism into the situated character of human activity. These insights bear upon our understanding of intentionality. In particular, they point to the need to revise our understanding of intentionality in a manner that breaks with the traditional forms of teleological interpretation. The ends by which human actors, precisely as social and embodied beings, are animated and directed are concretely specifiable only in reference to the situations to which these actors are responding.

In a more balanced treatment of Joas's creative appropriation of the pragmatist tradition than the one I am able to offer on this occasion, his highly nuanced account of corporeality and sociality would deserve as much attention as I have given to the situated character of human activity. Allow my exceedingly brief remarks about these two aspects of human agency to suffice at present. Unquestionably, an adequate account of our situated creativity demands painstaking consideration of the social matrix in which our embodied agency takes shape, also the irreducibly corporeal form of even our most private and seemingly "ethereal" acts of imagining, reflecting, and deliberating. But, on this occasion, the details pertaining to our sociality and corporeality are less important than a deepened appreciation of our situated creativity, in its broad outlines.

VI. Pressing the Question of Creativity

It might appear as though the very intelligibility of our activity is precluded by such a decided emphasis on genuine emergence and irreducible novelty (cf. Hausman). But the intelligibility of activity imposes the task, thus the activity, of confronting unique situations in their elusive uniqueness. This is far easier said than done, far easier announced than achieved. This might be especially true of the *activity* of theorizing is, especially when the overarching goal is to provide a pragmatist interpretation of human action, one in which the traits of action identified in the theory are integral to the form of activity identifiable as theorizing. This is fully in accord with Joas's own understanding: ironically, the exemplary intelligibility of Joas's approach to action might in some measure count against its ultimate adequacy as a truly pragmatic interpretation of creative action.

I want, however, to press this point for a moment. My reason is that a pragmatist approach to creative activity must take the form of a creative response to a problematic situation, though a form almost certainly in critical respects unlike anything envisaged by the classical pragmatists. The demands creativity imposes upon our forms of understanding, above all, upon the immediate intelligibility of a theoretical account, would seem to drive theorists engaged in this very undertaking to move beyond the conceptual resources to be found in traditional approaches to human activity (Hausman). It seems unlikely that past thinkers provide contemporary theorists with adequate resources for coming to terms with the irreducibly creative character of human activity. Doing justice to the creativity of action would seem to demand nothing less than the creative innovations of contemporary theorists who are driven by the very nature of their endeavor to go beyond what past authors have yet accomplished. While a creative appropriation of various parts of our intellectual inheritance is unquestionably a central part of this complex task (not only a

central part, but also possibly a truly creative one), such appropriation does not appear – to me at least – to be sufficient. Perhaps more than anything else, the extent to which we do *not* know what we are doing, including the extent to which this is so even when we are immersed in the activity of theorizing (in particular, crafting a theory designed to account for human activity as a creative process), needs to be made a pivot around which virtually everything turns. The ways of thematizing and, then, theorizing the varieties of human “ignorance” (the various and often interwoven ways in which even the most conscientious agents act in – and act out of – what might be called *constitutive* ignorance) invite us to look beyond the obvious yet important situations in which agents are thrown into doubt about what they are doing in this or that situation (that is, the kinds of situation upon which Peirce, James, Dewey, and other pragmatists tend to tend, almost exclusively). In raising this set of concerns, however, I am jumping ahead of the story. First, it is imperative to examine in some detail how Hans Joas in *The Creativity of Action* and, indeed, in other writings offers an alternative account of human activity and, by implication, a revised portrait of human agency. Unquestionably obvious and, hence, deceptively simple matters inform and underwrite this account and, hence, this portrait. Above all else, these concern matters the situated, social, embodied, and creative dimensions of human activity. The most important reason for highlighting or even mentioning these features is that they are so often ignored. Even when these features are formally or nominally taken into account, they frequently are not given their full due.

Agency seems to many inquirers to be, by definition, an exercise of control and, in its innermost core, the enactment of self-control. Thus, it is important to follow Joas in a surprising direction. “Like James’ theory of religion, Dewey’s theory of art is,” Joas suggests, “aimed at experiences in which the self is not master in its own domain” (1996, 141). It will, however, be impossible for some readers of Joas *not* to hear an echo of Sigmund Freud’s deliberate blow to our narcissistic pretensions and agential presumption: The ego or “I” is not a master even in its own house. As R. W. Emerson asserted at the conclusion of “Circles,” the way of life is, in some manner and measure, the way of abandonment (227). “The difference between talents and character is,” he stresses, “adroitness to keep the old and trodden round, and power and courage to make a new road to new and better goals. Character [in contrast to talent] makes an overpowering present, a cheerful, determined hour, which fortifies all the company by making them see that much is possible and excellent that was not thought of” (227). It is, as much as anything else, the joyous abandonment of inherited ideals of possessive mastery and, conversely, masterful possession. The capacity of the self to let go – also to let be (cf. Heidegger) – is, from what is still today the elusive perspective of a radically reconstructed pragmatism, one with the capacity to assist bringing into being, here and now, what is irreducibly novel (cf. Hausman). It is very difficult for human beings to grant to others, much less to themselves, the license to let go and to let be. There are however those rare individuals who are capable of doing just this. “They do not close,” as James with his characteristic eloquence, “their hand on their possessions. When they profess a willingness that certain persons should be free they mean it not as most of us do – with a mental reservation, as that the freedom should be well employed and other similar humbug – but in all sincerity, and calling for no guarantee against abuse which, when it happens, they accept without complaint or embitterment as part of the chances of the game. They let their bird fly with no string tied to its leg” (Perry, II, 269).

Those situations in which we are, at once, all too acquainted with the traditional modes of identification (e.g., our situation is that of being in classroom, or at home, or at work)

and altogether at a loss as to how we ought to orient ourselves to just these situations – those situations, at once, all too familiar and truly “uncanny” – are ones about which the inherited lexicon of American pragmatism is hardly adequate for purposes of description, interpretation, critique, and indeed simply identification (how, after all, can we most effectively identify the situation in which we are implicated?). Part of the problem here is the presumption that we are in the position to identify the nature of the situation in which we are implicated. A Socratic willingness to confess a rather profound form of human ignorance – a willingness rooted as much as anything else in the courage to acknowledge we do *not* know what we are doing in this situation – is an integral part of anything worth of the appellation *pragmatic intelligence*. Situated creativity requires nothing less than a renewed willingness to look afresh, in the effort to see anew. This is (at least) as much a moral and political achievement as it is an intellectual or cognitive accomplishment.

Somewhat paradoxically, however, the willingness or resolve to look afresh at the situations in which we are implicated more often than not demands a deepened understanding of the historical dimensions to such a large extent constituting these very situations. Dalibor Vesely helps us to understand why this is so when he stresses:

Situations are the receptacles of experience and of those events which sediment in them a meaning not just survivals or residues but as an invitation to a sequel, the necessity of a future. Situations endow experience with durable dimensions, in relation to which a whole series of other experiences will acquire meaning. ... The richness of situations depends on the reverberations of meaning through the depths of their history. (1983, 9)

In light of such considerations, I am inclined to propose that we need, on the one hand, to develop far more fully than anyone has yet done a detailed understanding of the experiential continuum precisely as a distinctive form of historical continuity and, on the other hand, a dramaturgical approach to the self-segmenting dynamic in any historical continuum (a dynamic nowhere more evident than in the way the continuum of experience inevitably divides itself into the more or less distinguishable scenes of an unfolding drama). Accordingly, highly abstract models and conceptions of continuity, drawn from mathematics, are likely to assist us in understanding the otherwise baffling character of the experiential continuum. Much as the notion of rhizome has proven so fruitful in one context, that of continuum might prove, once again,²² fecund in the context of our inquiry. In addition, finely elaborated models and theories of dramatic situations²³ (such as those

²² Of course, Peirce provides us with an exemplar of how to undertake this task. But, we need, at the very least, to explore the way he himself explored continuity but also to attend to more recent developments in the investigation of this notion.

²³ From the perspective being defended here, the expression *dramatic situation* is pleonastic, for situations are, as envisioned by the pragmatists, inherently dramatic. This is partly a function of their open-endedness: in the sense intended, open-endedness points (among other things) to a state of affairs in which the outcome hangs in the balance, in which the meanings to be intensified, deepened, expanded, and otherwise enhanced might play out in demeaning or trivializing ways. The fateful situation of human actors implicated in the shifting scenes of their ongoing lives (and this is the *overarching* situation of human agency) is captured by James in *Pragmatism* when he insists: “Nothing outside of the flux secures the issue of it. It can hope salvation [or even simply success] only from its own intrinsic promises and potencies” (125). To grant this is “to be willing to live on a scheme of uncertified possibilities which he [the genuine pragmatist nonetheless] trusts; willing to pay with his own person, if need be, for the idealization of the ideals which he frames” (142-43). The sensibility defined by such willingness “condemns all noble, clean-cut, fixed, eternal, rational, temple-life systems of philosophy” (*MT*, 215; cf. *Pragmatism*, 18). Such systems “contradict the dramatic temperament of nature [the emphasis is James’s own], as our dealings with nature and our habits of thinking have so far brought us to conceive them” (*MT*, 215).

articulated by Kenneth Burke,²⁴ Victor Turner, and Erving Goffman) provide us with the resources to do even fuller justice to our situated creativity than has been done by the author of *The Creativity of Action* or, indeed, anyone else. While the most highly abstract models of continuity might provide, in unexpected respects, resources for understanding the way qualitatively distinguishable scenes or episodes flow into one another, the most contextually determinate dramas in turn might offer opportunities to explore various aspects of the experiential continuum.

Our being with one another, our being in time, and our being individually identifiable continua intersecting with myriad forms of such continua are, in the overlapping situations of the unfolding drama of any human life, inseparably of a piece. This makes manifest that our primordial sociality, the distinctive form of human temporality, and the temporal constitution of human individuality (cf. Dewey's "Time and Individuality") intelligible only as instances of continuity. In turn, this makes necessary the need to explore more deeply than anyone has yet done questions concerning continuity.²⁵ The continuum as an indefinitely divisible reality is, in connection to human action, extremely suggestive. The very notion of action is irreducibly vague, such that what counts as an action might itself be divided, indefinitely, into components having themselves a claim to the status of actions. The situations in which we are implicated, the ones in which we are thus called to respond (cf. Joas 1996, 160-61), are always in some respects indeterminate. Such situations are inherently and irreducibly vague, in some ways and to some degree. So, too, the multiple possibilities of characterizing any situation or episode suggest an important respect in which a situation or episode is vague or indeterminate. Of course, the specification or identification of action is not precluded, since embodied and embedded purposes help practically to define relevant contexts of responsible description (e.g., the actors are in a dangerous situation by virtue of their car spinning out of control).

VII. Conclusion

Situation, corporeality, and sociality are, as much as anything else, markers, their principal function being that of marking the most important sites for future investigation. The task of thinking through – inseparable from that of *working through* (cf. Adorno's illuminating exploration of "The Meaning of Working Through the Past" in *Critical Models*; also Freud) – a complex inheritance and the inevitable constraints, enabling no less than limiting, put in place by this inescapable inheritance is ineluctably a task of re-thinking. In some measure, it arguably must also be a task of unthinking – and also undoing. In his journal entry for December 31, 1837 – thus, on the threshold of a new year – H. D. Thoreau observed: "As the least drop of wine tinges the whole goblet, so the least particle of truth colors our whole life. It is never isolated, or simply added as treasure to our

²⁴ The relevance of Burke to the creative appropriation of the central insights in the pragmatist tradition cannot, in my judgment, be gainsaid, even if it is very rarely recognized. This is nowhere more manifest than in reference to the topic – indeed, the task – at hand, the ongoing endeavor to assist the creative articulation of our situated creativity. His elaboration of what situations are in themselves and how they are inevitably related to one another is just one part of his contribution to this task, albeit an exceedingly suggestive and illuminating part.

²⁵ In *John Dewey* (1967), Bernstein goes so far as to suggest, regarding Dewey's metaphysics, we "are left with suggestions and hints, not carefully elaborated ideas" (179-80). In Bernstein's judgment, the difficulties regarding Dewey's project "can be seen in what is undoubtedly the most fundamental principle in Dewey – the principle of continuity. It is at the heart of his naturalism" (180). "We are never given," Bernstein alleges, "a detailed, systematic analysis of 'continuity'" (180). It is certainly high time that the followers of Dewey or, more generally, the proponents of pragmatism go farther than anyone has yet gone in providing just such an analysis of continuity. Our understanding of action and much else depends upon it.

stock. When any real progress is made, we unlearn and learn anew what we thought we knew before” (Shepard [ed.], 3).

In a letter to Henri Bergson, dated December 14, 1902, partly sent in response to having received from the author a copy of *Matière et mémoire*, James wrote: “I saw its great originality, but found your ideas so new and vast that I could not be sure that I fully understood them, although the style, Heaven knows, was lucid enough” (Perry, II, 605). Then James revealed to Bergson, immediately after confessing that his “health is so poor now that work goes very slowly”:

I am going, if I live, to write a general system of metaphysics which, in many of its fundamental ideas, agrees closely with what you have set forth, and the agreement inspires and encourages me more than you can well imagine. It would take far too many words to attempt any detail, but some day I hope to send you the book. How good it is sometimes simply to *break away* from all old categories, deny worn-out beliefs, and restate things *ab initio*, making the lines of division fall into entirely new places! (Perry, II, 606)

Joas is too conscientious an intellectual historian and too responsible a social theorist simply to break away from our inherited categories and to try to restate *ab initio* what action at bottom is. He works self-consciously and painstakingly at the intersection of diverse traditions. Even so, there is something truly creative about his achievement. The degree and respects in which it might have even more creative, however, are worthy of speculation. For example, the metaphor of a rhizome, such as the one put forth by Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*, seems (to me, at least) to be especially creative and fecund.

Without unduly striving to be idiosyncratic or even simply innovative, the pragmatist theorist devoted to offering a compelling formulation of situated creativity would seem, by the very nature of this undertaking, to be compelled not only to reconfigure or less traditional conceptions into novel patterns but also to improvise more or less innovative conceptualizations and creative metaphors. As Dewey notes in “The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy,”

Our life has no background of sanctified categories upon which we may fall back; we rely upon precedent as authority only to our own undoing – for with us there is such a continuously novel situation that final reliance upon precedence entails some class interest guiding us by the nose whither it will. (MW 10, 48)

But these include the categories offered by the pragmatists themselves for making sense out of our experience, hence for responding imaginatively to the situations in which we are implicated. These include, indeed, the category of experience itself (cf. Scott). It is certainly telling that Dewey near the end of his life questioned the wisdom of trying to redefine the term *experience* rather than using *culture* in its anthropological sense to designate the transactional process constituting the matrix and arena of human endeavor (*LW* 1, 361-64; cf. Rorty 1982, Chapter 5). Creative intelligence often demands linguistic innovation. The projection of novel possibilities might often require the crafting of novel locutions.

This point might easily be exaggerated, but the conservative cast of academic pragmatists suggests that the risk of such exaggeration is far less than that of falling back on categories sanctified by the elders (i.e., Peirce, James, Dewey, and Mead).

In *The Creativity of Action*, Hans Joas has undertaken in an exemplary manner the task of re-thinking some of the most critical parts of a complex inheritance regarding our understanding of human action. Moreover, he has in the process of doing so twisted free from the limiting conceptions and disfiguring images pertaining to human activity. Finally, his nuanced account of situated creativity is itself nothing less than a creative appropriation of a largely marginalized approach to human action. Even if Joas might have been more creative in this or that respect, his imaginative recasting of pragmatists insights cannot be gainsaid. It is truly a praiseworthy achievement.

Philosophers ought to be open to learning from sociologists about a topic to which philosophers have devoted so much attention, though often in an exceedingly myopic manner. So, too, North Americans ought to be receptive to learning from European scholars about one of the most distinctive contributions by such Americans to the ongoing task of communal inquiry – the quite singular contribution of “American” pragmatism. For the inaugural issue of this new journal, I take my own efforts as a North American philosopher who has devoted his intellectual life to the creative appropriation of classical American pragmatism – I take my own efforts as such a philosopher – to learn from, and to respond to, Joas’s innovative take on the pragmatic movement to be in keeping with both the animating impulse of pragmatism and the unique mission of this journal. The creative articulation of our situated creativity, beyond anything yet imagined by either the classical pragmatists or their most imaginative (and therein their most faithful) interpreters, among whom I count Hans Joas in the first rank, is truly “a task before us.” The task of creative democracy is the most urgent form of the task before us, but that of revising our self-understanding – of sketching in at least as bold and arresting strokes as Peirce, James, Dewey, and Mead portrayed the human animal as a creative agent – is far from insignificant. Indeed, the interminable task of creative democracy is of a piece with the ever renewed undertaking of revising our self-understanding.

Pragmatism as a theory of our situated creativity²⁶ is also a celebration of our irrepressible spontaneity and an acknowledgment of our implicated agency. It is rooted in the realization that, “the knower is an actor, and co-efficient of the truth on one side, whilst on the other he registers the truth he helps to create.” There “belongs to mind,” James insists, “from its birth upward, a spontaneity, a vote. It is in the game, and not a mere looker-on” (James 1878 [1978], 21).²⁷ The figure of such an agent must be part of any

²⁶ Pragmatism is not reducible to such a theory, but (upon any defensible construal) it must be inclusive of nothing less than an account of human agency as situated creativity.

²⁷ The critique of the spectator theory of knowledge might thus be construed as an implication of an even more radical critique of the traditional portrait of human agency in which situated creativity is made subordinate to preordained purposiveness. Knowing is at bottom the result of doing. As Dewey puts it, “no knowing takes place without an overt taking and employing things on the basis of their meanings” (LW 1, 249). Situated creativity is the human face of our situated agency. Such agency is, as I (following Joas) have stressed throughout this essay, constituted by its involvements in serial and, to some extent, overlapping situations (e.g., the student met on the stairs on the way to a joint seminar, followed by the seminar itself). The manifest traits of natural existence (e.g., the hazardous character of a particular situation) are not ones projected by humans onto nature; rather they are as much traits of nature itself as identifiable features of our specifically human transactions with environing affairs. What Dewey in *Experience and Nature* asserts about these traits is worth recalling here: “man is not contemplatively detached from them (LW 1, 67). They involve him in his perplexities and troubles, and are the source of his joys and achievements. *The situation is not indifferent to man, because it forms him as a desiring, striving, thinking, feeling creature.* [We might add: an *acting* creature as well.] It is not egoism that leads man from contemplative registration of these traits to interest in managing them, to intelligence and purposive art. Interest, thinking, planning, striving, consummation, and frustration are a drama enacted by these forces and conditions” (LW 1, 67; emphasis added). This goes some distance toward helping us to understand why Dewey would assert: “Every case of consciousness is dramatic; drama is [in turn] an enhancement of the conditions of

portrait of agency worthy of carrying creatively forward the insights of the pragmatists. But the task of creatively articulating a detailed self-understanding in which such figure claims such centrality – the task of articulating this self-understanding – is, by its very nature, open-ended. To some extent, then, the theory of situated creativity must – or simply might – take the form of a dramaturgical approach to human activity. This however points to an episode yet to be enacted, a future possibility in an ongoing drama.²⁸

consciousness” (*LW* 1, 232). Any situation in which we are implicated as actors, thus any one in which we are called upon to respond in some way to what is taking place, provides incontestable evidence regarding “the operative presence of a *continuum* of meanings” (*LW* 1, 232; emphasis added). It is for this and other reasons why I have been urging a dramaturgical approach to the experiential continuum. Just as actions have their meaning only *as responses* in the situations in which they are improvised by creative actors, so these responses in their most deep-cutting and far-reaching significance are only identifiable, much less intelligible, only as episodes in unfolding dramas (or at any given time a number of simultaneously occurring dramas). Unless we envision situations as scenes in such dramas, we run the inescapable risk of fragmenting the historical continuum of human activity into fragmentary and separable stretches of time. For the task of doing so, the work of Kenneth Burke is likely at least as relevant as that of Victor Turner, Erving Goffman, and Richard Schechner.

²⁸ As Dewey asserts in “The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy,” “the function of mind is to project new and more complex ends – to free experience from routine and caprice” (*MW* 10, 45). This however applies as much to our understanding of human experience and activity as to anything else: such understanding needs itself to be emancipated and, in turn, such emancipation is at least facilitated by the projection of more untraditional and complex aims than those defining today the terms of the *activity* of theorizing (i.e., the terms by which this activity is carried out).

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Rossella Fabbrichesi

Nietzsche and James. A pragmatist hermeneutics

Introduction

The continental – German for the most part – strand of classical hermeneutics and the typically Anglo-Saxon school of American pragmatism have more than one point in common, something which only some contemporary critics – the most famous of which is certainly Rorty – have noticed. To be honest, these possible convergences are considered with suspicion, maybe due to the extreme divergence of the two schools of thought that they refer to. The methods, the disciplinary orientations, the languages, the cultural environments in which the respective representatives work are, in fact, too distant the one from the other.

Nevertheless, there is a basic shared inspiration between the two philosophical perspectives that is recognisable and comparable under many respects¹. Be this shared inspiration a way of thinking common to a great part of twentieth century thought; or be it instead an actual consonance of perspectives, as a matter of fact hermeneutics and pragmatism resonate together, often echoing each other when reflecting on themes like truth, objectivity, belief, and value. This common intonation is the object of this article, thus introducing one of the themes that characterize the aims of this journal: the comparison of the different philosophical traditions developed on the two opposite sides of the Atlantic².

I will start simply with some quotations:

¹ From the beginning already I should like to make this clear: to compare Nietzsche and James is not only a theoretical proposal, but it also seems to be a sound historiographical direction: indeed, both the authors were enthusiastic readers of Emerson, from whom in many cases they both drew inspiration. Ralph Waldo Emerson seems to be the root of the crenulated developments of a great part of pragmatism and – *via* Nietzsche – of a significant quantity of studies in the “continental” field. More work should be done – in my opinion – on this shared root.

On the contrary, James knew little of Nietzsche. He had read some of his writings, since Nietzsche was mentioned in Harvard (Royce introduced Nietzsche to the North American academic world, with more appreciation of and attention to the German philosopher than James ever paid). Anyway, James' critique of Nietzsche's positions is very radical, while being restricted to certain pages of *The varieties of religious experience*, where the themes related to ascetic moral, force and therefore anti-democraticity of Nietzsche emerge.

The critical texts that treat the relations between the two authors are – to my knowledge – very few. Besides the already mentioned Rorty, who refers to Nietzsche and James specifically in *Consequences of Pragmatism*, Minnesota University Press, 1982 and in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Cambridge University Press, 1989; we can refer to Hingst Kai-Michael, *Perspektivism und Pragmatismus. Ein Vergleich auf der Grundlage der Wahrheitsbegriffe und Religionsphilosophien von Nietzsche und James*, 1998. In Italy Sergio Franzese is the main investigator: cp. *Nietzsche e l'America*, edited by S. Franzese, ETS, Pisa, 2005, with an essay by Franzese on *James lettore di Nietzsche*, themes further elaborated in *The Ethics of Energy*, Ontos verlag, Frankfurt, 2008. However we should not forget the first pioneering researches by R. Berthelot. (*Un romantisme utilitaire. Le pragmatisme chez Nietzsche e chez Poincaré*, Alcan, Paris 1911), by J. Granier, (*Le problème de la vérité chez Nietzsche*, Seuil, Paris, 1966) and by W. Kaufmann, who hinted at this in his *Nietzsche. Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, Princeton UP, Princeton, 1968.

² I have recently written about the relations between two other great representatives of these traditions, Peirce and Heidegger, in *Ermeneutica e pragmatismo*, CUEM, Milano, 2009. On these two authors cp. also C. Sini, *Passare il segno*, Il Saggiatore, Milano, 1981.

“Of what alone can *knowledge* consist? - “Interpretation”: The introduction of sense into things, not ‘explanation’ (in the majority of the cases a new interpretation of an old interpretation which has grown incomprehensible and has become little more than a mere sign). There is no such thing as an established fact, everything fluctuates, everything is intangible, yielding; after all, the most lasting of all things are our opinions”³ (WP 604).

“In opposition to Positivism, which halts at phenomena and says, ‘These are only facts and nothing more’, I would say: No, facts are precisely what is lacking, all that exists consists of interpretations. We cannot establish any fact ‘in itself’: it may even be nonsense to desire to do such a thing. [...] To the extent to which knowledge has any sense at all, the world is knowable: but it may be interpreted differently, it has not one sense behind it, but hundreds of senses. - ‘Perspectivity’” (WP 481).

“Beliefs are themselves parts of the sum total of the world’s experience, and become matter, therefore, for the next day’s funding operations [...] In the realm of truth-processes facts come independently and determine our beliefs provisionally. But these beliefs make us act, and as fast as they do so, they bring into sight or into existence new facts which re-determine the beliefs accordingly. So the whole coil and ball of truth, as it rolls up, is the product of a double influence. Truths emerge from facts; but they dip forward into facts again and add to them; which facts again create or reveal new truths (the word is indifferent) and so on indefinitely. The ‘facts’ themselves meanwhile are not true. They simply are. Truth is the function of the beliefs that start and terminate among them [...] What we say about reality thus depends on the perspective into which we throw it” (P 107-108)⁴.

Truth and perspective: these are essentially the themes at stake. The issue that troubled James – and that, we should add, did not trouble Peirce too much, since his interest focused on logical meaning – is actually truth or, to use a Nietzschean expression, will to truth. In other words, the theme is thus declined: which function has truth in our lives? Why do we consider to know and to know the truth better than not to know? I will focus – amongst the many possible comparable themes I could choose – on this aspect of the two doctrines.

Truth as perspective

Let us start from the statement – taken from one of his most important works – that James soberly proposes in the previous quotation, according to which truth is circular and perspectival and reality coincides with the totality of beliefs that denote it as such. As it is easy to notice, there are here extraordinary assonances with the Nietzschean vituperated expression – blamed by many as relativism and nihilism –, according to which we live dazzled, persuaded of the existence of concrete “things in themselves”, the “truth” of which it would be our task to look for. Certainly James does not reach the point of saying that there are no facts, only interpretations; but we can also state with a high degree of certainty that neither Nietzsche should be interpreted under the simplistic – partly Idealist and partly

³ I quote from F. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power. An attempted transvaluation of all values. Books one, two, three and four*, in Oscar Levy. The complete works of Friedrich Nietzsche. 14-15. Edinburgh and London: T.N. Foulis, (Revised third edition 1925, published by The Macmillan Company), from now on WP followed by the number of the pseudo-aphorism.

⁴ I quote from W. James, *Pragmatism. A New Name for some Old Ways of Thinking*, in *Pragmatism and The Meaning of Truth*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1978, from now on P followed by the page number.

Gascon – image apparently transpiring from *The Will to power*⁵. To better penetrate Nietzsche's thought let us take an example⁶ that Peirce and James would have probably appreciated, since it comes from biology, the elective science in mid-nineteenth century intellectual landscape, in which the two pragmatist friends were educated. The example involves the universe of ticks, small and annoying animals that – as it is known – react to only three sensible stimuli: light, warmth and smell. Every tick stays on a branch, sometimes for years, attracted by a particularly well-lit place (first fundamental index of their vital praxis); it stays there absolutely static and amorphous, until an animal with a certain type of smell happens to walk below it. This is the second sign of the 'world' to be perceived: an olfactory sign. A 'world' in the form of animal reek. Once the tick has fallen on to the back of the mentioned beast, it tries to crawl to the place least covered in fur in order to penetrate it: and here is the third stimulus that the tick welcomes from the world, a tactile one. That is all: of a world bustling with colours, smells, forms, sounds, flavours, screams, events, and movements, the tick extracts three things only: light, a certain smell, a certain temperature. The tick selects them, elevates them to absolutes and it does not seem to see anything else of that which is 'the world' for us. But is this a subtraction from or instead a perfection of the (biological) being? Is the world of the tick the same as our own world? The great German naturalist Jacob von Uexküll grasped this point with extreme acuteness: “we can no longer speak of the single sun, shining in the sky, but must speak of thousands upon thousands of suns. [...] The sun that makes a swarm of gnats dance is not our sun but a gnat sun, which owes its existence to the eye of the gnat.”⁷. Thus, it is not the same world seen from different points of view, but a different world. Here is – in plain words – the reference to hermeneutic principles based not on a trivial relativism or an interpretive subjectivism, but on the biological functions that ground the cognitive impulse. As many authors have already demonstrated⁸, Nietzsche's perspectivity is deeply rooted in a similar reasoning. In *The Will to Power* we can read: “It is our need that *interpret the world*; our instincts and their impulses for and against. Every instinct is a sort of thirst for power; each has its point of view, which it would fain impose upon all the other instincts as their norm” (WP 481).

In other passages, Nietzsche clarifies that it is possible to define knowledge as truth only by referring to the rigorously “biological and anthropocentric” reasons thanks to which “every centre of power – and not man alone – constructs the rest of the world *from its point of view* – that is to say measures it, feels it, and moulds it according to its degree of strength”, that is to say assumes perspectives (WP 636). In this way, we are already far from the “intellectualist” reading according to which perspective is an act of pure mental apprehension that – from a certain point of view – contemplates the truth of things, and this apprehension is being deemed as always unavoidably relative, since such a perspectival glimpse can never grasp the “being-in-itself” in its wholeness. This relativism can be defined as “nostalgic”: it always maintains regret for the absolute that – while existing

⁵ Indeed, it is to be remembered that these are notes and sketches of thoughts that Nietzsche wrote for personal use and not for publication.

⁶ This example is “stolen” from Deleuze.

⁷ J.von Uexküll, *Theoretische Biologie*, Berlin 1938, p. 340-1, 121-2, my translation.

⁸ Cp. A. Orsucci, *Dalla biologia cellulare alle scienze dello spirito*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1992; F. Moiso, *La volontà di potenza di F. Nietzsche. Una riconsiderazione*, in ‘Aut Aut’, 253, 1993, pp. 119-136; B. Babich, *Nietzsche's philosophy of science*, State University of New York, 1994; W. Müller-Lauter, *Physiologie de la volonté de puissance*, Allia, Paris, 1998; F. Moiso, *Nietzsche e le scienze*, Cuem, Milano, 1999; M. Ferraris, *Ontologia*, in Nietzsche, Laterza, Roma-Bari, 1999; B. Stiegler, *Nietzsche et la biologie*, PUF, Paris, 2001 (now in a new Italian translation, Negretto, Mantova, 2009, ed. by R. Fabbrichesi e F. Leoni).

somewhere – is inaccessible to the part. But here Nietzsche simply says: each perspective is determined by our need, by our *practical* and *physiological* instincts, and to live means to be “partial”, *to be* (in) *perspective*, without being able to be situated in different perspectives, and even less in panoramic ones. In more explicit words: “The things-in-itself is nonsense. If I think all the 'relations,' all the 'qualities,' all the 'activities' of a thing, away, the thing itself does *not* remain: for the 'thingness' was only *invented fancifully* by us to meet certain logical needs – that is to say, for the purposes of definition and comprehension (in order to correlate that multitude of relations, qualities, and activities).” (WP 558). It is only in this sense that there are no “facts”: if we delete the difference between being and knowability - as also Peirce's writings from 1868 attempted to do – we do not have either facts, or – in a strict sense – perspectives *on* facts: “As if a world could remain over, when the point of view is cancelled!” (WP 567).

If we make the real world disappear, the apparent world disappears also. Nietzsche is very clear about this point: if we eliminate metaphysical dualisms, with the idea of “in-itself” also the idea of “for me” disappears, that is, the opposition between absolute and relative disappears (is the “poor” world of the tick experienced as lacking of anything? That world is – in its poor relativity – absolutely perfect). Finally – Nietzsche states – a shapeless flux appears to us as a “fact” only when we are able to give a meaning to it (WP 556); even the word “fact” refers to the concept of action, to something that is man-made, produced. To talk of facts, of things in themselves is simply another interpretation, a perspective amongst the many others through which we can look at the world⁹.

This position is, as previously mentioned, represented with equal incisiveness – but maybe with more caution and some incoherence – in James' writings. In his seventh conference, titled “Pragmatism and Humanism” - perhaps the most theoretical and radical of the eight that compose *Pragmatism* – James attacks Truth, this “perfect idol of the rationalistic mind!” (P 115), clarifying – in a way that Nietzsche would have appreciated – that the question: “Which is the truth?” is “irrelative to all conditions” for any possible answer. It should not thus be considered as a real question, moved by a real doubt (a genuinely irritating one, that has an influence on our lives – as Peirce argued). Truth is always declined in the plural, it is not that which is in relation to something existent, “out there”, or to something that was, but it is that which is in relation to something that still does not exist, that is in formation. “Philosophy has the natural tendency to want that truth is facing backwards, according to James it looks in front of us”¹⁰. Thus truth “is not found, but manufactured” (ivi), not a discovery, but an invention; facts are, indeed, artifacts, created, produced (P 143). Truth ripens, as a fruit. It is constantly constituting itself and proliferating, like a coral.

Moreover – following the formulation of Ferdinand Canning Schiller – James emphasises that truths have to be conceived as “man-made products”, “abstract names for the results [...] of a certain process” (P 117); or better, as something that evolves with the progressing of our (individual and communitarian) life, in the same way as biological organisms evolve. In a Darwinian fashion, concepts emerge, impose themselves, blossom and decay. But if we can say this of truths, the same can be said of the so-called “facts”: the world is plastic – James writes inspiring by Schiller's humanism –, “it is what we make of it” (ivi). No “thing-in-itself” exists, before us or without us. We *produce* as much “Reality” as we can believe but we do not *find* it already out there (P 118). James could not

⁹ Cp. On these topics C. Sini, *Da parte a parte. Apologia del relativo*, ETS, Pisa, 2009.

¹⁰ H. Bergson, *Préface à W. James, Pragmatisme*, Flammarion, Paris, 1911, now in *La pensée et le mouvant*, Alcan, Paris, 1934, « Sur le pragmatisme de James. Vérité et réalité », p.275.

have read the notes of *The Will to Power*, but he would have certainly agreed with the following statement by Nietzsche: “‘truth’ is not something which is present and which has to be found and discovered; it is something *which has to be created* and which *gives its name to a process* [...]. To introduce truth is a *processus in infinitum*, an *active determining* – it is *not* a process of becoming conscious of something, which in itself is fixed and determined” (WP 552). As an aside note: this – and nothing else than this – is for Nietzsche the meaning of the will to power: to replace being with value (WP 556¹¹), to stamp Being with the character of Becoming (WP 617).

In many passages James does not hesitate, it is true, to define himself as an “empiricist” and to underline the existence of sensible fluxes, stimulations and perceptions that invade us and that offer a resistance to our free creation of beliefs and opinions about what is real and what is not. “‘Reality’ in general is what truths have to take account of” (P 117), something independent from our will. James – exactly like Nietzsche – is not an idealist. But these indistinct fluxes of material that invade us “are neither true nor false; they simply *are*” (P 117). “*That* they are is undoubtedly beyond our control; but *which* we attend to, note, and make emphatic in our conclusions depends on our own interests” (P 118). For example – James writes – Waterloo pinpoints a Belgian location, with certain features, undeniably existing there and now. But for an Englishman it means victory, for a Frenchman it means defeat. For a European man it is there, with its geographically and anthropologically well-analysable features, for a tick it will be a certain ground light, a rugged and inhospitable territory. Which “fact” are we talking about?, Nietzsche would then ask him. And for whom, if not for us and for our interpretive tools, can this be defined a “fact”?

Anyway, James again seems very close to these Nietzschean reflections in his conclusions: “What we say about reality thus depends on the perspective into which we throw it. The *that* of it is its own; but the *what* depends on the *which*; and the *which* depends on *us*” (P 118). Maybe Nietzsche would object that even the *that* is a function of the *what*, and that it does not “belong” to reality. But this scission of the being in event and meaning – to use Carlo Sini's words¹² – is attested in a clearly tragic way since Nietzsche's first writings. The frozen river of existence – as *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) claims – flows horrendous and tumultuous: in order not to be reflected in its abyssal depth, we dress it in beautiful shapes, with colourful “[r]ubbish and gold dust of unconscious human vanity”. Nevertheless, “[u]nderneath such flattering colours and repainted surfaces, we must once again recognize the terrifying basic text of *homo natura*” (BGE 143)¹³. In other words, Apollo is always one of Dionysus' names and Dionysus cannot appear if not “in figure”. But he is there, with the “that of its own” terrible and incomprehensible. We hear the echo of this complementary duality in James, who – in the last pages of the conference – insists on the fact that it is not possible to deny that “All 'homes' are in finite experience; finite

¹¹ The author writes here: “In short: the essence of a thing is really only an *opinion* concerning that 'thing.' Or, better still; '*it is worth*' is actually what is meant by '*it is*,' or by '*that is*.'” (WP 556).

¹² Cp. for instance *Eracle al bivio. Semiotica e filosofia*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino, 2007.

¹³ F. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, translated by Judith Norman and edited by Rolf-Peter Horstmann, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002 From now on BGE followed by the number of the aphorism. In aphorism 598 from WP we can read – very significantly: “The belief *that there is no such thing as truth*, the Nihilistic belief, is a tremendous relaxation for one who, as a warrior of knowledge, is unremittingly struggling with a host of hateful truths. For truth is ugly”. Thus for Nietzsche truth exists: it is the Dionysian ground of existence (cp. also BGE 143: the terrifying basic text of *homo natura*). But it is – evidently – an existence that is not existent, an endless falling of masks

experience as such is homeless". There is a certain sensible flux, but "what is true of it seems from first to last to be largely a matter of our own creation" (P 122).

There is thus a circularity – do we want to define it as a hermeneutic circularity? – between facts and beliefs, according to which human beings add constantly – through the *actions* of their lives – *facts* to the brute *matter* of existence. This retroactively shapes the interpretive forms themselves, redefining their contours. Matter could thus be conceived of à la Peirce as the cohesive order of our beliefs – consolidated and made inert by common sense – that come to be solidified in the course of tradition. "Reality" is thus continuously transformed by the beliefs and interpretations that lead us in actions, and actions, practical or theoretical, produce facts that were not even conceivable as such before.

If a reality independent from thought – that is from human action (P 118) – does not exist, how can we be sure to grasp truth? James does not let this question frighten him and – again – answers it in a surprisingly Nietzschean way: "We may glimpse [reality], but we never grasp it; what we grasp is always some substitute for it which previous human thinking has peptinized and cooked for our consumption. If so vulgar an expression were allowed us, we might say that wherever we find it, it has been already *faked*" (P119-120). In Nietzsche we can read: "'Dissimulation' increases in accordance with the rising *order of rank* among organic beings. In the inorganic world it seems to be entirely absent. - There power opposes power quite roughly - *ruse* begins in the organic world; plants are already masters of it. [...] Before 'thought' is possible, 'fancy' must first have done its work; the picturing of identical cases, of the seemingness of identity, is more primeval than the cognition of identity"(WP 544). Truth, in synthesis – as already the small but excellently written juvenile essay *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense*¹⁴ warned – is but "[a] mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms" and any concept is but "metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power" (p. 235).

The fulcrum of the pragmatist proposal is but a few steps away from the dangerous Nietzschean "relativism"¹⁵, and everything relies – like in Nietzsche – on the way of looking at the terms "truth" and "reality": "For rationalism reality is ready-made and complete *from all eternity*, while for pragmatism it is still in the making, and *awaits part of its complexion from the future*" (P 123). Reality is not certain and static, out there, but "still pursuing its adventures" (ivi) and, as in a creative and artistic process, we add, with the touch of our hands, the tint of colour that we prefer, the embossing that better seems to us to model the clay of the world, aware that we "rape" (ivi), embank and orient the sensible flux. Nietzsche thinks along exactly the same lines in *On the Genealogy of Morals*: "interpretation [is] forcing, adjusting, abbreviating, omitting, padding, inventing, falsifying"¹⁶

To interpret is to select some aspects that are significant for our vital practices, James thinks. Thus the truth and rigour of our analysis does not descend from the capacity of reading and describing correctly any aspect of the phenomenon that we have in front of us (the *that* facing us), but it also depends on our purposes, interests, or points of view. *Which* of these aspects we consider "real", making it work as decisive in the conclusions of our reasoning, becomes a *function* of the interest that moves us towards knowledge (P 121).

¹⁴ 1873. Friedrich Nietzsche. "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense.", in *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the Early 1870's*. Ed. and Trans. David Breazeale. New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1979.

¹⁵ Cp on this point C. H. Seigfried, *William James's radical reconstruction of philosophy*, State University of New York Press, 1990.

¹⁶ F. Nietzsche. *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. NY: Vintage Books, 1967, sezione III, 24.

And, as Heidegger said, knowledge has an understanding-interpreting root and a pathic-emotive root that are always entrenched. Thus, the analytical motto “[i]t is true what can be demonstrated in a rigorous way” has already decided in favour of that very precise value that is rigour (thus to be conceived as a pre-judice), it has already set itself in a particular emotive situation, ready to start an “interested” understanding that defines objectivity, coherence, clarity, analyticity as unshakeable values. But if they have value – both Nietzsche and James state – it is because they work in our cognitive practices, in our scientific forms of life, not because they are absolute and universal truths. When a theorem is analysed, order is certainly to be preferred to disorder. But when we are in a relationship, the coherent asset of an ordered world, or the crystalline domain of the rigour as reference parameters quickly fade away: there are no true and fake loves, demonstrable and indemonstrable ones. Nietzsche noticed how wisdom, clarity and logic had been used as weapons against the ferociousness of instincts, from Socrates to Stoics, and beyond. The request for greater “objectivity” and coherence, the appeal to elaborate a *disinterested* theory, led by an imperturbable gaze, answers to a very specific *interest*, with its undeniably emotive tone.

Logical truths reflect their own eco-physiological ground, as Babich states¹⁷; James' concept of interest and Nietzsche's concept of perspective have more than one point of connection and I believe that we can proceed along these lines and point out how Nietzsche bluntly develops pragmatist motives, and how James could be defined as a “perspectivist” in the sense that we have just sketched.

Truth as belief

If – according to Nietzsche – being is identified with the value that we attribute to it, according to pragmatists being is always what is believed to be the way it is: it coincides thus with the opinion that is held of it, with the sign that indicates and nominates it. Again the theme of truth is at stake and the shadow of Sophistics on the domain of our logical concepts lengthens.

James – as we have seen – believes in a “genetic theory of what is meant by truth” (P 37): truth is in the doing, it evolves in the course of experience, it is a process that is unfolded in time, following the model of epigenesis¹⁸, by assimilation and differentiation (“a minimum of jolt, a maximum of continuity” P 36), with no possibility to predict its outcomes. A true theory operates a “marriage-function” (P 37) between old and new parts of knowledge, grafting itself into the old stem of knowledge and modifying its nodes.¹⁹

But, above all, an idea or a theory can be defined as true, if it is of value as a useful *tool* for action and for life, acting as a guide and a companion to our existence (P 34). It is possible, I think, to sum up James' thought – as expressed in the *Pragmatism* essays – in this way: a belief *counts* as true when it *satisfies* us, it *pays*, also, in the cash-value of the word, it *gratifies* us, is *held as* true, proves itself *useful* if considered true, *functions* in orienting us along the road of research, that is, is *advantageous* as related to our vital

¹⁷ B. Babich, *op.cit.*, Cap. I.

¹⁸ I have developed further this aspect of James' philosophy in its relation to Darwin in *Effetti di verità: la rivoluzione darwiniana e il suo impatto sul pragmatismo*, “Discipline filosofiche”, 2009.

¹⁹ A theme that we found repeated in many passages in Nietzsche's notes, also. Cp. WP 499: “‘Thinking’ in a primitive (inorganic) state is to *persevere in forms* as in the case of the crystal. - In our thought, the *essential factor* is the harmonizing of the new material with the old schemes (= Procrustes' bed), the *assimilation* of the unfamiliar”. The Darwinian influence on the two authors, in these passages, is evident (Chauncey Wright will insist exactly on this point, anticipating that *exaptation* that is so much talked about these days)

power. “If there were no *good for life* in true ideas, or if the knowledge of them were positively disadvantageous and false ideas the only useful ones, then the current notion that *truth is divine* and precious, and its pursuit a duty, could never have grown up” (P 42, emphasis mine). Thoughts – in this conception – are simply tools “at-hand”, work instruments, almost a prosthesis of our vital organs that support the thousands of practical and theoretical operations we are daily involved in. An idea will be “verified” not when it agrees with an “external” object, but when it is able to put us “into such working touch with it as to handle either it or something connected with it better than if we disagreed” (P 102). Truth is only an “expedient” (P 106) that guides us through reality, and an experience that meets *some* experience in sight, and not necessarily will meet farther experience equally satisfactorily. “The possession of truth, here so far from being an end in itself, is only a preliminary means towards other vital satisfactions.” (P 98). The line is not to be drawn between truth and lie, but between what is true (meaning what is relevant to the active praxis) and what is irrelevant, which means unfit to guide me in the world-environment, and thus to facilitate the elaboration of a certain project, producing a state of calm and satisfaction.

James' position is thus ethical (or bio-ethical); more, it proceeds in the direction that I would ascribe to Nietzsche also, namely of an ethics of praxis: an idea can be considered true when believing in it proves to be better, that is more advantageous in our lives (P 42). In this sense it is a good and just idea, and truth can be considered as a species of good. But we are far from the Platonic horizon: true is the opinion that is held as true in a certain historical period and for certain ends; true is the belief, the belief that has a value, that more effectively circulates inside a community, as a banknote, and that is embraced since it proves useful for the survival of the individual or of the species. Indeed, how to separate what is better for us to believe and what we must believe? Is it not true - as Peirce also stated - that logic is grounded on inherently ethical principles and it is rooted on a social principle? That is – as Nietzsche wrote – is it not true that logic is structured as such since it comes from a field that is not entirely logical?²⁰

The blending of psychology and ethics that seems to pollute James' epistemology has been much criticised by those who ascribe themselves to the Peircean school of thought. But on the contrary, this blending is maybe the strength of this epistemology. James' insistence on affective and psychological themes is the same that was also present in Nietzsche, when he declared himself a psychologist²¹ or when he suggested to investigate the existence of a prehistory of “drives, inclinations, aversions” (GS 335) behind any judgement. Certainly James has never meant to advance a genealogy of morals, or of moral prejudices; and he has never used any idol-smasher hammer. Indeed, any philosopher has his own temper and his own weapons to fight the battle for truth.

Let us now put together what we have learned from James and what Nietzsche notices in relation to the theme of truth as belief: indeed it is surprising to see how even the words through which this hypothesis is presented – let alone their comments – are shared by the two great thinkers.

²⁰ F. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. J. Nauckhoff, Cambridge (Ma): Cambridge University Press, 2001, § 111; from now on GS followed by the aphorism number. “The predominant disposition [...] to treat the similar as identical – an illogical disposition for there is nothing identical as such – is what first supplied all the foundations for logic”. And that was the case of the construction of the concept of substance, or of causality, also. “No living being would be preserved had not the opposite disposition – to affirm rather than suspend judgement, to err rather than wait, to agree rather than deny, to pass judgement rather than be fair.

²¹ Cp. The Prefation by Friedrich Nietzsche. *Twilight of the Idol*. Trans. R.J. Hollingdale. London: Penguin, 1968. From now on TI, followed by chapter number.

“[T]hat there should be a large amount of faith, that it should be possible to pass definite judgments on things, and that *there should be no doubt* at all concerning all essential values. Thus it is necessary that something should be assumed to be true, *not* that it *is* true” (WP 507). If truth – as James clearly pointed out – is manufactured and not found, the will to truth demands the act of *making* true, of *holding* as true, of *acting as if* it were true. Indeed, will to truth – Nietzsche adds – is only a mask for will to power (that is then primarily creative power). To believe is the primordial trait in any sensible impression, “a sort of yea-saying”(WP 506); therefore the *evaluation* ‘I believe that this and this other is this’ has to be considered as an exact indication of the “*essence* of truth” (WP 507). This motive is present in the all of Nietzsche’s work: to the one who objects that for as much as a thing is believed in, it does not become true, the answer is that truth is simply a form of belief that is manifested as a non-eliminable condition of life, *that is* of an expansion of one’s own possibility of action (WP 532-3). The hypothesis that more than any other instills unto us a sense of security and strength is believed truer: its crystalline and coherent appearance is simply a projection of our strengthened and acquiesced soul. As a conclusion, the will to believe is nothing else than the will to power.

But which is the most valuable belief? It is the belief that something lasts and repeats itself – the author thinks –, that sound bases on which to build “facts” and theories can be individuated: that “logicising, rationalising, and systematising are of assistance as means of existence” (WP 552) (James wrote “helpful” P 42). To believe makes stronger, apter to life. “*What is truth?* - inertia; *that* hypothesis which brings satisfaction[...]” (WP 537). True is what resonates with a familiar tone and produces a pause in our questioning. The irritation due to doubt – Peirce said – induces a struggle to achieve a state of belief, something which represents the demi-cadence that closes a musical phrase in the symphony of our intellectual life. The only aim of the research is thus to establish an opinion, not necessarily a *true* opinion, but a stable, reassuring one²². To bring something unknown back to something known “is comforting, reassuring, satisfying and produces a feeling of power, as well” (TI VII.5): it is not Peirce here who speaks, but Nietzsche – and it is only the word *macht* (power) that distinguishes him from the American thinkers. The pleasure of familiarity is the proof of the value of truth, the author goes on. The unknown produces indeed a sense of danger, of restlessness, and the first instinct is the one of suppressing this distressing state of the soul: the need to rationalize is simply the need for known things (this is the reason we always start from ourselves and in particular from our supposed interiority[...]). But then, “Is it not the instinct to fear that bids us to know?” (GS 355).

Here Nietzsche begins to weave his spider web around the cornerstone-propositions of metaphysics: what if the issue was not knowledge, but power? And what if the search for truth was not the point, but an impulse to dominate and control the existent was at stake instead? What if the impulse to truth should be considered first and foremost genealogically, in its moral and psychological aspects? The instinct that pushes us towards knowledge – Nietzsche writes in BGE 6 – is not the father of philosophy but only one of its instruments: the inclination to expansion, domination, power, reassurance and self-preservation prevails in thinking and constructing reasoning: needs that are all human, too human. Let us start with always asking ourselves “how the most remote metaphysical claims in a philosophy really arose [...]: What moral is it (is he—) aiming at?” (BGE 6). Reading the first essay by James in *Pragmatism*, “The Present Dilemma in Philosophy”,

²² C.S. Peirce, *The fixation of belief* *IPopular Science Monthly* 12 (November 1877), 1-15. Now in C.S. Peirce, *Collected Papers*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1931-35, 5.397. Cp. In particular paragraphs 3 and 4 and notice the many analogies with Nietzsche that can be found here too.

with its well-known distinction between *tender-minded* and *tough-minded* souls, we will find a certain family resemblance (although not a sameness).

Concepts – Nietzsche realizes also – are only *instruments* “directed [...] at the *appropriation* of things” (WP 503), the apparatus of knowledge a pure mechanism that performs a task. “The object is not ‘to know,’ but to schematize, – to impose as much regularity and form upon chaos, as our practical needs require. In the formation of reason, logic, and the categories, it was a *need* in us that was the determining power: not the need ‘to know,’ but to classify, to schematize, for the purpose of intelligibility and calculation. [...] No pre-existing ‘idea’ had anything to do with it: but utility, which teaches us that things can be reckoned with and managed, only when we view them roughly as equal[...] *Finality* in reason is an effect, not a cause [...] The categories are ‘truths’ only in the sense that they are the conditions of our existence, just as Euclid’s Space is a conditional ‘truth.’ [...] [t]he instinct which makes us see the utility of concluding as we do conclude, is in our blood, we *are* almost this instinct [...] But what simplicity it is to attempt to derive a proof from this fact!” (WP 515). Is Nietzsche speaking here or James? Certainly, the issues at stake and the way of solving them are similar. I could go on quoting numerous aphorisms from the same period, 1884-1888²³ especially. Maybe the most revealing aphorism for tracing the identity of perspective of the two philosophers on this point is WP 514: the categories of reason – Nietzsche writes – were able to become dominant because they were functional to the survival even of the weakest ones. Their *moral* origin was *forgotten*, a sure sign of the origin becoming “master”. Soon they were considered *a priori*. “And possibly, they may have been the expression of no more than a certain practicality, answering the ends of a race and species – *their usefulness alone is their ‘truth’*” (WP 514, emphasis mine).

Truth as usefulness

We have thus reached the theme that most of all has motivated the connection between the two authors in critical literature. We will see that if the – almost lexical – affinities are truly surprising, their research directions differ in an unavoidable way. Nietzsche talks of usefulness, advantage, value for life, in a way that certainly echoes James’ work (e.g., WP 507), but exactly what kind of utility is that? And is it possible to equate truth and utility – an operation that for its apparent coarseness has provoked so many problems to the exegetes of James?

First of all, let us clarify that in Nietzsche “useful” is a linguistic term and as such it is metaphoric. Therefore it has to be determined in relation to a specific use, productive of finalities sometimes different from the expected ones. There are different species of usefulness, he writes in WP 647, in the aphorism titled “Against Darwinism”, and that which is useful, for instance, to the duration of the individual, could be in fact damaging to its strength and its brightness. The usefulness of an organ does not explain its formation – as Darwin instead claimed – on the contrary! We have always to ask ourselves: “Useful *in relation to what?*”.

There is especially one point on which the thoughts of the two authors seem far removed from one another. Let us read the aphorism 493: “*Truth is that kind of error without which a certain species of living being cannot exist. The value for Life is ultimately decisive*”. This is the issue at stake for Nietzsche: if it is true that the value for life is a non-

²³ For instance: WP 501, 503, 513, 455, 567, 568, GS 110.

transcendable principle (and life – it has to be reminded – means the expansion of the will to power, in this case the power of the body and its “great reason”), this value does not necessarily coincide with what can be considered true logically, but it could also be error, falsification, mask, pure appearance, deception. Since *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense*, the author has been arguing for the irrelevance of the questions connected to the distinction true/false, referring them instead to the distinction advantage/disadvantage²⁴. Thus truth – as Vahininger would write – can simply be considered as the most advantageous form of error. As a consequence, error can also appear as truth in itself, it is sufficient that it proves to be useful to somebody for something²⁵. “[A belief] might be a life-preserving belief and *still be false*” (WP 483). James certainly did not take this road. Although, if we read his writings carefully, it would be possible to infer a connection also at this level: indeed James moved beyond the distinction true/false, as we have seen, embracing the relevant (for somebody's interests)/ irrelevant one.

Anyway Nietzsche dares in an even more profound theoretical maelstrom: the falsity of judgment does not stand as an objection to it (BGE 4); on the contrary, without a perennial action of falsification – that is of metaphorisation of the existing that, as we have seen, is accomplished by logic and science, as well as by art and life, according to Nietzsche – it would not be possible to live. “We have arranged for ourselves a world in which we are able to live – by positing bodies, lines, planes, causes and effects, motion and rest, form and content, without these articles of faith no one could endure living! But that does not prove them true. Life is not an argument; the conditions of life might include error” (GS 121). To renounce to the creative exercise that weaves colourful mantles and repainted surfaces, an exercise that stays on the *surface*, in order not to see the *depth* of the cave on which we stand, that would mean to renounce to life: life wants errors, errors are a condition of life itself. Against the morality of reasonable utilitarianism, Nietzsche deploys the Apollonian power of lies and their beautiful appearances. If life is *becoming*, then knowledge is impossible, since it changes meaning as soon as it is constituted, since it becomes *error* as soon as it is attested as *being* (WP 617) “To concede the fictional nature of the condition of life means of course taking a dangerous stand against the customary feelings about value. A philosophy which dares to do that is for this reason alone already standing beyond good and evil”. (BGE 4).

Let us reconnect the threads of discussion without delving further in the complex theme of truth in Nietzsche, a theme that would require a much wider treatment. According to Nietzsche – as well as to James (and Peirce) – the “feeling of rationality” coincides with a state of rest of the thought, with an inertial state – we can say – in which the fear for the unknown is acquiesced and the faith in one's own certainties helps to survive without falling into the abyss of nihilism or scepticism. According to pragmatists, this process is not only necessary from a biological and epistemological point of view, but it is also an index of intellectual superiority. According to Nietzsche it has certainly played a role – for instance – in the edification of the knowledge of science and metaphysics, where logic has proved to be a successful expedient to conduct a more prosperous and protected life. If the aim is “value for life”, to talk of substance, subject, principle of non contradiction, sufficient reason, or causality, everything works perfectly, as long as it succeeds in granting strength to the *ascending* life, that life which does not accept to be petrified in a “pigeon-

²⁴ Cp. on this topic R. Brigati, *La verità sospetta: per una lettura di Verità e menzogna in senso extramurale*, “Segnali”, 2009.

²⁵ These themes are tackled and well clarified in one of the few texts dedicated to the “vital pragmatism” of Nietzsche: J. Granier, *Le problème de la vérité dans la philosophie de Nietzsche*, Seuil, Paris, 1966.

hole” of concepts. It is necessary, though, to be aware that it *works* because it is a *work of fiction*. That any interpretation (thus also logical, dialectical, metaphysical interpretations) is counterfeiting, a “fake”, a “substitute” (P 120). In these statements, apparently similar, the distance between the two authors can be measured: according to James, a “substitute” is a creation that “stands for” something that, although existing, we will never be able to grasp; according to Nietzsche this “something” is a nothing at all: we find “[b]ehind every cave an even deeper cavern” (BGE 289); “we no longer believe that truth remains truth when one pulls off the veil” states the preface to the second edition of the *Gay Science*.

Usefulness should not thus be seen as a value in itself, as an indisputable consequence of the truth of being – as it seems to be in James – but as a function of the will to power, that is, in conclusion, as one of its masks. If truth coincides with usefulness, usefulness has a purely illusory character: it serves the constant lie with which life constantly moves beyond itself translating itself into power. Thus, paradoxically, also the idea of truth as correspondence to a reality in itself (*adaequatio*) can be useful for a certain period and for certain purposes. The important thing is that it be *productive* of a functional *perspective*, in other words that it is able to deceive us on our ability to dominate. Also in Nietzsche there is – all in all – a non-transcendable value: sure not the value of usefulness but of life that wants to expand itself. And life is ready, in order to gain more power, to immolate itself, in other words not to be *useful* to itself anymore.

Truth in conclusion is always the effect of a (winning) praxis. There is no *truth in itself*, there are variegated and multiform *effects* of truth. If this is the keystone of the pragmatist investigation²⁶, also in Nietzsche we find sparse, but robust, references to the praxeologic dimension of knowledge. The prevailing of perspectivism, indeed, should not be interpreted as a sheer primacy of the intellectual point of view; on the contrary, it has an “empiricist” meaning in the Jamesian sense: “A higher duty is *to fix a goal* and to mould facts according to it: *that is, the interpretation of action*, and not merely a *transvaluation of concepts*” (WP 605). We introduce a sense, we produce it, we create it. But not arbitrarily or intellectually: with our actions and their sensitive effects. The perspective is nothing else than the praxis, the form of life to which we are anchored (even in a biological sense), a praxis that implies the selection of features crucial in modifying the very same experiential terrain in which we enact this praxis. But saying that the perspective coincides with the praxis that we enact, with the infinite habits of reaction through which we trade with the world, we have asserted again, without any coercion, the connection between hermeneutics and pragmatism, between interpretation and action. Any perspective is first of all embodied in a way of action: “the deed – the deed is everything”²⁷, and there is no legitimacy in thinking any subject as added to the event of the action, any being under the doing. “*The interpretation of causality is an illusion... A 'thing' is the sum of its effects, synthetically united by means of a concept, an image.*” (WP 551)²⁸. It is not difficult for those who know not only James but also Peirce to see, shining through this aphorism, a sketch of the pragmatic maxim: our idea of anything is the idea of its sensible effects, and any thought is translated into an action. Moreover, Nietzsche insists on pointing out the need to abandon “the faith in origin” and in the intention of the author, in order to consider the “backward working power” of

²⁶ In James' words: “The attitude of looking away from first things, principles, ‘categories’, supposed necessities; and of looking towards last things, fruits, consequences, facts” (P 36); in Peirce's words, simple and inspired by the Bible: “From their fruits ye shall know them” (*Pragmatism*, in *The essential Peirce*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1998, vol.2, p.401).

²⁷ F. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of morals*, cit., I, 13.

²⁸ Cp. also for instance: “Has anybody ever been able to testify to a force? No, but to *effects*, translated into a completely strange language” WP 620. But cp also: WP 551, 557, 558, 555, 585.

success or failure of an enterprise, that is of its consequences as values of the action itself (BGE 32)²⁹.

But if to land in a belief means to perform a habit of reaction – as Peirce claimed – to this habit we adhere, welcoming it as if it were an instinct. Better, as if it were a faith. I will choose two aphorisms that I consider particularly significant of the pragmatic tonality of the author: they are written at 15 years of distance, as a testimony of Nietzsche's persistent inclination towards this plan of analysis. In 1872 he writes: “[Life] needs faith in truth, but in that case illusion is sufficient, that is ‘truths’ are demonstrated through their effects, not through logical demonstrations... What is true and what exercises an action is considered as identical”³⁰. In the summer of 1887, close to his psychological collapse, Nietzsche questions himself again on the *real genesis* of concepts and says: “this springs from practical spheres, from utilitarian spheres, hence the *strong faith* it commands (*one is threatened with ruin* if one's conclusions are not in conformity with this reason; but this fact is no “*proof*” of what the latter asserts)” (WP 579).

Truth as faith

Let us then – in the end – consider maybe the most divulgative and popular text by James, the *Will to believe*. I will briefly synthesize the theses argued for in it, emphasizing the elements that – in my opinion – are most strongly echoed in Nietzsche. First of all, James claims that we adhere to a hypothesis, even in scientific domains, when we can make it come alive with the sap of our interest, an interest which has always a passionate nature. According to the nice example by the author, if I refer to the Islamic Messiah, the Mahdi, this kind of idea does not induce in my listeners any significant reaction; instead in an Arab, it turns out to be a lively hypothesis that can lead him to move mountains: the value of an idea is attested by the “willingness to act”, and the “faith” in it is embodied in the immediate and irrevocable action that follows from it. Any belief, in conclusion, has a fideistic component that ignites it and enables its perpetration. And this faith, or will to believe, is pragmatically will to act. A hypothesis that is not made alive by an active, favourite, passionate – inherently pre-judiced, we could say – choice is a dead hypothesis, and consequently it has to be admitted that the emotional sphere is not at all extraneous to intellectual knowledge: actually it nourishes it and it enables it to hold, in many cases, those aspects of ‘objectivity’ and rigour that – as we have already noticed – are nothing else than specific emotive tonalities. Intellectual knowledge is not “what remains after wish and will and sentimental preference have taken wing” (WB 8), but, lived as a belief in truth, it answers to a deep need of our being. The non-intellectual nature of all our convictions is absolutely determining in making knowledge itself emerge and circulate.

Truth, far from being evidence, is not only a pure perspectival belief, it is also configured as an act of faith that expresses a deep desire of a pathic nature. We need truth, that is, we need to believe in order to act. Before knowing, there is the *need* to know, an absolutely vital need. And, is there any difference – James asks – between faith in God and faith in science? Maybe not that much, since they are all faiths, although of different

²⁹ Cp. also W. James, *Will to Believe and other essays in popular philosophy*, Longmans Green and Co. New York, London and Bombay, 1897, p 17. From now on WB followed by the page number: “our great difference from the scholastic lies in the way we “face”. The strength of his system lies in the principles, the origin, the *terminus a quo* of his thought; for us the strength is in the outcome, the upshot, the *terminus ad quem*. Not where it comes from, but what it leads to is to decide”.

³⁰ I quote and translate from the Italian version: F. Nietzsche, *Frammenti postumi*. Vol. III, Adelphi, Milano, 1992, 19 (43).

character, unshakeable faiths that each of us embraces according to his own temperament. In this hall, the conference speaker reminds us, each of us blindly “believes” in the (admittedly invisible) presence of molecules and cells, he believes in those “things” that are democracy and progress[...] But are they facts or interpretations?

“Pure knowledge and pure logic” do not produce in themselves our beliefs which have an invariably passionate nature: “our belief in truth itself, for instance, that there is a truth and that our minds and it are made for each other, – what is [this] but a passionate affirmation of desire, in which our social system backs up?” (WB 9). Nietzsche seems to echo James: “But this involves *prejudice*, it is a sign that truth does not enter the question at all [...] But what was needed was always belief – and *not* truth” (WP 455). Science itself reveals its ethical foundation when it establishes that the unceasing evaluation of facts and the corrections of the false beliefs are the supreme goods for the human being. The same insistence on pure logic, *purified* from any feeling, betrays that the absence of sentimentalism shares the same sentimental nature of the sentimentalism that it would want to be rid of.

It is thus in this plot of emotions, passions, capacities of affection, practical impulses and vital needs that intellectual reflection emerges. They prove to be dynamo-genic principles – as the author writes in other passages³¹. And if “the faith in a fact can help create the fact” (WB 25) – that is, if any fact is declined as a value – the will to believe proves to be the will to power, that is the will to creative action, also for James.

Significantly, Nietzsche titled one of his most famous aphorisms “In what way we, too, are pious” (GS 344) and in its incipit it stages the same arguments as *The Will to Believe* by James. Science – they say – grants no right to citizenship to convictions; yet, it has to begin when the field has been emptied of any personal and passionate conviction. Probably this is said with good reason – the author glosses – but we still have to ask ourselves if, “*in order that this cultivation begin*, must there not be some prior conviction – and indeed one so authoritative and unconditional that it sacrifices all other convictions to itself?”. Thus, even “science rests on a belief”, and there is no science or knowledge completely empty of assumptions³². The question if truth is necessary has an answer that is antecedent any other research and any other intellectual inquire, and this is *exactly because* it points out a need of a very different nature: the faith “that *nothing* is *more* needed than truth”. As James claimed, also the scientist is a believer and one not very open to doubt.

Up until now – as easily noticed – the words of the two authors echo each other in tones, in arguments and even in lexicon. It is not possible to live without believing, it is not possible to live completely “sceptically”, that is it is not possible to live without thinking that there is the (a) truth. We adhere to the perspective in which we believe as we adhere to our skin: to us it is *the* truth, and we are faithful to it. If true is “to hold true”, it is also to want to hold as true, that is “to hold to it”.

But then Nietzsche hits deeper with his hammer and asks: What does this unconditional will to truth hide? The will to not let oneself be deceived? The will to not deceive? The will to not deceive myself? And what is the feeling that shines through, here, what is the advantage, for life, that inspires such an impulse? Why in the end avoid deception? How

³¹ W. James, *The energies of men*, in “Science”, N.S. 25, n. 635, 1907, pp.321-332.

³² On these topics we can find many other aphorisms of the same flavour. Cp for instance 333: “Yet in the final analysis, what is this *intelligere* other than the way we become sensible to the other three? A result of the different and conflicting impulses to laugh, lament and curse? Before knowledge is possible, each of these impulses must first have presented its one-sided view of the thing or event.”. Cp also on this topic: GS 345, BGE 1-2- 12, 24, 287; WP 455, 612, 556, 558.

many times in the course of life, of the individual and of the species, have we had demonstrations that deception serves life, more than truth itself? It is not thus a utilitarian calculation. And then why are we always speaking of things being true, good, fair, what is this a symptom of? It is not at all an epistemic, but a moral issue: “‘Will to truth’ does not mean ‘I do not want to let myself be deceived’ but – there is no alternative – ‘I will not deceive, not even myself’: *and with this we stand on moral ground*” (GS 344). A morality that conceals an unconscious will to death, because life is *polytropos*, varied, ambiguous, contradictory, deceiving. The man of truth is – in other words – the man of nihilism, the man that stiffens his own concepts – out of fear for becoming – until he makes them lifeless. Hypotheses – as James would have said – go from alive to dead. There is but one conclusion: “even we knowers of today, we godless anti-metaphysicians, still take *our* fire, too, from the flame lit by the thousand-year old faith, the Christian faith which was also Plato’s faith, that God, that truth is divine... But what if this were to become more and more difficult to believe, if nothing more were to turn out to be divine except error, blindness, the lie – if God himself were to turn out to be our longest lie?” (ivi).

Behind the will to believe the face that the mask of certainty conceals unveils: the will not to believe, the will of illusion, even the will of deception.

Certainly James does not reach this point. He does not reach it because truth – as perspectival as it can be – always appears and stays at the centre of his research (cp. WB ch. 5), because he is a self-proclaimed empiricist who “preserves as cordial a relation with facts” (P 26) and, especially, since to refuse the hypothesis of God and of a metaphysical hope was impossible to him, a religious man, and moreover an optimistically hopeful man in the progress of humanity towards the better³³. Sometimes, however – as pragmatism itself teaches us – the finalities that one sets upon oneself do not coincide with the effects that are produced. In James’ theses, in his refined and at the same time popular intellectual constructions, in the problems that he was able to spot, the themes of the coming new age were blossoming, first and foremost the one that Nietzsche summed up with the words “death of God”: the loss of any value and any certainty, but, at the same time, the birth of “philosophers of the dangerous Perhaps” (BGE 2), that will be able to avoid the mermaids of the will to believe.

I would conclude with a last, beautiful quotation by Nietzsche, taken from *On the Genealogy of Morals*, that synthesizes a great deal of his thought, at least as regards the themes that I have sketched here, and through which he – at the same time – seems to hold his hand out to James and to his last theoretical proposals: “From now on, my philosophical gentlemen, let us protect ourselves better from the dangerous old conceptual fantasy which posits a ‘pure, will-less, painless, timeless subject of cognition,’ let’s guard ourselves against the tentacles of such contradictory ideas as ‘pure reason,’ ‘absolute spirituality,’ ‘knowledge in itself’—those things which demand that we imagine an eye which simply can’t be imagined, an eye without any direction at all, in which the active and interpretative forces are supposed to stop or be absent—the very things through which seeing first becomes seeing something. Hence these things always demand from the eye something conceptually empty and absurd. The *only* seeing we have is seeing from a perspective; the *only* knowledge we have is knowledge from a perspective. *The more emotional affects* we allow to be expressed in words concerning something, *the more eyes*, different eyes, we know how to train on the same thing, the more complete our “idea” of this thing, our “objectivity,” will be. But to eliminate the will in general, to suspend all our emotions

³³ In this article I was aiming at emphasizing the affinities between the two thinkers: I am willing to admit that just equal if not bigger are the differences that divide them, that I have only sketched here.

without exception—even if we were capable of that—what would that be? Wouldn't we call that *castrating* the intellect? [...]³⁴.

³⁴ F. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of morals*, cit., III, 12.



Larry A. Hickman

Why American Philosophy? Why Now?

This title presents not two, but three questions. The third question, the one that lies behind and is obscured by the two more obvious ones, concerns the nature of American philosophy. What qualifies as “American” philosophy? Is it, as some have suggested, philosophy as it is practiced in any of the Americas—North, Central, or South? Or is it perhaps philosophy as it is pursued by practitioners living in North America, or even in a more restricted sense, by practitioners living in the United States of America?

My own suggestion is that there is a strand of philosophy that is typically American and that is different from, but related to, philosophy in Latin America. It is also different from, but related to, philosophical imports, such as Anglo-American analytical philosophy and so-called “continental” philosophy as they are practiced in the United States of America.

I harbor no illusion that my suggestion has been, or will be, widely accepted. Several years ago, for example, I received a copy of a book whose title was “American Philosophy of Technology.” I turned to the table of contents with some excitement, expecting essays on John Dewey’s critique of technology, or even the instrumentalism of William James. But that was not to be. It contained instead essays written by six highly regarded Dutch philosophers about six highly regarded philosophers of technology who live and work in the United States. Five of the six essays focused on philosophers working in the following traditions: 1) Heidegger, 2) Heidegger, 3) Marcuse, 4) Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, and 5) Critical Theory. The sixth involved a feminist approach to technology. No Dewey. No James. (I should add that I found the book very informative, and I applaud the work both of the essayists and their subjects. But I must also admit that I remain puzzled by the title. Should it not have been “Philosophy of Technology *in America*”? I have a very different sense than do the editors of this book of the traditions that I identify with “American philosophy.”)

The American philosophy that I know is deeply rooted in the history of its native country. That is not to say that it somehow began from scratch, that nothing has been imported from abroad. When the Puritans came to New England in the 17th Century, for example, they brought with them ideas and practices that had been influenced by their time in England and the Netherlands. But they were very soon faced with new conditions which demanded that old tools, the conceptual ones as well as the tangible ones that fit their hands, be modified for the new environment and the new tasks they faced.

And even though Jonathan Edwards did much of his influential work on the frontier, we can now see that he was in dialogue with the main trends of contemporary philosophy as it was practiced in England and elsewhere. But we also know that his work was designed to respond to the new challenges that presented themselves as the narrow vision of Puritan Calvinism began to dissolve in response to the vastness of the geographical and intellectual possibilities of the new landscape. This was a uniquely American task.

Despite his own claims to the contrary, even Charles Peirce – who was probably one of the best-read philosophers of his generation when it came to the history of European philosophy – even Charles Peirce exhibited this American preoccupation with tools and

instruments. In his hands, and in the hands of his successors, William James and John Dewey, concepts were treated not as complete in themselves, but as tools for further inquiry. Even a cursory review of Pierce's treatment of habits bears this out.

As for John Dewey, on the occasion of his 90th birthday the *New York Times* hailed him as "America's Philosopher." It would take a sizeable essay in itself to discuss the many ways that Dewey's philosophical work departed from the traditions of philosophy as it was practiced in Europe. Put in contemporary terms, however, I believe that Dewey's position amounted to a kind of "post-postmodernism." Along with (or one should perhaps say "in anticipation of") contemporary French-inspired postmodernists (and their cousins, the Rorty-inspired neo-pragmatists), Dewey rejected the long tradition of static, substance-accident metaphysics. The bare-bones metaphysics that Dewey retained consists only of what he termed "generic traits of existence," adding that such traits are more general than science and more specific than common sense. And of course Dewey's work shares the postmodernist disdain for foundationalism as well.

Beyond that, however, here is the point at which, in my view, Dewey's philosophical work is both distinctively American and richly relevant to the resolution of difficulties encountered in the philosophical traditions that have flourished in Europe. Because of his rich treatment of concepts and hypotheses as instrumental, his insistence that there is a commonality of human life and that our understanding of it is grounded in the biological and anthropological sciences, and his commitment to a hard-headed notion of referentiality, Dewey's American, broadly-experimentalist philosophy avoids some of the central problems of both the Anglo-American analytic tradition and French-inspired postmodernism (and its neo-pragmatist American cousins).

Why is this approach to philosophy distinctively American? The answer to this question lies in its treatment of concepts as instruments that are malleable, but not infinitely so (as the postmodernist preoccupation with the infinite variations on the literary trope and the Rortian commitment to infinite re-descriptions would have it); and in its commitment to the hands-on, rough-and-tumble engagement with stubborn facts, especially those having to do with social problems, in ways that treat analysis as but one phase of concrete problem solving and not as an enterprise sufficient unto itself (as some of the more etherial exercises of conceptual analysis would have it); and in its insistence on a philosophy that is democratic in its methods and outlook because it is committed to a pedagogy that lies at the heart of democratic life and the continual reform of democratic institutions.

Put another way, one of the central strands of American philosophy, Pragmatism, offers a third option, between Anglo-American conceptual analysis and French-inspired postmodernism. Its broad reach transcends the analysis of concepts and definitions in order to engage the real-world problems of men and women. And at the same time it rejects the notion of a "grand narrative," it also transcends the postmodernist denial of commonality and referentiality. It engages the physical and social sciences, as well as technology, in ways that are rarely found within other philosophical traditions. (Contrary to the claims of some of his critics, Dewey also rejected the positivists' search for the "foundations" of science and mathematics, which he thought worked quite well enough and thus required no foundations).

Why American philosophy? Why now? My suggestion is that during this time in which the means of communication are ubiquitous, when previously isolated cultures are rubbing up against one another as never before, and when it is essential that we find commonalities that we can use as platforms for constructing a better world, American Pragmatism is made-to-order for the task. If you want to reject foundations; if you want to jettison the baggage

of static metaphysics; if you want to treat the results of inquiry as both warranted and assertible (although potentially fallible); if you want to engage concrete social problems; if you are ready to articulate and deploy a thick pedagogy that balances the needs of student and curriculum; if you look to the sciences, the humanities, and the arts as informing and informed by philosophical inquiry and thus as sources of philosophical insight and renewal – then you are aligned with the program of American Pragmatism.

American philosophy has its roots in the experimentalism that was required by a people who faced the task of coming to terms with the uncertainties of a radically new environment. But a true experimentalism always reaches out in an attempt to be inclusive – as American Pragmatist Jane Addams learned to do during her late 19th and early 20th century experiments with Hull House, the settlement house located in a section of Chicago where recently arrived immigrants spoke more than a score of different languages and where sharply differing customs rubbed up against one another. Her search for unity in diversity – a richly American concept – was to become a central feature of Dewey's philosophical outlook.

Why American philosophy? Why now? Because the world is smaller and more crowded today than it was yesterday, and we need to employ experimentally based and philosophically informed methods if we are to meet the challenges of our developing milieu, and to flourish in the process.



Christopher Hookway

Lotze and the classical pragmatists

It has been said that, after the fall of modernism, Hermann Lotze (1817-1881) reigned as the single most influential philosopher in Germany, perhaps the world” (Sullivan 2008: 2)¹. It is now not easy to take such claims about Lotze seriously, and historical surveys of nineteenth century philosophy treat him as a marginal figure, if they mention him at all. Part of the explanation of this change in his standing becomes clear if we accept Sullivan’s helpful observation that Lotze was a ‘prominent figure within an essentially transitional period’ in philosophy (Sullivan 2008: 2-3). It is a mark of his international prominence that the Harvard philosopher George Santayana wrote a PhD dissertation on Lotze’s *System of Philosophy*, Oxford philosopher Bernard Bosanquet edited translations of his major books on Logic and Metaphysics, and he is taken seriously in the writings of Bertrand Russell and Bradley. This paper documents his role in the development of pragmatism. He made a positive contribution to William James’s psychology and his writings on pragmatism; and Dewey’s instrumentalist approach to logic was developed through critical engagement with Lotze’s work.

David Sullivan has described Lotze’s work as transitional between post-enlightenment movements such as materialism and romanticism and developments characteristic of early twentieth century philosophies such as the logical analysis of Frege and Russell and Husserl’s phenomenology. Often seen as an idealist, he was most plausibly read as preserving a broadly Leibnizian tradition. Lotze’s marginal roles in most histories of philosophy can be explained by the fact that he was ‘a prominent figure within an essentially transitional period’: ‘his long shadow was, perhaps, predestined to gradually fade from the scene’. (Sullivan 2008)

The description of Lotze as ‘transitional’ is a clue to some of his relations with pragmatism. According to William James, pragmatism is a mediating philosophy, one that can reconcile the insights of empiricism and rationalism, of materialism and idealism, and of naturalism and phenomenology. These innovations can survive and allow for further development, while Lotze’s ideas were more rapidly overcome by new techniques and ideas. The aim of this paper is to describe some of the ways in which the pragmatists learned from, and reacted to, Lotze’s work. Peirce was largely disdainful of Lotze’s contributions but both James and Dewey profited from them in different ways. Dewey exploited his criticisms of Lotze’s logic in order to develop his own distinctive approach to the subject, but James found Lotze’s work highly congenial and was willing to incorporate his insights in his pragmatism and to his psychological views.²

¹ The quoted passage is from David Sullivan’s valuable article on Lotze in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. The passage quoted here is not an idiosyncratic remark by a single scholar. Gary Hatfield holds that between 1850 and 1875, Lotze was probably ‘the foremost German academic philosopher and psychologist’ (Hatfield 2003: 98).

² Lotze also had a role in the development of analytical philosophy. Frege attended his lectures on logic and studied his *Logik*. Hans Sluga argues that Frege’s ideas are deeply indebted to those of Lotze (1980: 5) but Michael Dummett has responded that this claim rests upon a distorted understanding of the history of philosophy.

*Lotze and James on psychology*³

James's writings provide evidence of Lotze's influence upon his psychological ideas⁴. Both were eager to put psychology on a scientific footing. We can note a few examples of such influence, noting especially the role of psychological ideas that had a pragmatist character. The first example concerns the origins of James's influential ideas about emotions. Apparently James wrote 'Emotions due to bodily reverberations' on the fly sheet of his copy of Lotze's *Medizinische Psychologie* (1852), and this is taken to be an explicit acknowledgment of Lotze's influence on James's thought (Myers 1986: 530). A further illustration of this is found in James's chapter on 'The Will' in James's *Principles of Psychology*. James asserts there that Lotze was the first person to see that muscular exertion is a form of afferent and not of efferent feeling.⁵

Another example is provided by James's views about the will. James took from Lotze the idea that 'there is a smooth transition from an idea to behaviour that requires no act of will or effort whatsoever'. He thus endorsed Lotze's views as they are expressed by his saying: 'All the acts of our daily life happen in this wise: our standing up, walking, talking, all this never demands a distinct impulse of the will, but is adequately brought about by the pure flux of thought.' James attached importance to this passage saying that 'to recall this is to avoid the excesses of earlier mentalist psychology which saw the presence of "wilfulness" in every volitional act. (James 1983: 103).

A third case concerns 'ideo-motor action', described by James as the principle that 'once an idea occupies the mind it will, unless obstructed, seek expression in action'. This idea is particularly pertinent to pragmatism, suggesting the sort of link between concepts and habits of actions which both Peirce and James saw as fundamental to the doctrine. James credited Lotze together with Charles Renouvier for persuading him of the truth of this view. So there is some evidence that some of the psychological ideas which provided foundations for James's pragmatism were grounded in his reading of Lotze.

Lotze and James's pragmatism

When we turn to James's 1907 book on *Pragmatism* we find him often acknowledging Lotze's influence or noting similarities between the views of the two philosophers. And these similarities concern doctrines that are integral to James's pragmatism. The first of these passages is in lecture VII on 'Pragmatism and Humanism'. James is defending his account of the difference between pragmatism and rationalism, and he explains that 'for rationalism, reality is ready made and complete from all eternity, while for the pragmatist it is still in the making, and awaits part of its complexion from the future.' (James 1907: 123) For the rationalist, 'the universe is absolutely secure, on the other it is still pursuing its adventures.'

For our purposes we need to note one important issue on which they disagreed: Lotze rejected the formalization of logic (1988: 208ff).

³ There is relatively little contemporary literature on the relations between the thought of Lotze and James, probably because of diminishing interest in Lotze. Otto Kraushaar wrote four papers between 1936 and 1940 which are listed in the references.

⁴ For my purposes of this paper, I am more concerned with how the pragmatists responded to Lotze, and what they took him to be saying, than with issues about whether they understood him correctly. This is why my claims about Lotze's influence upon James's views are generally based upon James's testimony.

⁵ Dewey appeals to Lotze's account of emotions in his 1916 paper 'Logic of judgments of practice' in defence of a pragmatist account of value judgments. He attributes to Lotze the view that emotions, 'as involving pleasure and pain' are 'organs of value judgments' or 'appreciations of worth' (Dewey: 1916. 351)

James links this important pragmatist doctrine to a ‘deep suggestion’ that had been made by Lotze, when he criticizes a naïve and mistaken conception of *reality* which we naturally assume but which reflects the rationalistic outlook

Reality, we naturally think, stands ready-made and complete, and our intellects supervene with the one simple duty of describing it as it is already. (James 1907: 123)

Lotze’s proposed alternative is that ‘our descriptions’ may ‘themselves be additions to reality.’ Indeed, he suggests that the ‘previous reality’ does not exist in order for us to obtain knowledge of it which presents just what was there already. Instead, its function is to ‘[stimulate] our minds to such additions as shall enhance the universe’s total value.’ It is not surprising that James identifies this with ‘our pragmatistic conception’. The world is ‘malleable’, being transformed by our attempts to know it. James cites this view as adding to our ‘dignity and our responsibility as thinkers’ and remarks upon how the Italian pragmatist, Papini, is inspired by ‘the view it opens of man’s divinely-creative functions’. It is in harmony with Peirce’s claim that our contributions to inquiry enable us to make our contribution to the process of creation (James 1907: 123).

For all pragmatists, the content of a concept is explained in terms of how things behave in virtue of falling under that concept. As James puts it, the ‘pragmatic method’ involves interpreting notions by tracing [their] ‘practical consequences.’ Again in *Pragmatism*, James asks: ‘Is it not time to repeat what Lotze said of substances, that to *act like* one is to *be* one?’ (James 1909:64). A similar point is made in *Essays on Radical Empiricism*, where James endorses Lotze’s claim that ‘to be an entity all that is necessary is to *gelten* as an entity, to operate, or be felt, experienced, or in anyway realized, as such’ and recognizes that his position is in harmony with Lotze’s requirement. (James 1912: 85).

Pragmatists and Lotze’s logic.

So far we have seen evidence that Lotze’s views about mind and reality have much in common with the kind of pragmatism defended by William James. When we turn to his views on Logic, things are different and appear to be subject to pragmatist criticism. Dewey used Lotze’s *Logik* in courses on ‘The Logic of scientific methods’ at Michigan in 1890 and ‘Theory of Logic’ at Chicago in 1899-1900 (Shook 2000: 188-9), so it is understandable that Lotze’s approach to logic became his target when he was developing his own ideas.

In 1903, John Dewey published *Studies in Logical Theory*, a collection of papers by himself and his students at the University of Chicago which presented what he offered as a new approach to logic. Dewey’s own four contributions all have as their running title ‘Thought-and its subject-matter’, and the first carries the title ‘The general problem of logical theory.’⁶ The aim of his chapter is to explain how the need for a logical theory arises, to contrast two contrasting approaches to the nature of logical theory, and to make a case for favouring one of the two. The conception of logic that he criticized – in each of the four papers – was to be found in Herman Lotze’s *Logik*. Dewey developed his own conception of logic by criticizing Lotze’s influential views. Where James saw Lotze as a source of valuable ideas which were compatible with pragmatism, Dewey valued Lotze as

⁶ The subtitles of the other three papers are ‘The antecedents and stimuli of thinking’, ‘Data and meanings’ and ‘The objects of thought’. All four papers were reprinted, without the running title as the first four chapters of Dewey’s *Essays in Experimental Logic* (1916).

the author of views that should be rejected and he thought that criticizing them will be a source of positive insights.⁷

Peirce had doubts about this strategy (CP 8.244). He describes Lotze as ‘in his day, a very careful, serious inquirer’, this faint praise becoming fainter when he adds that ‘he was never a thinker of great subtilty’ (sic). Commenting on Dewey’s book, he remarked that ‘I regretted your making everything turn on Lotze, as if he were a Hume’ and turned the screw by remarking that Lotze was ‘rather small game for [Dewey]’ and is now ‘so entirely left behind, that I thought you might have left his doctrine to be disposed of’ by lesser thinkers. Where Dewey saw Lotze as a source of instructive mistakes, Peirce denied him even that merit.

On the very first page, Dewey tells us what the logical problem is. It concerns ‘the relation of thought to its empirical antecedents and to its consequent, truth, and the relation of truth and reality’ (1903: 1). And he reminds us that ‘from the naïve point of view’, such questions present us with no difficulty since we think about ‘anything and everything’, often in response to a particular practical need. Dewey suggests that the naïve standpoint’s account of reasoning is that ‘thinking is an activity which we perform at specific need, just as at other need we engage in other kinds of activity’. Moreover, its ‘material’ is ‘anything in the wide universe which seems to be relevant to this need.’ The naïve point of view can respond to such issues as arise without developing the sort of general theory that is to be found in logic books. We look for a theory only in special circumstances, notably when ‘circumstances require the act of thinking and nevertheless impede clear and coherent thinking in detail; or when they occasion thought and then prevent the results of thinking from exercising directive influence upon the immediate concerns of life’. (1903: 4) In other words, we only look for a *theory* of thinking when our practice of thinking and our various cognitive and practical presents us with problems, when our practice loses its familiar ‘organic character’.

When this occurs, and we seek a *logical* theory, that we find ourselves asking questions that are significantly different from those that are addressed in practical deliberations and scientific research. When we seek a theory of reasoning, we want something *general*. The naïve standpoint assumes that every inquiry or process of reasoning is concerned with specific purposes and specific circumstances. When thinkers like Lotze raise questions about ‘the relation of truth and reality’, for example, they seem to abstract from all that is particular and specific in our reasoning and deliberations. The question that divides Lotze and Dewey concerns just how abstract our logical theories need to be.

Lötze’s treatise on Logic was tellingly divided into three parts: ‘Pure logic’, ‘Applied logic’, and ‘On Knowledge (Methodology)’. Logic could be *applied* to the solution of problems about how we should conduct inquiries and about the evaluation of beliefs. But pure logic said nothing about psychological states such as beliefs or activities such as inquiries; instead, it is devoted to ‘thought in general and those universal forms and principle of thought which hold good everywhere, both in judging of reality and in weighing possibility, irrespective of any difference in the objects’ (Lötze 1888: 10-11). The three sections of his discussion of pure logic are devoted to concepts, judgments, and inferences respectively. And in classifying the different kinds of concept, judgment, and inference, it treats them as ‘*ideal* forms, which give the matter of our ideas, if we succeed in

⁷ Ralph Sleeper makes the interesting suggestion that Dewey’s real target was ‘an account of logic that would avoid both Peirce’s formalism and James’s psychologism’. His use of Lotze came from the latter’s attack on the psychologism associated with empiricists such as Mill. He wanted to show that a more radical version of empiricism might enable him to escape the a priori. (Sleeper 1986: 64-5)

arranging it under them, its true logical setting.’ (ibid: 11) Applying these ideal forms to concrete investigations with specific subject matters is a messy business: the peculiarities of particular subject matters ‘offer resistance to this arrangement’ under the ideal forms. And ‘applied logic is concerned with those methods of *investigation* which obviate these defects. It considers hindrances and the devices by which they may be overcome; and it must sacrifice the love of systematisation to considerations of utility, and select what the experience of science has so far shown to be important and fruitful’ (ibid).

Lötze’s approach to logic thus has a two stage character. Pure logic provides us with *a priori* knowledge of ideal forms that reveal the nature of concepts, judgements, and inferences. These forms can then, with difficulty, be applied to concrete cases. In identifying these ideal forms, it abstracts from all empirical information about particular investigations and particular subject matters. We need such information when we apply logic to provide guidance in our reasoning and investigations; but it is of no relevance to the study of the ideal subject matter of pure logic. It is thus a mark of the purity of logic that it is independent of psychology (1888: 10): when doing pure logic we can ignore the psychological processes that are presumably involved in ordinary reasoning. Logic’s starting point is simply that ‘between combinations of ideas, however they may have originated, there is a difference of truth and untruth, and that there are forms to which these combinations *ought* to answer and laws which they *ought* to obey’ (Lotze 1888: 8). Information about the genesis of our ideas is irrelevant to pure logic.

In order to avoid relativism and scepticism, he thought, we need necessary laws of thought. Our knowledge of such laws is grounded in ‘intuition’, a faculty that reveals to us self-evident truths. Indeed, logic and other areas of knowledge rely upon *axioms* of which we have self-evident knowledge. In constructing logical concepts and identifying logic laws, we can rely upon a system of categories (roughly of things, properties and relations), which is reflected in the grammatical categories of ‘substantive’, ‘adjective’ and ‘verb’. This presumably ensures that the logical laws will be abstract, as general as is possible, and minimally dependent upon the specificities of particular thoughts and inquiries.

This provides the context for Dewey’s defense of his view of logic. He tells us that ‘the very nature of logical theory as a generalization of the reflective process must of necessity disregard the matter of particular conditions and particular results as irrelevant’. So long as logic studies the relations of ‘thought as such’ to ‘reality as such’, it seeks abstract and very general formulations. This is what Dewey finds in Lotze who holds that ‘pure logic’ is concerned with ‘universal forms and principles of thought which hold good everywhere both in judging reality and in weighing possibility, *irrespective of any difference in the objects*’. (1903: 6).

Logical theory is concerned with ‘thought as such – thought at large or in general’. And it asks ‘how far the most complete structure of thought ... can claim to be an adequate account of that which we seem compelled to assume as the object and occasion of our ideas.’ (Lotze 1888: 9) It provides a general abstract account of thought, truth, reference etc, and it engages with our ordinary practical and scientific deliberations by, like any abstract scientific theory, being *applied to* concrete circumstances. But these circumstances, and the differences between the objects of different thoughts, can be safely ignored while we are doing *pure logic*. So logic achieves generality by dealing with universal abstract laws and principles that are binding upon *all possible* thought and inference. These can be *applied* to particular cases, and this can help us in dealing with problems. ‘The entire procedure of practical deliberation and of concrete scientific research’ is thus irrelevant to the project of pure logical theory.

Dewey describes this sort of approach to logic as ‘epistemological’, because it entails that the fundamental problem of logical theory was to explain ‘the eternal nature of thought and its eternal validity in relation to an eternal reality’ (Dewey 1916: 92). As Dykhuizen put it, the kind of logic that Dewey rejects holds that ‘the function of thought is to represent reality and that the truth of an idea depends upon how faithfully it does this (1973: 84). The justification for describing such theories as ‘epistemological’ is that once we give a very abstract account of thought and reasoning, one which ignores the specificities of particular episodes of reasoning, we find ourselves facing sceptical questions: what reason have we to think that processes if thought described in these abstract terms can provide us with knowledge of reality? Such logics force us to confront fundamental epistemological problems. These concern the relations between thought-as-such and reality-as-such. This becomes clear in Dewey’s second essay, where he describes Lötze’s account of the materials of inquiry and the circumstances in which we inquire. It is indeed cast in very abstract terms. The ‘ultimate material antecedents of thought consist in impressions, which are due to external objects as stimuli. Taken in themselves, these impressions are mere psychological states or events’: an impression is nothing but ‘a state of our consciousness, a mood of ourselves’. Inquirers then examine patterns which are sometimes ‘coincident’ and at other times ‘coherent’; and the aim of reasoning is to ‘recover and confirm the coherent, the really connected, adding to its reinstatement an accessory justifying notion of the real ground of coherence, while it eliminates the coincident as such’ (1903: 27ff). This ignores all that is specific to any particular inquiry but, at the same time, captures a common form that fits all. Dewey is scornful of Lötze’s attempt to somehow get from the impression, which is subjective, to its real ground.

It is important here that formal logic did not have a major role in Lotze’s system of pure logic (Lotze 1888: 208ff). In fact, he complained that contemporary developments in Boolean algebra, for example, did little more than give us a notation that offered an unhelpful restatement of what we all knew already. Rather than being concerned with the properties of arguments or the logical forms of propositions, Lotze’s logic was concerned with the a priori principles that made *judgement* possible. This still left room for the study of the structure of thoughts and propositions. Lotze relied upon studies of the grammatical structures of sentences to identify fundamental categories that our reflected in the judgments we make. He relied upon a grammatical classification of expressions into substantives, adjectives and verbs, to identify a categorial classification of the elements of thought into things, properties and relations.

Lotze thought that the principles used in logic are knowable a priori, that they are expressed in necessary truths, and that without them, we have no answer to scepticism and relativism. They take the form of a system of axioms, and when we ask how we are justified in accepting the axioms, the answer is that they are *self-evident*. At this point, Lotze’s distinction between the genetic or psychological and the logical becomes important. Presumably, in constructing these laws, Lotze would have to reflect upon our ordinary practices of thinking and reflecting; the subjective psychological processes involved in arriving at them may be complex. But to regard these reflections and processes as relevant to the justification of these laws would be to succumb to a psychologistic error. Once these processes have been completed, the normative standing of our acceptance of these laws is determined by their self-evidence. There is nothing further to say about *why* we are right to accept them and *how* they are self-evident. Lotze’s general account of justification is broadly coherentist: in ordinary investigations, we begin with our simple subjective sensations, we recognize that the patterns among them can be distinguished into those that

are ‘coincident’ and those that display coherence. When we think, we try to carry out procedures designed to identify and preserve coherence. Once we try to use these ideas to relate ‘though-as-such’ to ‘reality-as-such’, it becomes open to charges of vicious circularity. Lotze’s response that ‘The circle is inevitable, so we had better perpetrate it with our eyes open’ does not inspire confidence (Lotze 1880: 451)⁸

Dewey suggests that we should consider a different way of ‘stating the problem of logical theory.’ The key idea is that, while a general theory will have to abstract from ‘much of the specific material and contents of thought situations of daily life and critical science’, it can still identify ‘*certain* specific conditions and factors, and aim to bring them to clear consciousness.’ It seems to be an empirical investigation which tries to identify the features that are common to circumstances that prompt inquiry, to ‘show how typical features in specific circumstances of thought call out to diverse typical modes of thought-reaction’, and it can ‘attempt to state the nature of the specific consequences in which thought fulfils its career’ (Dewey 1903: 7). We begin with particular cases, and then identify patterns involving *kinds* of particular cases whose laws can be used to deal with the problems that first give rise to the search for a logic theory.

So the big difference between Lotzean logic and Dewey’s logic is that the former seeks *complete* generality, it seeks to abstract from all and any of the specific features of reasoning and find laws that govern *all possible kinds* of reasoning and inquiry. Dewey seeks a kind of generality which is intermediate between this complete generality and a study of thought which focuses on the particular case and their idiosyncrasies. Awareness of the problems that give rise to the search for a logical theory can guide us in formulating laws governing particular kinds of inquiry, or inquiries that share distinctive salient features. So we develop a logical theory which already incorporates the classifications we need to use when trying to exercise self-control over our reflection and inquiry. Logical theory no longer has a two stage character: we don’t construct a general theory using a vocabulary which is not constructed with an eye to how we want to describe inquiry and reflection. Rather our logical theory already uses the vocabulary of the theory of inquiry and there is a continuity between our practice of inquiry and the developing of a logical theory that can guide it. It is relevant to this that Dewey describes his approach as one of ‘instrumental logic’⁹. This is a type of logic which ‘deals with thinking as a specific procedure relative to a specific antecedent situation and to a subsequent fulfilment (1903: 8). From this perspective, ‘an attempt to discuss the antecedents, data, forms, and objective of thought, apart from reference to particular position occupied and particular part played in the growth of experience is to reach results which are not so much true or false as they are radically meaningless – because they are considered apart from limits’ (1903: 8). To think about the aims and conditions of thought ‘apart from the limits of a historic or developing situation, is the essence of a *metaphysical* procedure – in the sense of metaphysics which makes a gulf between it and science’ (1903: 8-9).

So Lotze employs a distinction between pure logic and applied logic, the former taking the form of a framework of a priori knowable necessary truths or principles. Dewey rejects that distinction; we can use our logical standards to criticize arguments and beliefs without making use of a logical theory with these properties. The use of logic lies in guiding reflection in dealing with concrete problems, and the role of logical *theory* is determined by

⁸ The passage in which this quotation occurs is given at greater length by Sullivan (2008: 12)

⁹ In fact, Dewey suggests that someone like Lotze would recognize the value of ‘instrumental logic’, but would treat it as an application of pure logic, as something subordinate to fundamental logical theory (Dewey 1903:8)

what is needed for our practice of reasoning. Lotze is associated with a kind of rationalist intellectualism which James would recognize as the enemy of pragmatism.

A schematic comparison of Lotze, Peirce, and James is useful here, and it will help to explain Peirce's disdain for Lotze's work. Peirce would be in agreement with Lotze about two important points: both hold to a distinction between pure and applied logic; and both deny the relevance of psychology and other natural sciences to pure (or, in Peirce's term, 'normative') logic. Dewey would disagree with them on both points. Theory in logic is less abstract and all encompassing than Lotze or Peirce would accept, both of whom think that that logical theory must deal with 'all possible thoughts'. And he would welcome a 'rapprochement' between logic and psychology and natural history. Dewey's pragmatism is inseparable from his rejection of Lotze's pure logic: his rationalism is at odds with pragmatist ideas. But Peirce thinks that his form of normative or pure logic is compatible with pragmatism. This is because the achievements of which he is most proud are contributions to *formal* logic.¹⁰ According to Peirce, the epistemology of formal disciplines need not appeal to suspect concepts such as 'self-evidence'.

Conclusion

It is clear that, in very different ways, the philosophical ideas of both James and Dewey were influenced by their knowledge of Lotze's writings. This is itself an acknowledgment of Lotze's prominent position in the philosophical world of the years either side of 1900. This is further illustration of the role of European thought in fuelling pragmatism. My conclusion is a modest one, that a better understanding of this part of the intellectual context of pragmatism probably has more of offer to our understanding of James and Dewey than is currently supposed.

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Sandra Laugier

Transcendentalism and the Ordinary

For Stanley Cavell, the specific and contemporary theme of the ordinary sets off from America and the transcendentalism of Emerson and Thoreau, in order to reinvent itself in Europe with ordinary language philosophy – Wittgenstein and Austin. But in order to understand this, it is necessary to perceive what Cavell calls, inspired by Wittgenstein and Thoreau, “the uncanniness of the ordinary,” inherent to its anthropological thematization. In his preface to the recent work of Veena Das, *Life and Words*, Cavell (2007) notes that the ordinary is our ordinary language in so far as we constantly render it foreign to ourselves, which invokes the Wittgensteinian image of the philosopher as explorer of a foreign tribe: this tribe, it is we who are foreigners and strange to ourselves – “at home perhaps nowhere, perhaps anywhere.” This intersection of the familiar and the strange, shared by anthropology and philosophy, is the location of the ordinary:

Wittgenstein’s anthropological perspective is one puzzled in principle by anything human beings say and do, hence perhaps, at a moment, by nothing.

The ordinary does not exactly mean common. It is not determined by a web of beliefs, or of shared dispositions. Common language, the fact of being able to speak together, nevertheless defines the ordinary: between the ordinary (everyday, shared life) and ordinary language, between the proximity to ordinary life called for in American transcendentalism, in film and literature which inherit it and the ordinary language philosophy of Wittgenstein and Oxford, the ordinary is the search for a new land to discover and explore, then to describe. The thought of the ordinary is experimental: in aiming to describe ordinary experience, it brings together words and world. From Emerson to Wittgenstein, from Austin to Goffman, we will attempt to retrace these routes and to make heard these contemporary and unrecognized voices of the ordinary, which demand new forms of attention to the human form of life and another understanding of pragmatism.

“I ask not for the great, the remote, the romantic...”

Let us start from Concord, and from the hypothesis of Cavell: that the distinctive feature of American thought, its capacity to begin philosophy again in America, is found in its invention of the ordinary. This new departure of philosophy – which has nothing of the clean slate to it, but rather, like the Hollywood “remarriage” comedies, it has to do with a second chance – is a reversal of philosophy’s two inveterate tendencies: the denial of our ordinary language and of our ordinariness in the philosophical pretension to go beyond them, to correct them, or again the philosophical pretension to know what we want to say, what is common to us. The call to the ordinary, or the return to practices is neither evidence nor solution, as certain varieties of empiricism or sociology suggest: it is traversed by the “uncanniness of the ordinary.”

It is from this perspective that it is necessary to register Cavell's return to American authors such as Emerson and Thoreau. Emerson, founding father of American philosophy, asserts the intellectual independence of America, the appropriation of the ordinary in contrast to the sublimities inherited from Europe, in a passage of his famous address, "The American Scholar":

I ask not for the great, the remote, the romantic; what is doing in Italy or Arabia; what is Greek art or Provençal minstrelry; I embrace the common, I explore and sit at the feet of the familiar, the low. Give me insight into today, and you may have the antique and future worlds. (Emerson 1837: 171)

Admittedly, recourse to the "common", to the "low" has existed for a long time in philosophy, and plays a central role in English thought. But there is a new accent on the ordinary here. It is not a matter of praising common sense but of bringing back all thought to the ordinary, to those categories of the ordinary – the low, the close at hand - which precisely stand in opposition to the great and the remote, and allow for "knowing the meaning" of ordinary life...

What would we really know the meaning of? The meal in the firkin; the milk in the pan; the ballad in the street; the news of the boat; the glance of the eye; the form and the gait of the body (ibid.).

Emerson expresses here the demand for a distinctive American culture, as an alternative to European culture, and which would be defined by this positive aspiration for the common. He described, in advance, the privileged objects of American film, or those of photography, as though it were necessary to renounce "sophisticated" European art in order to envisage truly American ordinary art.

His list in "The American Scholar" of the matters whose "ultimate reason" he demands of students to know – [...] – is a list epitomizing what we may call the physiognomy of the ordinary, a form of what Kierkegaard calls the perception of the sublime in the everyday. It is a list, made three or four years before Daguerre will exhibit his copper plates in Paris, epitomizing the obsessions of photography (Cavell 1972: 150).

It is not only a matter of art in this aesthetic of the ordinary, but of perception of reality. There is the elaboration of a list of new categories, those of the ordinary, more precisely of the elements of a physiognomy, of a gait, or of a 'look' of the ordinary, that philosophy, but also film and photography, would have to describe. It is as if the classic transcendental question has transformed itself: the question is no longer about knowing the "ultimate reason" of the phenomena of nature, but of establishing a connection to ordinary life and to its details, its particularities. For Emerson, this new approach, particularist and perceptual, is inseparable from a new relationship between classes, from a democratization even of perception.

One of these signs is the fact that the same movement which effected the elevation of what was called the lowest class in the state, assumed in literature a very marked and as benign an aspect. Instead of the sublime and beautiful, the near, the low, the common, was explored and poeticized. That which had been negligently trodden under foot by those who were harnessing and provisioning themselves for long journeys into far countries, is suddenly found to be richer than all foreign parts. The literature of the poor,

the feelings of the child, the philosophy of the street, the meaning of household life, are the topics of the time. (Emerson 1982 [1837]: 565)

The poor, the child, the street, the household: these are the new objects that it will be necessary to *see*. For Cavell as for Wittgenstein, the task of philosophy is to bring back the ordinary to us – to bring our words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use – which is neither easy nor obvious.

In this he joins his thinking with the new poetry and art of his times, whose topics he characterizes as “the literature of the poor, the feelings of the child, the philosophy of the street, the meaning of the household life. I note that when he describes himself as asking “not for the great, the remote, the romantic,” he is apparently not considering that the emphasis on the low and the near is exactly the opposite face of the romantic, the continued search for a new intimacy in the self’s relation to its world. (Cavell, “An Emerson Mood”, p. 149-150)

The search for the ordinary takes its meaning from the menace of skepticism – of the loss of or distance from the world. As he presents it at the beginning of his essay “Experience,” Emerson associates this loss with the failure of speech, which by definition renders it inadequate, or unhappy – it is a matter of infelicity of language. It is this essential inadequacy of language that in “Self-Reliance,” Emerson calls the conformity of his contemporaries, and that Thoreau denounces as “quiet desperation.”

Their every truth is not quite true. Their two is not the real two, their four not the real four; so that every word they say chagrins us, and we know not where to begin to set them right. (Emerson 1990: 34)

The call to the ordinary is inseparable from this skeptical moment when the world radically chagrins us, when (because) we want most strongly to grasp it, to seize it conceptually and possessively, it evades us, according to Emerson. In their defense of the ordinary against the vain wish to conceptualize and grasp reality, Emerson and Thoreau are thus the precursors of ordinary language philosophy, recommending, instead, the attentive description of reality: being next to the world (both close and separate).

The connection means that I see both developments – ordinary language philosophy and American transcendentalism – as responses to skepticism, to that anxiety about our human capacities as knowers. My route to the connection lay at once in my tracing both the ordinary language philosophy as well as the American transcendentalists to the Kantian insight that Reason dictates what we mean by a world. (Cavell 1988a, p. 4)

Our connection to the ordinary is another way of formulating the question of our connection to reality, and of our ability to say things with our ordinary and shared language. For Emerson, America must reinvent transcendental philosophy, while following its own methods, temperaments, and moods. It must then invent an access to the ordinary, a specific mode of approach of this new nature – for which the categories of transcendental philosophy, to some extent the conceptual mode of access to nature developed by Europe, are inoperative. A new education is necessary. Thoreau puts it nicely in *Walden*:

It is time that we had uncommon schools, that we did not leave off our education when we begin to be men and women. It is time that villages were universities. Shall the world

be confined to one Paris or one Oxford forever? Cannot students be boarded here and get a liberal education under the skies of Concord? (Thoreau 1954, ch. 3)

To return to ordinary language is to speak seriously – to respect its speech, to take up the Austinian theme. It is not a matter of discovering an authentic and original meaning of words, a myth that Wittgenstein unravels in the first lines of *The Blue Book*. As Cavell says, “Words come to us from a distance; they were there before we were; we are born into them. Meaning them is accepting that fact of their condition” (1972: 64). The meaning of a word is its use – to borrow Wittgenstein’s phrase: “We do not know what “Walden” means if we do not know what Walden is” (ibid. 27). And thus of all the words employed by Thoreau, to which he gives a new sense: morning (morning is when I am awakening and there is the dawn in me), the bottom of the pond (we do not know what the base is, or the foundation, so long as we have not probed, like Thoreau, the bottom of Walden Pond), the sun (a morning star).

“Discovering what is said to us, just like discovering what we say, is to discover the exact place of where it is said; to understand why it is said at this precise place, here and now” (ibid: 34). It is the education, or the method of ordinary language: to see why, when, we say what we say, in which circumstances – because without its use a word is a “dead sign” (Wittgenstein 1958: 3). It is not a matter of discovering an authentic or hidden meaning of words. Everything is already in front of us, displayed before our eyes: stay to see the visible. Thoreau thus announces, like Emerson, the anthropological project of the *Investigations*: to see the ordinary, which escaped us because it is near to us, beneath our eyes.

What we are supplying are really remarks on the natural history of human beings; we are not contributing curiosities, however, but observations which no one has doubted, but which have escaped remark only because they are always before our eyes. [Wittgenstein, PI §415]

One could return to a beautiful formulation of Foucault, where the important point is that he connects this ability to “see the visible” to ordinary language philosophy and its project of using usage to discover what is actually going on : “faire une analyse critique de la pensée à partir de la manière dont on dit les choses” :

We have long known that the role of philosophy is not to discover what is hidden, but to render visible what precisely is visible – which is to say, to make appear what is so close, so immediate, so intimately linked to ourselves that, as a consequence, we do not perceive it. (Foucault 1994 [1978]: 540-41)

The ordinary exists only in this characteristic difficulty of access to what is right before our eyes, and what one must learn to see. It is always an object of investigation – this will be the approach of pragmatism – and an object of interrogation; it is never given. The low always has to be reached, in an inversion of the sublime. It is not enough to want to start from the ordinary, from “the man in the street.” It is not a matter of correcting the heritage of European philosophy, and of creating new categories: it is necessary to give another sense to the inherited words (such as those of experience, idea, impression, understanding, reason, necessity and condition), to bring them back from the immanent to the common, or from the metaphysical to the ordinary, which means, to make something else of them.

Emerson proposes his own version of categories, in the epigraph to “Experience”, with the list of “the lords of life”:

The lords of life, the lords of life, - / I saw them pass, / In their own guise, / Like and unlike, / Portly and grim; / Use and Surprise, / Surface and Dream, / Succession swift, and Spectral Wrong. (Emerson 2005: 77)

At first glance, the lords of life resemble categories that control our life, our experience, and determine our access to the world, as with Kant – those of causality, substance, or totality. But the list demonstrates well that it cannot be [a matter of] these categories: use, surprise, surface, dream, succession, evil, temperament... In Emerson there is the idea that a new collection of concepts must be invented in order to describe the ordinary, the given or, rather, the diverse materials, “strewn along the ground.” And it is a new ordinary man who will need to build or, as he says, “to domesticate.”

This revolution is to be wrought by the gradual domestication of the idea of Culture. The main enterprise of the world for splendor, for extent, is the upbuilding of man. Here are the materials strewn along the ground (Emerson 1990: 178)

Categories of the ordinary, democracy of experience

If Emerson were satisfied with carrying on with the arrangement of the categories, and substituting for a traditional list (the European transcendental heritage) a modernized, Americanized list, the contribution would be weak. To imagine categories of the ordinary alters the very idea of category. The idea of domestication of culture, of the ordinary as next, as neighbor, is not the idea of mastery of reality – because the ordinary is neither conceptualized nor grasped: it is an understanding of the connection to the world, not as knowledge but as proximity and access to things, as attention to them. It is not a matter of rewriting the list of categories, but of redefining their use: not as conceptual grasping of reality, but, instead, as neighboring things. It is the recognition [of reality] as next to me, near or close, but also separated from me, next door. The revolution achieved by Emerson consists less in a re-definition or redistribution of categories than in a remodeling of what experience is, which continues from James, to Dewey and Goffman.

Hence, our relation to the world is no longer a matter of (actively) applying categories of understanding to experience but of (passively) watching the lords of life passing by in the course of experience. They will emerge from experience, suddenly appear – “I find them in my way” – as if the categories, instead of being imposed or posed, are simply to wait patiently, and to *find*:

Illusion, Temperament, Succession, Surface, Surprise, Reality, Subjectiveness – these are threads on the loom of time, these are the lords of life. I dare not assume to give their order, but I name them as I find them in my way. (Emerson 1837: 106)

Emerson takes and subverts Kant’s system. The lords of life do not control our perception, or our experience, they come out from it, like forms on a background: “I saw them pass” (Ibid). The categories themselves are the object/subject of observation and exploration. Such is the intellectual revolution brought about by transcendentalism. The transcendental question is no longer: How do we know to start from experience? (A question which, since Hume, one knows leads to the response: one knows nothing at all – and thus leads to skepticism). But rather: How do we approach the world? How do we have

an experience? This difficulty of approaching the world is expressed by Emerson in “Experience” in regard to the experience of grief, and is generalized to an experience of the world taken as a whole under the sign (the category) of loss. Skepticism is found there, in the inability to have an experience. We are not as much ignorant, as inexperienced. William James will follow this thread of Emersonian thought (for example in *The Will to Believe*), Dewey will follow it as well by proposing his own categories, and Wittgenstein probably uses it in his later writings.

In Emerson, experience cannot teach us anything, contrary to what “paltry” empiricism tells us – not because it is insufficient, that we must go beyond it, as the traditional epistemology asserts, but because it does not touch us. Our attempts to master the world and things, in order to grasp them in all senses of the term (materially and conceptually) distance us from them. It is what Emerson describes in Experience as “the most unhandsome part of our condition” (Emerson 2005: 81) – this fleeting reality slips between our fingers at the moment when, because, we clutch at it: *unhandsome*. It is our desire to grasp reality that causes us to lose it, our craving to know (as theoretical appropriation and synthesis) that keeps us from ordinary proximity with things, and cancels their availability or their attractiveness (the fact that they are at hand, handsome). Emerson transforms the Kantian synthesis, not by going the transcendental way but the opposite, non romantic way, towards immanence. This surpassing of the synthesis by the low, and not by the high, is characteristic of Emerson and Thoreau. Emerson launches into an ironic recapitulation of Cartesian and Kantian themes from the European theory of knowledge:

It is very unhappy, but too late to be helped, the discovery we have made, that we exist. That discovery is called the Fall of Man. Ever afterwards, we suspect our instruments. We have learned that we do not see directly, but mediately. (Emerson 1990: 98)

It is conceptual activity as such that must come to renounce this “cognitive rapaciousness” that is unhandsome (this hand and these fingers which clutch and clench). Let us refer to the criticism brought about by Wittgenstein in the *Blue Book* of the “craving for generality” characteristic of philosophy. The attention to the particular that Wittgenstein demands goes against our tendency toward a thorough grasp.

We feel as if we had to *penetrate* phenomena: our investigation, however, is directed not towards phenomena, but, as one might say, towards the ‘possibilities’ of phenomena. We remind ourselves, that is to say, of the kind of statement that we make about phenomena.[...] Our investigation is therefore a grammatical one. (Wittgenstein PI §90)

When Wittgenstein affirms our impression that we must visually penetrate phenomena, and when he specifies that our “grammatical” investigation is directed not towards phenomena but towards their possibilities, he intends to substitute for the categories an imaginative grammar of human concepts, a grammar of the particular. The difference with Kant is that, in Wittgenstein and Emerson, each word of ordinary language, each bit of ordinary experience, each aspect of the features of the ordinary, they each require a deduction to know its use: each one must be retraced in its application to the world, by the criteria of its application. A word, for Emerson and for Wittgenstein, must be stated in the particular context where it has a meaning, or else it is false (it sounds false), it “chagrins me.” In this way, one could read the series of words not as a renovated list of categories, but as a grammar of the particular experience.

It is in this relation to experience that Emerson (and Dewey) goes perhaps even further than Wittgenstein himself. For Wittgenstein seems, on this point, dependent on a transcendental heritage, with his idea of the “possibilities of phenomena” and his definition of grammar as constituent of these possibilities. The radical empiricism of Emerson consists in saying that speaking of the given is still too much. What interests him would be, we might say, the “found”. “Finding as founding,” Cavell puts it (1991:79).

The ordinary, then, is what escapes us, what is distant precisely because we seek to appropriate it to us rather than letting ourselves go to the things, and to insignificant encounters: “all our blows glance, all our hits are accidents. Our relations to each other are oblique and casual,” writes Emerson in *Experience*. This insistence on the accidental, the contingent, situates the ambiguity of Emerson. The casual is also misfortune, fatality – hence his pun casual/casualty: our experiences may be both casual and catastrophic, and the casual structures ordinary experience, as the low and the near.

Transcendentalism is therefore badly named, because what Emerson proposes is a particular form of empiricism, which one might readily call radical empiricism. My perceptions are more reliable than my thoughts; they are fatal, escaping my desire to grasp the world. So it is from perception, conceived as attraction and as receptivity, that one will be able to imagine a framework for ordinary experience.

Every man discriminates between the voluntary acts of his mind, and his involuntary perceptions, and knows that to his involuntary perceptions a perfect faith is due. [...] But perception is not whimsical, but fatal. (Emerson 2005: 81)

The conversion that philosophy requires is not the (transcendental) passage towards another world. The new America is here, in front of me. And it is only in this ordinary world that I can change.

Why not realize your world? But far be from me the despair which prejudices the law by a paltry empiricism – [...] There is victory yet for justice; and the true romance which the world exists to realize, will be the transformation of genius into practical power. (Ibid.: 106)

To realize the world: Emerson transforms and de-sublimes the transcendental, bringing the categories back to the ordinary, realizing the “possibility” of “true romance,” realizing genius into practical power. There are no longer two worlds but only one, which always and ordinarily remains for us to discover and to describe.

It is not a ground where I could make myself at home. Emerson and Thoreau are thinkers of migration (not just of the ground or of identity): for them it is not a matter of “dwelling” but of always leaving. Starting off is what counts, being always ready to go, not attachment or rootedness, which are synonymous with being stationed, or with clutching, with clenching the nation or oneself.

But in truth all is now to be begun, and every new mind ought to take the attitude of Columbus, launch out from the gaping loiterers on the shore, and sail west for a new world. (*The Senses and the Soul*, in Emerson 1990)

The pioneer is one of the exemplary figures of this impulse to set off. The pioneer (like Will Hunting at the end of Gus Van Sant’s film by that name, or like the hero of Francis Ford Coppola’s *Rumblefish*) moves toward the West, which is also the East where the sun

rises, since we now know that the Earth is round and that the sun “is but a morning star,” as Thoreau puts it in the last sentence of *Walden*.

The importance of importance

By claiming the ordinary, Emerson calls for a revolution (“Here are the materials strewn along the ground”). The American hope becomes that of the construction of a new man and culture, both “domesticated”, which is the opposite of oppressed and enslaved: the domestic man is the one who comes to harmonize his interior and his exterior, his public voice and his private voice, without renouncing one or the other. The construction of American democracy is the invention of an ordinary man: “the upbuilding of man.” Public expression is then founded on self-trust, which is not trust in a pre-given self (philosophy of the ordinary is not a philosophy of subjectivity) but trust in one’s experience.

To trust in one’s experience: this defines the recourse to practice, in a genuinely empirical move. One could explore the political implications of this trust with the question of civil disobedience. Cavell has applied it in the first place to film and what it teaches us. In *Pursuits of Happiness*, he examines the act of “checking one’s experience,” which is to say, of examining one’s own experience, of “let[ting] the object or the work of your interest teach you how to consider it.” To educate one’s experience, so as to be made educable by it. To be interested in film as works of thought means to be interested in our experience of film. That means a displacement of the object of the investigation from the object to the experience I have of the object, “the interest I bring to my own experience.” It means a reliance on the experience of the object, in order to find the right words to describe and express it. For Cavell, it is the viewing (repeated and common) of films that leads to trusting one’s own experience, and to acquiring at the same time an authority over it. “[It] is a conceptual as much as an experiential undertaking [...]. I think of this as checking one’s experience.” (1981: 18). Cavell returns then to “the empiricism practiced by Emerson and Thoreau.” Empiricism thus re-read defines the paradoxical link between experience and trust: it is necessary to educate one’s experience in order to trust it. Here is a new reversal of the Kantian inheritance: not to go beyond experience via theory, but to go in reverse from what is, in philosophy, the very movement of knowledge; to go beyond theory via experience. The trust in self is defined by the ordinary and expressive authority one has over one’s experience: “Without this trust in one’s experience, expressed as a willingness to find words for it, [...] one is without authority in one’s own experience.” (Ibid. 19). The trust consists of discovering in oneself (in one’s “constitution,” says Emerson, in the political and subjective sense) the capacity to have an experience, and to express and describe this ordinary experience. This is also the definition of ordinary experience for Wittgenstein, and what for Freud, one expects from psychoanalysis (to gather and remind, re-allocate – re-member – the scattered scraps and memories of words and uses). One finds this approach to ordinary experience as well in William James’ radical empiricism, and in Dewey’s theory of inquiry, and in Henry James’ literary concepts: what is important is to have an experience (cf. Dewey 1934).

To have an experience means: to perceive what is important. What interests Cavell in film is the way our experience makes what counts emerge, be seen. Cavell is interested in the development of a capacity to see the importance, the appearance, and the significance of things (places, people, motifs):

The moral I draw is this: the question what becomes of objects when they are filmed and screened – like the question what becomes of particular people, and specific locales, and subjects and motifs when they are filmed by individual makers of film – has only one source of data for its answer, namely the appearance and significance of just those objects and people that are in fact to be found in the succession of films, or passages of films, that matter to us. (Cavell, 1998b : 182-3)

What defines importance, circularly, is – “To express their appearances, and define those significances, and articulate the nature of this mattering” (Cavell, 1998b: 183).

If it is part of the grain of film to magnify the feeling and meaning of a moment, it is equally part of it to counter this tendency, and instead to acknowledge the fateful fact of a human life that the significance of its moments is ordinarily not given with the moments as they are lived, so that to determine the significant crossroads of a life may be the work of a lifetime. (Cavell, 1998b: 11)

Experience turns out to be defined by our capacity for attention: our capacity to see the detail, the expressive gesture, even if it is not necessarily a clear and sharp picture, nor exhaustive. It is attention to what matters, to what counts in the expressions and styles of others – what makes and shows the differences between people, the relation each has to his/her experience – that we must then describe.

To recognize restores, manners, habits, turns of speech, turns of thought, styles of face as morally expressive – of an individual or of a people. The intelligent description of life, of what matters, makes differences, in human lives. (Diamond 1991: 375)

These are the differences which must be the object of “the intelligent, sharp-eyed, description of life.” This human life refers to the Wittgensteinian form of life, seen not as a social norm, but as the context where gestures, manners, and ordinary styles are visible. In this way, attention to the ordinary, “to what we would like to know the meaning of” (Emerson 1982: 564), is the perception of textures or of moral motifs. What is perceived are not objects, but expressions, which is only possible against the background of the form of life. Literature is the privileged place of this perception, through the creation of a background that reveals the important differences between the expressions. Film also for Cavell is the medium of moral expression.

It is a matter of a competence which has to do not only with knowledge or reasoning, but with learning the suitable expression, and with an education of sensibility: education of the reader’s sensibility by the author, who renders such a situation, such a character perceptible, while placing it (describing it) in the appropriate framework. The novel teaches us to look at ordinary life as “the scene of adventure and improvisation”, beginning with the appropriate modes of expression, linguistic or other: a development of sensitivity through exemplarity. The novel shapes our capacity to read moral expression– the capacity to make use of words to describe moral experience of the particular.

The attention that the Henry James novel suggests and provokes makes the reader’s experience an adventure (in Emerson’s words, “true romance”). There is adventure in any situation that mixes uncertainty and the “taste for life”. James notes, regarding the novels of George Eliot, that the emotions, the tormented intelligence, and the consciousness of its heroes become “our own adventure.” (see Laugier 2006)

A human, a personal 'adventure' is no a priori, no positive and absolute and inelastic thing, but just a matter of relation and appreciation – a name we conveniently give, after the fact, to any passage, to any situation, that has added the sharp taste of uncertainty to a quickened sense of life. Therefore the thing is, all beautifully, a matter of interpretation and of the particular conditions; without a view of which latter some of the most prodigious adventures, as one has often had occasion to say, may vulgarly show for nothing. (James, 1934: 286)

Experience itself, if one trusts it, becomes an adventure. To refuse this trust is to miss out on this part of the adventure – the character's adventure, and one's own adventure. Lack of attention to experience, the failure to perceive its importance, causes one to miss out, to miss what happens. The stipulation found in the ethnomethodology will combine the heritage of Wittgenstein, Emerson, and pragmatism: Do not miss out, do not miss the thing for lack of comprehension and sensitivity to the fluctuations of the circumstances of action when it happens.

Thus one can see experience as a conceptual and sensible adventure at the same time - in other words: simultaneously passive (one lets oneself be transformed, touched) and active. In experience, there is no separating thought (spontaneity) and receptivity (vulnerability), comprehension and perception. It is this, for James, which "constitutes experience:"

The power to guess the unseen from the seen, to trace the implication of things, to judge the whole piece by the pattern, the condition of feeling life, in general, so completely that you are well on your way to knowing any particular corner of it – this cluster of gifts may almost be said to constitute experience." (H. James "The Art of Fiction" p. 10-11).

James adds that one must let nothing escape, let nothing be wasted on oneself: "Try to be one of the people on whom nothing is lost". It also opens toward a specific capacity, for the attention or care to detail, which brings about the humanity to the description of the ordinary. (Laugier 2005)

So how are we to recover this elusive ordinary life? How are we to know what is important without being focused on only the pertinent? To realize what one wants to say, to be precisely expressed, would be to manage to put the phrase into context. To take up an expression of Wittgenstein, it would be to restore the phrase to its country of origin, its "natural environment". This is the task Wittgenstein assigns to ordinary language philosophy: "To bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use" (*PI* §116). But in the ordinary there is nothing to recover. Cavell says of Thoreau, "Walden was always gone, from the beginning of the words of Walden" (Cavell 1972: 119). The only assurance registered in the use of my speech, is that of abandonment, of the departure that one constantly finds in American thought – of departure, of the road. I am no longer here where one expects me. I'm not there".

If conversation is acceptance of the linguistic condition – our form of life in language – and of exposure to others, film is the privileged place for such an (over) exposure, and the actor has this capacity, by supporting the expression, of constituting the experience of the spectator. The experience of film becomes experience itself (as Kant says, there is only one experience), and it belongs to our ordinary existence, without constituting a separate world. Cinematographic projection proves to be the answer, through its mimesis of ordinary conversation, to skeptical questioning, to the philosophical search for adequacy in the world. The moments of adequacy between an expression and a world that film offers us

exist only through the natural expressivity of the ordinary human body. This is what Emerson demanded: “What would we really know the meaning of? [...] the form and the gait of the body.” These meanings and moods are manifested – to anticipate here the ethnographic analyses of Goffman – through the ordinary human conversational gesture.

It is this echo of Emerson’s demand that one hears in Wittgenstein (whose interest in cinematographic experience is known). It returns to Cavell to disclose the transatlantic connection hidden between ordinary life, language, and natural expressivity. Conversation in film is bodily expression: Cavell notes that the dialogues of a film cannot be reproduced, and do not give anything when they are spoken (except if one speaks about it with somebody who saw the film, returning to a shared experience of the vision of the dialogue). The conversation is intended to be viewed. The success of a dialogue on screen, these moments of conversational felicity that the grand Hollywood films offer, exist only in their temporal and fleeting projection: “they have to be taken from the page and put back [...] onto the screen” (Cavell 1981: 11). In this way, the films respond to the failures of experience (infelicities, misfires, in the Austinian register), through the successes/felicities of conversation, which are rare and memorable, as Goffman notes in *Frame Analysis*.

These memorable moments are fragments, privileged fragments of experience, which will constitute the subjective grammar of it, the expression of the importance.

[These] films [...] bear in their experience as memorable public events, segments of the experiences, the memories, of a common life. So that the difficulty of assessing them is the same as the difficulty of assessing everyday experience, the difficulty of expressing oneself satisfactorily. (Cavell 1981: 41)

Linguistic phenomenology as a pragmatic approach of the ordinary

In the ordinary of ordinary language one can see a pluralistic reformulation of the question of the description of ordinary experience: ordinary language philosophy, which, following Wittgenstein, confronts the failures of practiced language in its description. The next stop along the ordinary’s transatlantic circuit is thus Great Britain. The exploration of uses is an inventory of our forms of life: for Austin, we examine “what we would say when.” (Austin 1962: 182) It is a matter of saying not only what *we* say, (a theme of the common, of agreement, of consent within language; cf. Wittgenstein 1953) but also “which words to employ in which situations,” (*id.*) what is fitting to the circumstances or allows one to act on them. Austin makes clear: “we are not looking merely at words, but also at the realities we use the words to talk about. We are using our sharpened awareness of words to sharpen our perception, though not as the final arbiter of, the phenomena” (1962: 182). The language of description is then a tool for focusing, associated with agreement and with the perception of the important detail.

To speak about ordinary language is to speak about the world, but this does not happen through a miraculous connection of language-thought to reality: It happens on condition of precisely describing the uses of language and their differences. To say is to perceive. “For defining an elephant (supposing we ever do this) is a compendious description of an operation involving both word and animal (do we focus the image or the battleship?)” (*ibid.* 124) Austin, by advocating the description of uses, seeks this relation of words and the world (words/world again).

The theme of the ordinary introduces skepticism into practice: certainty, or trust in what we do (play, argue, value, promise), models itself on the trust that we have in our shared

uses of language and our capacity for using it well. The enigma of speaking the same language – the uncanniness of the use of ordinary language – is the possibility for me of speaking in the name of others, and vice versa. It is not enough to invoke commonness; it remains to be known what authorizes me to speak, what is the real strength of the agreement.

It is what human beings say that is true and false; and they agree in the language they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life. (Wittgenstein PI §241)

It is crucial for Cavell that Wittgenstein says that we agree in and not on language, language as spoken. That means we are not actors of the agreement, that language precedes this agreement as much as it is produced by the latter, and that this same circularity makes the assertion of a primacy of agreement or of human coordination (joint attention or common absorption) impossible:

We learn and teach words in certain contexts, and then we are expected, and expect others, to be able to project them into further contexts. Nothing insures that this projection will take place (in particular, not the grasping of universals nor the grasping of books of rules) [...]. It is a vision as simple as it is difficult, and as difficult as it is (and because it is) terrifying.”(Cavell 1969: 52)

To agree in language means that language produces our agreement as much as it is the product of an agreement; that it is natural for us, and that the idea of convention is to mimic and mask this need. “Underlying the tyranny of convention is the tyranny of nature,” according to Cavell:

Here the array of “conventions” are not patterns of life which differentiate human beings from one another, but those exigencies of conduct and feeling which all humans share. Wittgenstein’s discovery, or rediscovery, is of the depth of convention in human life; a discovery which insists not only on the conventionality of human society but, we could say, on the conventionality of human nature itself. (Cavell 1979: 110-11)

This natural link between language agreement and conventions is fundamental in Austin, and defines the conditions of felicity for our use of language. “Performatives, if adequate to reality, are felicitous, if not, then, in specific ways, infelicitous” (Cavell 1984: 81). This attention, centered on failure as much, and even more, than on success, is characteristic of Austin, who will allow the theme of the ordinary to return to America, this time in sociological description. Linguistic phenomenology returns in a sociological form with Goffman, whose work echoes Cavell’s in its discovery of the ordinary. One of the goals of ordinary language philosophy is to determine the various ways for an utterance to be infelicitous, inadequate to reality, to fail. One of the goals of Goffman’s sociology will be to determine the ways for our actions, our behavior, to be infelicitous. Austin, like Goffman, wants to give the conditions of felicitous language as ordinary practice, to highlight the vulnerability of our uses, and to provide some tools for adequate repairs (excuses, arrangements: see Laugier 2008).

The question is no longer exactly of agreement in language. Austin moves the difficulty, so often invoked in philosophy, of “arriving at an agreement” on an opinion or a theory, to another, to agreeing on a starting point, on a given, or, more precisely, a ground agreement on “what we would say when”. This agreement, adds Austin, is an “agreement on the

manner of determining a certain given”, “on a certain way, one, to describe and to know the facts”. The agreement must be about the methods of the description of what happens.

Here at last we should be able to unfreeze, to loosen up and get going on agreeing about discoveries, however small, and on agreeing about how to reach agreement. Austin 1962: 183)

Agreement and discovery are possible because 1) ordinary language cannot claim to be the last word; “we should simply remember that it is the first word” (ibid. 2) ordinary language is a collection of differences, and “contains all the distinctions that humans have judged useful to make”, more subtle and solid than “those which we could, you or me, find, settled in an armchair on a beautiful afternoon – the more appreciated methodological alternative” (ibid). It is this capacity to mark and inventory differences that makes language an adequate instrument of perception: because reality is made up of these details and differences (which show up in the account we give them).

From this perspective, one can better understand the enigmatic passage in “A Plea for Excuses” where Austin excuses himself from speaking about linguistic phenomenology in order to assert the fact that the conscience refined by words is the refinement and education of our perception.

When we examine what we should say when, we are looking again not merely at words (or meanings’ whatever they may be) but also at the realities we use the words to talk about: we are using a sharpened awareness of words to sharpen our perception of, though not as the final arbiter of, the phenomena. For this reason I think it might be better to use, for this way of doing philosophy, some less misleading name than those given above—for instance, “linguistic phenomenology”. (Austin 1962, 182)

It is in this theme of differences and resemblances (a common theme with Wittgenstein) that ordinary, natural realism is constituted; ‘natural,’ to borrow an expression Hilary Putnam (2001) used regarding Austin, James, and Wittgenstein. The distinctions that establish ordinary language philosophy, notes Cavell, are natural, drawn from observation, not manufactured like those of philosophers and theorists of language:

One of Austin’s most furious perceptions is of the slovenliness, the grotesque crudity and fatuousness, of the usual distinctions philosophers have traditionally thrown up. Consequently, one form his investigations take is that of repudiating the distinctions lying around philosophy – dispossessing them, as it were, by showing better ones. And better not merely because finer, but because more solid, having, so to speak, a greater natural weight; appearing normal, even inevitable, when the others are luridly arbitrary; useful where the others seem twisted; real where the others are academic. (Cavell 1969: 103)

The inventory of differences creates the link between language and reality. It is in this sense that philosophy is fieldwork/groundwork. One then understands Austin’s fundamental intuition, which Goffman will develop in a more complete way, that language itself is something to perceive, framed, like contextualized practice, and it is as practice that it will fit or not: “fit the facts more or less loosely” (Austin 1961: 108). So for him, “fit” indicates a concept that is neither ‘correspondence,’ nor ‘correction’, but rather “fit” as the appropriate character, the proper statement in the circumstance. In his later philosophy, Wittgenstein also describes this indissociably social and perceptive moment when agreement in language – human coordination – is a matter of keen observation and

adjustment to the action, yet also “found”, “met” as if the same contingency of “falling into place just so” defined agreement in language: *das treffende Wort* (Wittgenstein, PI II, XI)

In this agreement, in [what is] “achieved through mapping the fields of consciousness lit by the occasions of a word” (Cavell, 1969: 100), Austin registers the possibility of finding an ordinary adequacy to the world. This possibility is founded on the reality of language as the social activity of maintaining the world: conversation/conservation. Ordinary language is a tool; it represents experience and inherited perspicacity – a tool to mark differentiations. Consider, for example, the classification of actions in “Excuses” or the distinction at work in “Three Ways of Spilling Ink,” between spilling intentionally, deliberately, purposely – the minute detail of human action in its capacity for disaster, casualty.

Goffman, returning explicitly to Austin, articulates the accuracy of the perception of “what happens,” the access to reality (returning to William James’s chapter on the principles of psychology entitled “The Perception of Reality” [1890]), and the felicity of speech. In Felicity’s Condition, Goffman integrates the conditions of Austinian felicity with the condition of the interaction’s felicity, adding his characteristic discovery to the Austinian given. There is a definition of felicity common to Austin and Goffman: normality, and maintenance of the expressive order. The order present within the ordinary (interaction order), is defined by the threat of embarrassment or breakdown. The felicity is minimal (appearance of sanity) and maximal. On the one hand, it is easy to fail: the possibility of conversational failure sums up the vulnerability of human action, of the ordinary form of life. On the other hand, felicity sums up our chance to have a world – this new America, always unapproachable. Here, Goffman is the heir at the same time to the transcendentalist quest, the pragmatist investigation, and linguistic phenomenology. Moments of social disorganization – like moments of rupture in interaction, or more radically, like the irruption of mentally disturbed behavior in a family – are moments of loss: a loss of the experience itself. We saw that with his insistence on failure, Austin highlights the vulnerability of ordinary human action, defined on the model of the performative utterance, as what can turn out badly. Thus the pragmatic theme (the title “How to do things with words” was chosen by Austin for his William James Lectures in ironic homage to the pragmatist maxim) is inverted; action is articulated through speech, defined and regulated by failure, “going wrong”. Goffman defines the human character of action by taking a chance. Action means (analytically) that there is damage incurred to oneself and to others and that one takes risks (a threat to one’s face or of others) because of the circumstances of the action.

This is what the whole Austinian theory of excuses – which follows the description of the philosophy of language as fieldwork – shows. Excuses – what we say when it appears we have acted or done badly (awkwardly, inadequately, etc.) – excuses let us know what an action is, they let us begin to classify and differentiate what we gather under the general term ‘action’. Excuses are essential to human action – they do not in some way come “afterwards”. The variety of excuses shows the impossibility of defining agency otherwise than in the detail and diversity of our modes of description and clarification, in the styles of accomplishment (or non-accomplishment) of action, and in the manner or look that one wants to give it.

It is a matter of seeing the whole human form of life as vulnerable, defined by a constellation of possible failures, of ways that we have of compensating, of strategies that we have for forgiving or forgetting, for leveling things, and for swallowing our difficult condition as creatures of failure. Goffman, in “Cooling the mark out” examines cases where

it is necessary to support someone in the suffering of a radical social failure [Goffmanian interaction analysis assigns a place to ordinary disorders, agitations, embarrassments, shame, uneasiness in trespassing encounters, intrusions, offences, and violations at the surface of “normal appearances,” all of which make us suffer the fragility of the ordinary conceived as intimately connected to *order*. Concern with excuses and reparation due to others is indeed the transatlantic link from Austin to Goffman, who brings Oxford back to America and to Chicago – all the way to Goffman’s last great work, *Frame Analysis : Essay on the Organization of Experience*. The ordinary is redefined once again on American ground, and is redefined as reality itself, seen as itself vulnerable – to others, and to our perceptions. Ordinary language philosophy and, specifically, the discovery of speech acts are being linked to this problematic of the failure, transgression, and vulnerability of the social person. Cavell couples this vulnerability to the reality of this expressive body.

By introducing Oxford ordinary language philosophy to it, *Frame Analysis* achieves the Emersonian and pragmatist project of categorization of the ordinary: “to take ordinary activity seriously as a ‘paramount part of reality’”. Goffman returns to Dewey as well as to William James, using widely *The Perception of Reality*.

But here Henry James may be even closer to this conception of the ordinary that stems from Emerson. For James experience – our capacity to feel life in general and in detail – is constituted by our attention. He follows Emerson (and will somehow be followed by Dewey) in his idea that the most difficult is not (as the European epistemology taught us) to learn (or derive knowledge) from experience, but to HAVE an experience. Our problem, as Cavell beautifully says, is that we are *inexperienced*.

Experience is never limited and it is never complete; it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spider-web, of the finest silken threads, suspended in the chamber of consciousness and catching every air-borne particle in its tissue. [...]

The power to guess the unseen from the seen, to trace the implication of things, to judge the whole piece by the pattern, the condition of feeling life, in general, so completely that you are well on your way to knowing any particular corner of it—this cluster of gifts may almost be said to constitute experience. Therefore, if I should certainly say to a novice, “Write from experience, and experience only,” I should feel that this was a rather tantalising monition if I were not careful immediately to add, “Try to be one of the people on whom nothing is lost!” I am far from intending by this to minimise the importance of exactness – of truth of detail. (James, *The Art of Fiction*)

What is referred to here is a competence that is not only a matter of knowledge or of reasoning, but of adequate and particular expression. Here again, it is a question of the expression of experience: when and how to trust in one’s experience. The attention that James’ writing invites and sustains does not give us certainties; rather it makes uncertainty emerge: it makes experience itself an adventure in the strict sense (or, to speak after the manner of Emerson, a *true romance*). There is adventure, according to James, in every situation that mixes uncertainty and “the taste of life”. Experience itself, if one trusts it, becomes an adventure itself. This is maybe an unseen, but important and still living connection between transcendentalism and pragmatism.

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Joseph Margolis

Constructing a Person: A Clue to the New Unity of the Arts and Sciences

I

It is certainly true that no one has demonstrated the sheer falsity of claiming that whatever we count among the most distinctive things of the human world (persons, surely) or that whatever are rightly included among the most salient anthropocentric properties ascribed such things (a capacity for speech and self-reference, for productive and self-transformative agency, and for avowing beliefs, intentions, feelings and the like) are reducible in physicalist terms. Nevertheless, the prospects of a “human science” (a science of the human) confined in reductive terms are very slim indeed – effectively nil. So that *if* the admission of the realist standing of the human world obliged us to weigh seriously the compatibility between a causal theory of human agency and the usual causal canons favored in the physical sciences, we might be forced to concede that deciding what a true science entails would itself be hostage to the contingent difficulties of completing any reductive undertaking here.

The very idea of agency, I suggest, requires an “internalist” rather than an “externalist” causal model. Think for instance of Wittgenstein’s example of “my raising my arm”, which, speaking unguardedly, we say “causes” or “brings about” or (as I prefer to say) “utters” the action in question – which entails but does not cause “my arm’s rising.”¹ We cannot say that an agent’s *raising* his arm causes (in the externalist way) his arm *to rise*, because of course the bodily movement, the arm’s rising, is nothing other than the material event by which the enabling action is itself inseparably realized. The “uttering” of the action and the action “uttered” are never more than internally distinguished within a successful action: they are never more than notionally distinct, never jointly separable in the way the externalist model of causality requires; and the entailed movements of the arm that would ordinarily be identified and explained in the externalist way are no more than the logically dependent subfunctionally factored functioning “parts” of the molar action in question, hence *not* themselves actions in any pertinent sense at all. On the reductionist model, the would-be action should ultimately be no more than a selected set of movements of the kind just conceded, which would effectively retire agency in favor of some Humean-like externalist causal linkage (without reference to agents or persons); and on the agency model, what might otherwise have redeemed the reductionist thesis would now be incorporated, subsumed without distortion, as no more than externally related bodily movements answering to the factored subfunctions of the original action’s molar process, without reference to which *their* causal relevance would remain unspecified.

In this sense, the internalist and externalist models are reconcilable, but only on terms favorable to the agency model; on the externalist model, agency would be abandoned altogether or reduced to a *façon de parler*. It was, in fact, Arthur Danto’s very clever

¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953), Pt. I, §621.

conjecture (within the first decade of the publication of Wittgenstein's *Investigations*) that suggested that the linkage between actions and bodily movements (in Wittgenstein's example) held the key to how we might understand the conceptual linkage between paintings as artworks and mere canvases covered with paint, which obliquely afforded the perfect clue as to how to construe the conceptual relationship between human culture and physical nature – *a fortiori*, between the human and the natural sciences.² The fact that Danto took a fashionably wrong turn here is no more than a minor complication: the larger lesson rests with the structural analogies disclosed. As far as I know, Danto never explains the difference between nature and culture.

You begin to realize that Wittgenstein's extraordinary question renders the entire fabric of scientific explanation instantly vulnerable in a way it had never seemed before: we are no longer certain what causality means in the physical world or whether it applies in its usual way to human agency; we find ourselves unclear about how to mark the difference between the "natural" and the "human" worlds; and we begin to wonder about what distinguishes science from non-science and what to understand by the very idea of causal explanation. Certainly, there is no prospect of arriving *a priori* at a uniquely convincing picture of "the method of science": Hume and Kant – who, between them, gave the strongest possible reasons for impoverishing our conception of the self and whose influence in this respect may have had a considerable role to play in encouraging, in the 20th century, the return of an analytic bias against enriching that conception – might then be deemed to have been seriously mistaken in their grandest ventures. The methodology of the sciences would then be open to dispute in a very deep way: the idea of the unity of the sciences might remain as insistent as ever but now no longer on the basis of any fashionable model that favored reductionism or an externalist causal model or the primacy of an extensionalist idiom of description and causal explanation or indeed the irreplaceability of the covering law model of explanation.

Danto, I might add, took the wrong turn, not in Hume's and Kant's way by impoverishing our conception of the functional identity of persons but by compartmentalizing (I'm afraid) the analysis of human agency and the proposed reduction of actions to bodily movements; *a fortiori*, the reduction of paintings to painted canvases and speech to uttered sound, as far as numerical identity is concerned. If you allow these analogies to point to the right analysis of the conceptual linkage between culture and nature (which I judge Wittgenstein to have been alluding to) then the would-be reduction of historical deeds to mere bodily movements (by the rhetoric of external redescription applied

² See Arthur C. Danto, "The Artworld," *Journal of Philosophy*, IXI (1964); and *Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981). For a sense of Chisholm's extremely intricate efforts at identifying a person's or human agent's "causal contribution" to making something happen, see Roderick M. Chisholm, "On the Logic of Intentional Action," in Robert Binkley *et al.* (eds.) *Agent, Action and Reason* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), together with comments by Bruce Aune and Chisholm's reply. Chisholm may well have had Wittgenstein's question in mind at some level of reflection. The essay is clearly a "work in progress." An early incarnation of his view appears in "Freedom and Action," in Keith Lehrer (ed.), *Freedom and Determinism* (New York: Random House, 1966).

I don't subscribe to Chisholm's view but mention him as one of the principal proponents of "agent causation." My own thesis is that agency is a *sui generis* causal model applied to human persons but that persons are not the causes of *their* own actions (or utterances): their own actions are normally not the causes of their further actions; but their actions are the causes of both culturally significant (or culturally "penetrated") events as well as of mere physical effects, and externalist physical causes that are factorial "parts" of *their* actions are also the causes of further physical effects. Normally, we provide reasons (not causes) for supposing that a person has in fact "uttered" a causally potent action. This is an interpretive, not a causal, matter. Accordingly, the explanation of history, artistic production, and practical life is at once both causal and interpretive, which suggests the need to acknowledge the pertinence of an interpretive science.

to bodily movements that we wish to treat as actions) would ineluctably put at risk the coherence of any theory of persons or of the human sciences. There's the threatened *reductio*.³

We cannot manage by merely piecemeal strategies the reduction of action to bodily movement or of paintings to canvases covered with paint or speech to sound and hope to keep our account of the robust existence of persons or selves (ourselves of course) free of reductive risk. All of these bits of analysis must cohere together. Similarly, we cannot insist on the unity of science ranging over the human sciences in the same way the doctrine is said to apply to the natural sciences, as by the positivists, if the theory requires (as it obviously does) an externalist model of causality that could not be applied to human agency unless the agency of human persons were itself reducible – but not otherwise. These interlocking conceptual linkages are much too complex to be treated lightly. Wittgenstein's question cannot be easily answered.

In fact, the realist standing of human persons is well-nigh irresistible, even where it is combated by skillful strategies. Because reductionism in its strictest sense does not actually require the elimination of persons or even the defeat of every form of dualism; because no thoroughgoing reductionism has ever achieved a degree of mastery sufficient to tempt us in the direction of eliminativism; because, for technical as well as practical reasons, the sheer collection of data, our unquestioned reliance on the resources of experience, the proposal and testing of explanatory hypotheses, deliberate commitments to tasks and purposes of consequence make no sense at all without the presence of human persons. This is the larger meaning of P. F. Strawson's well-known objection to the "no-ownership" theory of perception and thought, although Strawson himself is remarkably lax in his account of persons.⁴ It's also the larger meaning of opposing the usual forms of the so-called "supervenience" theory of the mental – Jaegwon Kim's for instance. You have only to think of contrasting Hegel with Kant and Thomas Reid with Hume to appreciate the implied contest.

Strawson's argument and the argument against Kim draw on surprisingly similar strategies, though they are applied in opposite directions and may be rendered well-nigh vacuous. In effect, Strawson's argument, which captures a very strong intuition of what may be called philosophical grammar, holds that feelings, perceptions, thought, intentions and the like must be "adequated" to some existent "subject," agent, organism, or self capable of "possessing" or manifesting "mental states"; such states and occurrences, as of sleep and memory (as we now understand matters), cannot (Strawson argues) be merely contingently or "externally" predicable of the subjects that possess them, though Strawson mistakenly believed that what it was to be a "subject" hardly needed to be elaborated by much to make the point.

Kim's argument, which treats the mental as supervening on the physical in accord with strict causal laws and which supports in that way (and is supported by) the thesis of the "causal closure of the physical" nevertheless fails (for question begging reasons) to come to terms with another intuition of philosophical grammar, namely, that (as in treating a chess move as causally efficacious, in accord with the sense of Wittgenstein's example) a feeling or a thought must not only be possessed by a subject, as an action must be embodied in a physical movement, but the "internal" causal linkages involved can be (dependently) specified *on and only on* the logically prior admission of the would-be supervenient state or occurrence in question – which, of course, implicates the human subject. Thus the material

³ This is the effective upshot of Danto's *Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, Ch. 1.

⁴ See P. F. Strawson, *Individuals: A Descriptive Metaphysics* (London: Methuen, 1959), pp. 95-103; there is an instructive note on Wittgenstein at p. 95n1.

conditions pertinent to the causal efficacy of a chess move are meaningfully specified only as factorially internal “parts” of the would-be supervenient action itself: a chess move may be locally performed in endlessly many ways, though, identified thus, chess moves remain open to informal causal generalizations but hardly to universal or necessary causal laws. Hence, Kim’s analyses put the cart before the horse.

II

Let me put this more forcefully since the problem that Kim considers is ubiquitous with regard to cultural things and to the cultural “penetration” of mind and action (as through language and what language conveys in the way of theory and interpretation and the like): the problem cannot be confined to the biology of the mind. I don’t believe Kim, who may well be the most skillful and unyielding reductionist of the current Anglo-American analytic movement, ever offers a reductionist account of languaged thought or speech; and yet, of course, without success there, reductionism would be dead in the water.

Apart from that, Kim is committed among his most recent discussions to the following thesis, which he calls “*conditional physical reductionism*, the thesis that if mental properties are to be causally efficacious, they must be physically reducible.” Now, this doctrine is meant to provide an answer to the problems of “mental causation and consciousness,” which, effectively, *construes* these questions in a peculiarly restricted way:

Each poses a fundamental challenge [Kim concedes] to the physicalist worldview. How can the mind exercise its causal powers in a causally closed physical world? What is there, and how can there be, such a thing as the mind, or consciousness, in a physical world?⁵

It’s important to understand that the distinction of the cultural world and of the human sciences and studies that address that world *requires* the defeat (or stalemate) of Kim’s version of reductionism (which affects the fortunes of a very large swath of familiar forms of the doctrine); but then we must also see why supervenientism fails on its own terms.

The answer is straightforward but needs some care. It’s worth remarking that Kim’s solution is not troubled by any hint of dualism; on the contrary, Kim regards his thesis as made stronger by its compatibility with dualism: because of course dualism would have no adverse bearing on the causal question *if* Kim’s “conditional physical reductionism” were true.

That would count as an interesting gain – compatible for instance with epiphenomenalism and the classic forms of emergentism. It helps to explain why Kim’s usual treatment of the “mental” (wherever the mental plays a causal role) deliberately yields in the dualist direction – though not of course in any way meant to agree with Descartes’s causal doctrine. Tangential questions, you realize, threaten to overwhelm us here: we must keep our discussion of the mental as close as possible to the cultural “penetration” and transformation of our biological gifts; we must hold fast to the agency of persons; and we must keep before us the differences between the human and the natural sciences. These are our principal touchstones.

The trouble with Kim’s supervenientism is that it completely neglects a natural option (a stronger option in my opinion) that arises in connection with the distinct kinds of

⁵ Jaegwon Kim, *Physicalism, or Something Near Enough* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 5, 13.

evolution separately implicated in consciousness (or mind) and in the cultural world. For one thing, if dualism is a conceptual scandal both metaphysically and causally, then it's more reasonable to treat the evolution of mind and culture *non*-dualistically if we can – and of course we can. And for another, it's reasonable to think of the evolution of mind as thoroughly biological, but not the evolution of culture – hence not the cultural transformation or *Bildung* of the mind.⁶ For even if the “mental” and the “cultural” possess *physical* features (as perception, thought, and speech do), Kim's entire argument would still risk irrelevance. Indeed, it's not only possible – it's true – (i) that there are events that we characterize as mental or culturally significant that possess physical features of their own and produce effects in the physical world that cannot be convincingly replaced by mere physical sequences: a verbal insult, say, that produces anger and the reddening of the face; and (ii) that what is “emergent” here in some pertinently evolutionary sense is *not* “supervenient” according to Kim's formula, because of course supervenience is explicitly dualistic whereas cultural emergence is not and because the material realization of the culturally emergent is logically inseparable from what is actually emergent. How could it be otherwise?

If you grant all this, you grasp the sense in which Kim's argument relies on a deep equivocation that he seems never to have addressed or to have thought needed to be addressed. He's missed the most important possibility! Here's the evidence:

Mental properties [Kim says] supervene on physical properties, in that necessarily, for any mental property M, if anything has M at time t, there exists a physical base (or subvenient) property P such that it has P at t, and necessarily anything that has P at a time has M at that time.⁷

But this cannot be true or even relevant if there are no psychophysical laws or reductionist laws by which to validate the last clause of Kim's formulation. But there are no laws linking the cultural and the physical, or mental powers that are culturally penetrated – because in introducing cultural events we already make provision for those *subfunctional* physical events by which the cultural is duly realized. In fact, quite independently, there is no known argument to show that there *are* any necessary or exceptionless causal laws at all, or that the commitment to exceptionless laws cannot be abandoned without loss.⁸

Admitting the larger argument against reductionism obliges its advocates and allies to muster a better campaign than they thus far have. Strawson himself, conceivably because he failed to distinguish (in *Individuals*) between his own (intended) theory of persons and

⁶ See, for a firm admission that the propagation of culture cannot be accounted for in terms of Darwinian evolution, Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); see, also Mario Bunge, “Emergence and the Mind,” *Neuroscience*, XI (1977), for a sketch of an emergentism that fails to consider viable forms of emergence that, like the evolution of the cultural world, are relatively independent of the organization of physical and biological systems on which they nevertheless build.

⁷ Jaegwon Kim, *Mind in a Physical World: An Essay on the Mind-Body Problem and Mental Causation* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), p. 9. It's fairly clear that Kim takes “supervenience” and “emergence” to be pretty nearly equivalent. There are such uses, but it is not in the least clear why Kim does not consider emergentisms that eschew dualism altogether and the unyielding doctrine that there must be exceptionless covering laws for all causal sequences. See, for instance, Jaegwon Kim, *Supervenience and Mind: Selected Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 134-135. See, also, Lloyd Morgan, *Emergent Evolution* (London: Williams and Newgate, 1923), cited by Kim in preparing his argument here. The *Physicalism* and *Mind* texts go no further. Kim's modest finding in all this comes to this: “it seems clear to me that preserving the mental as part of the physical world is far better than epiphenomenalism or outright eliminativism,” *Physicalism, or Something Near Enough*, p. 120. Yes, of course, but those are hardly the important options.

⁸ See for instance the strong argument offered in Nancy Cartwright, *How the Laws of Physics Lie* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983).

an unsatisfactory dualism, or (say) a self-styled hermeneut like Charles Taylor, who never quite realizes that the choice between reductionism and the hermeneutic vision cannot for the strictest of reasons assume a disjunctive form, cannot be an effective guide.⁹ The reason is plain: a consistent reductionism can perfectly well admit the entire human world and (as Kim argues) at least some standard forms of dualism, and still coherently seek to “reduce” the description and explanation of its features in materialist terms. That is in fact reductionism’s charge. Taylor neglects this elementary truth. In fact, given the history of what counts as “matter” in the physical sciences, it would not be beyond reason to recommend we dub the mental and the cultural as “material” phenomena themselves – obviating thereby the reductionist’s supposed advantage at a stroke.

But if you grasp all this, you cannot fail to see that the same question confronts us when we worry whether reductionism affords the right relationship between the natural and the human sciences or between the arts and the sciences or between theory and practice. The reason is simply that, *prima facie*, human persons *are* the ineliminable agents of all the arts and sciences – the “middle term,” so to say, of any argument recommending a redefinition (modest or radical) of what, philosophically, to understand an art or science to be. And there, though it may seem otherwise, the theory of the human self, the paradigmatic agent or subject of action and utterance – or of thought, perception and feeling, or of purpose, intention and commitment, or of responsibility, interpretation and appreciation, or of technology and creativity – is a theory about one and the same being. I don’t mean to disallow eliminativism in principle. But certainly, it would be absurd to ignore the fact that, in denying that there *are* persons, that is, existing persons – a thesis Wilfrid Sellars manfully tried to show us a way of eliminating¹⁰ though it’s very likely Sellars’s effort was meant to be no more than a thought-experiment, possibly a joke, since he willingly restored persons and what he called their “intentions” to their ordinary niches, by trivial rhetorical “addition” – *we* would still be bound to deny our own existence!

III

There’s a deep puzzle there. Strawson’s objection to the no-ownership theory may be reasonably reinterpreted as a grammatical rather than an explicitly metaphysical thesis, meaning by that that what we informally call “the mind” is intended to collect our sense of the functional coherence, even unity, of a set of distinctive attributes instantiated in the lives of human beings: “mind” is the nominalization of that sort of functional unity, whatever may prove to be a perspicuous theory of the “I” or “self” or “soul” of the human world or its animal or (possibly) its machine surrogates among robotic selves. Derek Parfit, for instance, in what may be the first of his penetrating efforts to define what is minimally necessary in theorizing about the “subject” of thought, experience, memory, and action, failed to concede the full force of Strawson’s complaint – which, rightly applied, counts as a severe objection to both Hume and Kant (though for very different reasons).¹¹ Parfit disjoined attribute and referent grammatically (or logically) when he rightly objected to excessively grand theories of some substantive “I” ranging over the whole or large phases

⁹ On Strawson’s difficulties, see Bernard Williams, *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973). See, also, Charles Taylor, *Philosophical Papers*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

¹⁰ See Wilfrid Sellars, “Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man” and “The Language of Theories,” *Science, Perception and Reality* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963).

¹¹ See Derek Parfit, “Personal Identity,” *Philosophical Review*, LXXX (1971); and *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984).

of human life. Nevertheless, at least two very ardent eliminativists, Daniel Dennett and Paul Churchland, were, I think, literally convinced by Sellars's arguments.¹² Not, I may say, Sellars himself, as far as the evidence goes.

Also, in admitting the "existence" of persons we are not yet obliged (let it be noted) to hold that persons are or are not substances or entities of any canonically familiar sort (the Aristotelian sort, for example). Perhaps "person" need signify no more than the notional site or seat of certain culturally emergent competences that cannot be described or explained in terms of the merely natural biological powers of the animal species *Homo sapiens*. "Person" and "organism" may well be conceptually incommensurable distinctions though *not* for that reason incompatible categories affecting the would-be unity of the sciences. In any case we cannot rightly give an account of the "unity" of the sciences, or the unity of the arts and sciences or of theoretical and practical concerns, without a robust theory of the agency of persons, unless we turn (unwisely, as the evidence suggests) in the direction of reductionism.

The logic is clear but the metaphysics is disputed. It's worth pondering, therefore, why the admission of intelligent animals – dogs, elephants, chimpanzees, dolphins – does not oblige us to exceed the functional coherence and unity of such creatures' lives in the direction of the conceptually swollen theories usually reserved for humans. The obvious answer concerns the *sui generis* emergence of the cultural and the cultural penetration (and artifactual transformation) of our animal powers and the absence among the most intelligent animals of more than an incipient form of proto-cultural learning too weak to give evidence of any artifactual "I." It's the artifactual "I," which the mastery of language entails and makes possible, that compensates more than adequately for the impoverished theories of Hume and Kant. The point is that confirmation of the presence of the "I" *is* empirical, though not phenomenal in the empiricist sense or, *a fortiori*, rationally necessary in the transcendental sense. We can actually witness the growth of the "I" among our children.

Persons or selves, I would say, are, paradigmatically, the artifactual sites of our culturally acquired powers, exerted in whatever transformative ways they are through whatever is biologically given by our membership in *Homo sapiens*. It may then be ultimately more important to enrich our sense of the functional powers of persons than to speculate on any "substantial" difference between mind and matter. Kant's surprisingly misguided elaboration of what he calls the "concept or judgment" of the "I think" (his transcendental revision of Descartes's *Cogito: Ich denke*) – somehow added to (or made to "accompany") the putatively *completed* system of his transcendental categories – surely counts as an embarrassing lesson. But if that is true, then so, too, is Dennett's impoverishment of the human "mind," where what may be needed are promising thought-experiments capable of eclipsing eliminativist options¹³.

It comes as a surprise to discover how entrenched an animus there is against persons or selves in modern Eurocentric philosophy: either against their very existence (eliminativism) or against their possessing a perceptually discernible nature matching their apparent form of life – as, among 18th century theories, following the decline of rationalism, in the views of figures like Hume and Kant: after failing in the relevant regard, empiricism and transcendentalism have led the analytic temperament back to reductionism and dualism –

¹² See Daniel C. Dennett, *Content and Consciousness* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969) and *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Little Brown, 1991); and Paul M. Churchland, *A Neurocomputational Perspective: The Nature of Mind and the Structure of Science* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990).

¹³ See Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, Chs. 9, 13, 14. Compare Bernard J. Baars, *A Cognitive Theory of Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

our prevailing contemporary preferences. Hume cannot find any empiricist datum to count as the “I” of any of “us” – rightly so; and Kant is all but defeated by having to attach to his perfectly closed system of categories the external, oddly fitted, almost entirely undefended and unexplained function of the “I think,” which he renders as a surd that has no other purpose but to “accompany” or “introduce” (as he puts it) the categories themselves applied to sensuous intuitions – so as not to produce unwanted paralogsms.

We must remember not to impoverish our account of the human mind in our zeal to favor one or another theory of the various sciences and arts, or practical and theoretical concerns. There you have the decisive clue to the strategic importance of our conception of persons or selves in seeking a rapprochement between (say) the analysis of painting and literature and the analysis of physical processes and the existence of human societies. On its face, it seems preposterous to suppose that the description, interpretation, explanation, and appreciation of what obtains in the arts and sciences would never require the robust role of a reflective “I,” however subject it may be to historied conviction and evolving experience and interest. The 18th century was doubly victimized by the effective absence of the conceptual resources of modern evolutionary theory and the historied *sui generis* emergence of the cultural world from the biological: without these, it’s quite impossible to construe the human “I” as an artifactual achievement; and without that extraordinary invention, the entire puzzle of the human sciences would make no sense at all.

By the close of the 18th century, Hume and Kant take command of the two principal forms of subjectivism – one psychologistic, the other not – which in a curious way are inseparable from one another and plainly dominate a very large part of the subsequent history of philosophy down to our own day. Their theories, however, have impoverished our picture of the human subject, and have, as a consequence, provoked a profound reaction among the post-Kantian Idealists and their immense progeny ranging among the existentialists, the Marxists, the pragmatists, the champions of *Lebensphilosophie*, the hermeneuts, the Nietzscheans, the phenomenologists, the Freudians, the Heideggerians, the advocates of *Weltanschauungsphilosophie*, the Frankfurt Critical school, the Wittgensteinians, and others, who hurry to re-enchant the world by restoring an enhanced account of what it is to be a human person.

Here, I find the most important, most inventive sources of the philosophical recuperation of the human to be the following two 19th-century contributions: namely, Hegel’s notion of historicity and Darwin’s theory of evolution. Without pausing to explain for the moment the terms of art I favor here, let me say that Hegel provides the most important new conception of what may be termed “internal *Bildung*,” a notion (still borrowing from the German to explain the Greek) akin to Aristotle’s themes of *sittlich* education, as in his *Ethics, Politics, Poetics, and Rhetoric*, except for the fact that *Bildung* must be construed as a specifically enculturating form of instruction under the condition of historicity – distinctions Aristotle was all but completely unaware of, which surface incipiently in the 18th century in Vico and Herder and find their first great conceptual articulation in Hegel’s remarkable achievement.¹⁴

¹⁴ You will find a somewhat inchoate grasp of the *sui generis* world of human history and culture – in philosophical terms – in John McDowell’s *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994, 1996). See, also, *Reading McDowell: On Mind and World*, ed. Nicholas H. Smith (London: Routledge, 2002). McDowell tries to use Aristotle’s and Kant’s conceptual resources in order to capture something close to Hegel’s and Gadamer’s notions of *Bildung*, but the effort is abortive. That the effort was made as late as the end of the 20th century by one of the most promising younger figures of Anglo-American analytic philosophy is something of a surprise. I think one cannot make sense of it without conceding that the influence of Hume’s and Kant’s conceptual economies (with regard to the characterization of the self or human subject or person) are as strong as they ever

Hegel's theory is an expression of high philosophy, but Darwin's is not. Darwin provides the essential empirical grounds for the elaboration of what (by a term of art) I shall call "external *Bildung*," meaning by that the gradual evolution of prehuman and proto-human modes of intelligence and communication close to achieving the rudiments of true language and the forms of self-reference and self-identity and other *sui generis* skills that (we take to) constitute the first appearance of those all-important cultural artifacts – those "second-natured" hybrid creatures – we call persons. Of course, affirming all this counts as issuing a very large promissory note. But I must offer a more pointed sense of the novel "entity" I'm enlisting before we allow ourselves to become completely occupied with its defense.

I take persons to be a certain kind of cultural construct, enjoying realist standing as such, which, if true, could not have been rightly defined philosophically until about the turn into the 19th century or after Darwin. This literally means that, for somewhat more than the first two millennia of the whole of Western philosophy (which is itself nearly the whole of Western philosophy), it was literally impossible to formulate a reasonably correct "metaphysics" or "philosophical anthropology" of the human. I find that a stunning admission, closely related (in my mind) to the explanation of Plato's futile attraction to the Forms when, defining the virtues in the elenctic dialogues, Socrates clearly lacks any conceptual resources that might have made it possible to avoid admitting the Forms – in proposing (say) the radical idea of the cultural construction or constitution of the virtues themselves, a thesis that very naturally matches the idea of the cultural construction of persons. Think of the paradox of attempting to explain the Socratic virtues in a Darwinian world in which the human species had not yet evolved! To grasp the lesson is to grasp the insuperable impoverishment of rationalist, empiricist, transcendentalist, and Idealist options: we cannot advance beyond one or another constructivist constraint.

Plato clearly has the use of the concept of *paideia* (internal *Bildung*) but not external *Bildung* in anything like the sense that would admit the primordial appearance of the human. I find it suggestive to think of persons as "natural artifacts," meaning by that that, in their merely biological niche, they are incompletely formed for their characteristic cultural role; hence also, that their biological gifts prepare them for their "second-natured" enculturation: their mastery of a home language, for example.¹⁵ The human sciences are focused on the *sui generis* powers of a hybrid being that is "artificial by nature" (that is, by becoming "second-natured"). If then you take the liberty of characterizing mind and culture as "material" – meaning to equate the natural and the material uncontroversially – you realize that you've stalemated reductionism, dualism, and eliminativism at a stroke without yet declaring what the distinction of the human world actually is.

Let me put the point a little more quarrelsomely. Aristotle, I suggest, never needed to invoke what I'm calling "external *Bildung*" because, whatever his temptation, he never seriously exceeded a *sittlich* reading of the normative (if I may put the matter thus); whereas, already in the *Republic*, Plato pursues the supposed discovery of the ultimate Forms by which all questions of right conduct and right belief are said to be governed. Hence, Aristotle constructs a reasonable picture of the good life and the good *polis* largely in terms of his comfortable attraction to Athenian life; similarly, a reasonable picture of the best of Greek tragedy, in accord with his preference for Sophocles. Whereas Plato makes it

were in the 18th century. For a glimpse of Hegel's sense of "Bildung," see his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), Introduction.

¹⁵ I take the term from Marjorie Grene, "People and Other Animals," *The Understanding of Nature: Essays in the Philosophy of Biology* (Dordrecht: O. Reidel, 1974).

clear that, on the strength of Socrates's project (in the *Republic*), Homer and the most admired poets will have to be exiled from the ideal state. *If* the Forms must and can be contested, then, as history makes clear, we cannot fail to address the question of "external *Bildung*," since the choice of supposedly real norms of goodness and truth would still confront us if we conceded that truth and goodness must have an artifactual provenance. I view that as a radical option to which we are inexorably driven.

IV

Once you glimpse the force of this last challenge, you begin to see the extraordinary paradox produced by Hume and Kant in impoverishing (in their very different ways) the notion of the "I," the notion of the subject and agent of everything distinctly human. As I say, the self becomes a surd in Hume's official philosophy: Hume retreats very cannily (when he wishes) to the idiom of ordinary humanity when, very sensibly, he overtakes the scandalous threat of the "no-ownership" thesis; for his part, Kant enriches the transcendental subject's judgments regarding the standing of Euclid's geometry, moral obligation, and the disinterested pleasure of natural beauty; but he never quite acknowledges how much more in the way of conceptual resources he actually needs in order to account for instance for at least the history of science (if not also the history of morality and an engagement with the fine arts) and what in particular he needs to acknowledge transcendently about the "I"'s agency apart from the categories and pure intuitions the "I" applies to sensuous intuition. He simply does not assign sufficiently detailed powers to his transcendental ego to accomplish its usual chores even with respect to the principal kinds of judgments he examines – or to explain how those powers arise.

Kant's third *Critique* provides the most notorious evidence in support of the charge, particularly if you read its argument as an emendation of the first *Critique*. There's next to nothing in the first part of the third *Critique* – bearing on the resources of the mind – to account in transcendental terms for any familiar creative or critical practice regarding the fine arts – or "language" or "history" or "culture" in the large. Kant is driven, for example in his gymnastic speculations about new ways to trick the faculty of imagination into applying the concepts of the understanding to our interest in artworks (or our appreciation of beauty in nature of course), in a way that would not violate his well-known taboo against treating aesthetic judgments as cognitive in any sense. This is a hothouse quarrel, I concede, but it yields a compelling lesson nevertheless. I'm interested here not so much in the local puzzles of moral and aesthetic theory as in the consequences (for any compliant philosophy) of Kant's having impoverished our conception of the "I" – *and* his having failed for that reason to realize how doing *that* renders every part of his own philosophy conditionally suspect and arbitrary. Hard as it is to believe, Kant seems not to have noticed that the entire structure of the first *Critique*, preeminently the strategic function of the closed system of the categories and pure intuitions of the understanding, depend on the legitimate cognitive powers of the "I" rather than on the seeming sufficiency of our guesses at the completeness of his proposed run of fundamental categories. In any case, you cannot have the one without the other.

We're speaking here of the most influential philosophical mind of the last two and a half centuries. Kant simply abstracts all that he can say about his transcendental subject (the "I think") *from* whatever, *independently*, can be derived from his account of the various kinds of judgment he allows; but these are themselves drawn up only dialectically – that is, *from* a quarrelsome literature, *not* from any examination of the salient

competences manifest in actual practices in any of the arts or sciences.¹⁶ In fact, the “free play of the imagination” featured in the third *Critique* has led figures like Wilhelm Dilthey and Ernst Cassirer to weigh the possibility that Kant may have signaled the need for a looser account of the “system” of the categories than he offers in the first *Critique* – in order, precisely, to account for the historical nature of human being itself (Dilthey) or the emergence of novel “symbolic forms” (Cassirer) that may not be able to be accounted for on the basis of Kant’s original system.

I am concerned here to demonstrate how impossible it is to justify any plausible account of the admitted work of the sciences and arts without a ramified theory of the nature of the human self. I’ve dwelt on Kant’s and Hume’s theories of the self in order to remind us of just how impoverished a picture Western philosophy was obliged to draw on by the end of the 18th century (at the very dawning of “modern” modern philosophy, ushered in by Kant’s great revolution) and how through the work of analytic philosophy in the 20th century we have somehow returned once again to the impoverishment of the concept, signaled in different ways (as I’ve suggested) by strategically placed figures like Wilfrid Sellars and Charles Taylor.

Let me clinch the point, therefore, by merely citing what Kant offers in abruptly introducing the idea of a cognizing function, the “I think,” which he calls a “concept” or “judgment” but which has no other function to perform except what is confined as follows:

The I think [Kant affirms] must be able to accompany all my representations; for otherwise something would be represented in me that could not be thought at all, which is as much as to say that the representation would either be impossible or else at least would be nothing for me

It is only because I can combine a manifold of given representations in one consciousness that it is possible for me to represent the identity of the consciousness in these representations itself, i.e., the analytical unity of apperception is only possible under the presupposition of some synthetic one.¹⁷

There’s the *deus ex machina* of Kant’s first *Critique*: all of the analyses of the sciences and arts, of theoretical and practical matters, of judgment and sensibility, are formulated (by Kant) without sustained or direct attention to whatever is problematic about experience or practice or the influence of history or prejudice or perspective or the *Bildung* of a human being. This, of course, was Herder’s prescient worry and the focus of Hegel’s profound correction.

But apart from these instructive details, the most forceful demonstration of what must be recovered belongs decisively to Ernst Cassirer, though the lesson’s already obscurely adumbrated in Kant himself and among the post-Kantian Idealists and their progeny. Cassirer’s “philosophy of symbolic forms” is at once a Hegelianized eclipse of the adequacy of Kant’s transcendentalism and an attempt at recouping the Hegelianized possibilities of a Kantian-like reformulation of the “I think” that effectively admits the *a posteriori* standing of the resultant transcendental definition of the “categories” of “all” our *Wissenschaften* (sciences, studies, arts, technologies) constructed under the condition of history and historicity. Cassirer “commits” himself to Kant’s transcendental outlook but does not actually “demonstrate” the necessity of the transcendental categories. In effect, he

¹⁶ I pursue the theme – with regard to the philosophy of art – in *Aesthetics: An Unforgiving Introduction* (Belmont: Wadsworth, forthcoming 2009).

¹⁷ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, §16.

converts Kant's "critique of *reason* [into] a critique of *culture*."¹⁸ The truth is, Cassirer *supersedes* the Kantian categories by introducing an openended evolving set of "symbolic forms": most tellingly perhaps in his account of the late phases of modern physics. He's aware of this (and admits the fact obliquely), but avoids a direct confrontation with the Marburg Kantians. There's the upshot of the Kantian heritage for our time.

Which is to say: the resources of the productive or creative agency of the "I" cannot be construed abstractly (in the manner of Kant's first *Critique*) but must follow the actual exemplars of how history and experience are concretely exploited. In effect, the entire fund of cultural history informs our picture of the inventive powers of the "I." That is precisely what Hegel attempts to gather in his critique of Kant: what cannot possibly be defined or transcendently confirmed according to Kant's conception. It would not be unreasonable therefore to read Kuhn's *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*, Hegel's *Aesthetics*, and Cassirer's *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* as pointed reflections on the functional powers of the "I think" in the segregated spaces of science, moral reflection, the aesthetics of fine art, history, mythic imagination, religion, technology, semiotics, interpretation, and whatever other sectors of human interest Kant fails to feature; and to see in their kind of contribution the need to oblige Kant's transcendental inquiries to address the very problem he bruits in acknowledging the nearly completely neglected role of the "I." The analysis of the "I" and the analysis of its powers are inseparable.

Seen this way, there is and can be no principled disjunction between concepts and categories: the *a priori* is no more than *a posteriori* while remaining a second-order conjecture; there cannot be any universally adequate closed system of the categories of description and explanation; general predicates make sense only in the context of their provisional exemplars, which must themselves be continually replaced with evolving experience; every vestige of strict universality and substantive necessity must and can be retired; inquiry (of every kind) must be inherently openended, subject to potentially radical revision however regulated by our evolving notions of the relative adequacy of our experience and theories; and the unity of all such efforts, whether among the sciences or between the sciences and the arts, cannot but depend on our theories of how persons are culturally constituted and what we take their evolving "natures" to be.

V

In this sense Cassirer's penchant for the idiom of universality and necessity (a Kantian disorder, let us say) must be set aside in the same way Hegel's extravagances are, by redefining the continuum of the finite and the infinite in terms of the moving but insuperably inaccessible "limit" of human inquiry, which bids fair to facilitate (in a new way) the unity of the arts and sciences. The prototype of this mode of reconciliation, incipiently perceived among the post-Kantian Idealists, was perhaps most perspicuously remarked, in terms of rational hope more than of accessible knowledge, somewhat later than the middle of the 19th century, somewhat after the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species*, by that oddly transplanted German Idealist the American pragmatist Charles Sanders Peirce, whose theories Cassirer was aware of and in certain important respects unexpectedly shared.¹⁹ Cassirer simply restricts the more strenuous Kantian idiom to the

¹⁸ Carl Hamburg, "Cassirer's Conception of Philosophy," *The Philosophy of Ernst Cassirer*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp (La Salle: Open Court, 1949), pp. 77, 86.

¹⁹ See my "Rethinking Peirce's Fallibilism" *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, XLIII (2007).

compartmentalized space of his “symbolic forms”; but he does not treat the “forms” as demonstrably necessary categorial constellations – or as “complete.”

In any case, Cassirer locates a particularly strategic – in fact a decisive – piece of evidence regarding the physical sciences that confirms the inherent provisionality of Kant’s entire table of transcendental categories: which, once admitted, marks the historicity of explanatory theories among the physical sciences, the *a posteriori* standing of transcendental apriority (when separated from transcendentalist presumptions); and, most important, the need for an enriched account of the “nature” of human agents and inquirers, which ranges over the whole of human life (including the arts, religion, and myth) often against the scientific models of science that still prevail.²⁰ All of this bears directly on the prospect of reconceiving what it is to be a science.

Cassirer himself seems to have believed – it’s the nerve of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* – that the model of transcendental necessity and universality in Kant’s first *Critique* is resilient enough to accommodate the “classical” system of Galilean-Newtonian dynamics [and] the principles on which it rested [drawn from “observed phenomena” in such a way that] the basic framework of physical reality seemed to have been established once and for all [as well as that deeper] revolution in method in the field of physical theory [first developed by Heinrich Hertz and Wilhelm Helmholtz, which turned away] from the copy theory of physical knowledge [based on sensory representation] to [favor] a purely symbolic theory.

That is, turned away from confining explanatory theory to the limited data of sensory perception (applied to conceptually instantiated *explananda* and *their matched explanantia*) in order to treat perceptual data in a freer way – as “signs” of their compliance with independent, mathematically invented abstract functions, no longer constrained by the *initial* categories governing sensuous intuition in Kant’s sense (but to which, within the resources of some present history, the observable data could then be shown to conform).²¹ The upshot of this single, seemingly small adjustment is philosophically electric. It shows unmistakably that Cassirer eclipsed the supposed “completeness” of Kant’s categories even as he presented himself as an orthodox neo-Kantian: it marks the nerve of the radical revision, within the Kantian movement, of the very idea of a closed system of description and explanation.

If you consider the transformation Cassirer carefully flags here, you begin to see that his own loyal and generous adherence to the Kantian philosophy – or to as much of the Marburg interpretation as he dared concede – may already be too sanguine for the Hegelian innovations he’s also adopted. They already implicate a conception of an active subject – an “I think,” if you like, or, better, an “I” capable of inventing in the freest way explanatory proposals of a hitherto unforeseen “transcendental” sort, well beyond the assured ken of Kant’s “completed” table of transcendental categories (and his “I think”). That is part of the upshot of Cassirer’s conception of “symbolic forms” applied particularly among the

²⁰ See my *The Unraveling of Scientism: American Philosophy at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).

²¹ Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 3, trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), p. 20.

²² The best (brief) demonstration of the now-contingent nature of the Kantian *a priori* that I’m familiar with appears in C. I. Lewis’s classic paper, “A Pragmatic Conception of the *A Priori*,” *Journal of Philosophy*, XX (1925). The argument, therefore, takes a pragmatic turn, which is precisely what explains the strong convergence between the views of Peirce and Cassirer.

²³ See, for instance, A. G. Cairns-Smith, *Genetic Takeover and the Mineral Origins of Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

sciences and judiciously extended to the spheres of myth, art, language, history, and the like, regardless of Cassirer's "official" use of Kant's transcendental idiom.²²

My own conjecture has it that what must be added *here* cannot be slimmer than whatever may be required in admitting creativity and agency among the arts, technology, philosophy, and practical life. There's the point of pursuing Kant's failure to fulfil his own transcendental goal. This may be fairly counted as the beginning of "modern" modern philosophy, sketched first in Hegel's classic anticipation in the *Phenomenology* – however unmanageably for his successors. Once you admit that the sciences are artifactual constructs of a kind no longer minimally restricted to the boundary conditions of sensory experience (either descriptively or explanatorily) and open, as a consequence, to a new sort of confirmation under conditions of historicity prepared to abandon all presumptions of necessity and universality, there can be no antecedent limitations on explanatory concepts and categories that could possibly vindicate Kant's original convictions regarding transcendental closure or the limitations Kant imposes on the "I think." Kant's picture is already too thin for Cassirer's needs!

The fact is that the original appearance of organismic life may have been due to contingencies of a fortuitous and probabilistic sort that cannot be shown to depend on causal laws of the classic kind.²³ Universality and necessity may be conceptual extravagances that finite inquiry cannot validate – however useful such idealizations may prove to be. Here, the contingencies of the arts, politics, natural-language discourse, history, and the adequacy of institutional practices fitted to all the contexts of human interest militate against the presumption of ever discovering "the" changeless order of things. It's in this sense that the new unity of the arts and sciences depends on the cognitive complexity of the role we assign the human subject in all our inquiries. Cassirer has put his finger on a decisive *reductio* of the Kantian orthodoxy he does not directly attack.

There are indeed some telltale oddities in Kant's first *Critique* that (against the *Critique's* intention) hasten the eclipse of Kant's version of his own transcendental revolution. If, for instance, you treat Euclid's geometry and Newton's physics as the natural sites of Kant's way of proceeding philosophically, then it's quite impossible to make compelling conjectures about the necessity, universality, fixity, or completeness of Kant's table of basic categories – except conditionally, relative to whatever is generated in the actual history of science: the contingent successes of what Kant calls the faculty of understanding (*Verstand*) must then be seen to introduce no more than a run of empirically contingent concepts for which, on Kant's own say-so, reason (*Vernunft*) is expected to discern those deeper universal categories that necessarily inform whatever concepts belong to any particular interval of historical adequacy. But the idea was wildly off the mark with respect to both non-Euclidean geometry and relativity physics – and, as we now realize, it had to be. It takes but a moment's reflection to grasp the telling fact that historicity and universality are bound to be finally incompatible.

If the theory-laden "givens" of perceptual experience are themselves emergently or historically contingent, then the transcendental universals under which they are rightly subsumed cannot be more than conditional as well. Consider only that we seem capable of endlessly improvising new concepts and categories to match evolving experience – at precisely the same time that experience obliges us to make the effort! How could we possibly claim that any closed system of categories would be sufficient for all time? Nevertheless, it's here, precisely, that Kant reverses the seemingly sensible order of things

²⁴ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B143-144.

²⁵ See Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, §§20-22; compare §16.

– in order to ensure the apriorist standing of his own thesis. He holds (as, in effect, we've seen) that “the categories arise independently from sensibility merely in the understanding,” and that in this sense “the manifold that is given in a sensible intuition necessarily belongs under the original synthetic unity of apperception, since through this alone is the unity of the intuition possible.”²⁴

Kant never shows that this must be true, and indeed, given Cassirer's argument, the claim is defective on its face. For the “I think” ensures the unity of the categories merely by introducing “the logical function of judgments” and confirms (tautologically) that the completeness and closure of the system of our categories are rationally assured, since otherwise no “deduction” of the categories could claim its necessary standing.²⁵ Extraordinary trickery! That is, Kant does not grasp the falsity of his own constraint on the intelligibility of the physical sciences for the same reason he cannot grasp the conceptual limitation of the Newtonian picture of a valid physical science (one, say, that claims not to “feign hypotheses”): he was unable to anticipate the innovations of Hertz and Helmholtz in exactly the same sense in which he could not imagine a non-Euclidean geometry. But once grant that, we cannot fail to see that the categorial requirements of all of Cassirer's symbolic forms must be constructed and empirically testable rather than transcendently confirmed in Kant's apriorist sense.

Cassirer's discovery develops along entirely different lines from Kant's own philosophical strategy. What Cassirer demonstrates in taking account of modern physics' eclipse of the “copy theory” of science (which in Kant's book presupposes the passivity or receptivity of sensibility)²⁶ is nothing less than the knockdown evidence that the mathematized thought of modern physics (the *a priori* construction of mathematical “objects,” say) is indeed explanatorily productive just where it frees itself from a “reliance on sensuous or perceptual guides.” That is precisely its “intellectual triumph.”²⁷

²⁴ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A19-20-22/B33-34.

²⁵ See Harold R. Smart, “Cassirer's Theory of Mathematical Concepts,” in Schilpp (ed.), *The Philosophy of Ernst Cassirer*, pp. 256-259.

²⁶ See Thomas Nagel, “What is it like to be a bat?” *Philosophical Review*, IV (1974); and David Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) and “Facing Up to the Problem of Consciousness” and “Moving Forward on the Problem of Consciousness,” in *Explaining Consciousness – The ‘Hard Problem’*, ed. Jonathan Shear (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995-1997).

²⁷ See Chalmers, “Facing Up to the Problem of Consciousness,”

p. 10; compare Charles Taylor, “Self-interpreting Animals,” *Philosophical Papers*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

²⁸ Chalmers, “Facing Up to the Problem of Consciousness,” p. 11.

²⁹ See, for instance, Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, trans. W. R. Boyce Gibson (New York: Collier Books, 1962), “Author's Preface to the English Edition.” Hegel's and Peirce's phenomenologies, let it be noted, are completely unrestricted (as against privilege) when compared with Husserl's model.

³⁰ Cassirer and Peirce hold similar but not identical accounts of the triadic nature of representations, signs, symbols, and other semiotica. Cassirer is somewhat more explicit than Peirce about confining semiotic “objectivity” to what obtain *within* the space of particular symbolic forms – which corresponds to his analysis of the relative autonomy of mathematized “objects” introduced in the physics of Hertz and Helmholtz; whereas Peirce never entirely resolved the relationship between a realist and idealist account of science itself. See, here, Hamburg, “Cassirer's Conception of Philosophy,” pp. 82-85; Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 1, trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953), “Introduction and Presentaton of the Problem”; Susanne K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973); T. L. Short, *Peirce's Theory of Signs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); and Margolis, “Rethinking Peirce's Fallibilism.”

³¹ See, for instance, Alva Noë, *Action in Perception* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006).

Cassirer obviously goes beyond the most canonical of Kant's constraints: the inclusive and changeless categories said to govern all sensuous intuition. In doing that, Cassirer signals the cognate effect of additional creative possibilities bearing on categorial "thought" among inquiries involving other of Cassirer's "symbolic forms." But none of this would have been conceivable if we lacked a sufficiently enriched account of what the "I" signifies: the evolving, self-inventive self or agent of any human inquiry whatsoever – a figure closer therefore to Hegel than to Kant but distinct from both. Cassirer's innovation ranges without let or reference to Kantian systematicity over any sustainable inquiry. Cassirer obviously breaks with Kant's *transcendentalism* but is loath to admit the fact explicitly. There's the breakthrough that topples Kant's apriorism and signals the insuperably historicized cast of the *a posteriori* second-order conjectures of what a science or objective inquiry is or must be.

VI

I must make my amends now. I've been as careless as Hume and Kant about the nature of the human self. Well, perhaps not altogether, since we've gained important ground against their utterly disastrous and inexplicable retreat. Because it's obvious that neither Hume nor Kant – nor Sellars, to join the centuries in a pointed way – could possibly account for their respective analyses of mind and world without admitting *the full powers of a competent human agent*. (I have yet to explain what such an "agent" must be like. I shall leave that question largely unanswered here. The answer requires a fresh beginning.)

Indeed, very nearly the entire question has been reopened in recent years in a distinctly courageous (entirely serendipitous) way by a young Australian philosopher, David Chalmers. Chalmers confronts in great detail the entire reductionist and eliminativist brotherhood (to which he would otherwise happily belong but for the unresolved puzzle of "consciousness"). He intends much the same puzzle that was posed more than thirty years ago by Thomas Nagel with regard to the "subjective aspect" of phenomenological "experience," which has never been satisfactorily explained.²⁸ Nagel was right of course; but Nagel never cast his own challenge in a way that might have precluded dualism. That, ultimately, is what I think we must recover. Dualism is itself a relatively innocent (but blind) strategy for impoverishing our conception of the self along reductionistic lines.

Chalmers's question is not quite the deeper question Hume, Kant, and even Sellars signal (without answering). Nevertheless, what he offers mobilizes the entire literature of the philosophy of mind in a more perspicuous way than the 18th-century or the usual 20th-century theories of mind (which Chalmers effectively dismantles) had ever managed to afford. I mean: the question of what a person or self (a subject or agent) must be, in any sense that concedes a "first-person" or phenomenological dimension to human life.

Chalmers broaches no more than the question of consciousness biologically confined, and he does so only against the backdrop of an otherwise apparently adequate reductionism. But in pursuing the failure of reductionism *there*, he inadvertently opens the entire

³⁴ Herbert Feigl seems to have introduced the notion of "nomological danglers" into the literature of the philosophy of mind; Sellars's danglers are more radical. See Herbert Feigl, *The "Mental" and the "Physical": The Essay and a Postscript* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1958, 1967).

³⁵ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953), §621.

reductive undertaking to a measure of scrutiny that can no longer preclude the culturally “penetrated” (culturally transformed) powers of the artifactual selves that we are. The Kantian origins of positivism made it possible for positivism’s late Anglo-American progeny to ignore the post-Kantian and Hegelian complication for a very long time. But now that that company has itself begun to consider incorporating Hegel’s distinctive resources, Chalmers’s appealing challenge cannot fail to resonate with the latent lessons recovered for example by reviewing Cassirer’s deeper challenge. A similar confrontation addressed to the standard account of the methodology of the sciences in general featuring reductionism, the analysis of causality, and a commitment to exceptionless covering laws, is now in the process of being revived and deepened (in tandem with the first) by what amounts to a second reading of Kuhn’s *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Thomas Nagel’s well-known anticipation of Chalmers’s complaint required Chalmers’s added voice in order to be effective both in the setting of the philosophy of mind and in the philosophy of science – and in our reflections about culture and history.

There’s the matter Hume and Kant and Sellars, in addition to the champions of scientism and the laxer champions of “hermeneutics” in Charles Taylor’s sense, have largely ignored. The fact is, a “reformed” reductionist like Chalmers (reformed in rather the same sense in which an alcoholic is “reformed”) holds precisely the same minimal view about the *functional* powers of human agents (for instance, “the reportability of mental states,” “the ability of a system to access its own internal states,” “the ability to discriminate, categorize, and react to environmental stimuli,” “the integration of information by a cognitive system,” “the focus of attention,” “the deliberate control of behavior”) that Charles Taylor, as the devoted opponent of reductionism and scientism that he is, would surely be prepared to avow.²⁹ But they would intend completely different readings of the questions broached: both would restrict themselves to “biology” of course, but Taylor would feature hermeneutic concerns and Chalmers would regard his own examples as yielding to some form of reductionism or computationalism.

It’s here that Chalmers falters – just where Taylor misreads the persistent eligibility of the reductive option: for Taylor believes the experiential or phenomenological complication of the “functional” powers of persons instantly entails the defeat of reductionism, whereas Chalmers believes the “functional” aspect of the powers (just enumerated) *can* be accounted for reductively. It’s only the “additional” presence of consciousness or experience (in the biological sense) that threatens to defeat reductionism! Chalmers fails – utterly and tellingly – because he *separates* what he calls “the hard problem” of consciousness from “the easy problem” of all the functional achievements (according to his lights) of the “I’s” mode of functioning. But of course he means by this that the easy problems do not in principle require consciousness in his sense though they can tolerate its presence. Whereas the essential point remains that the artifactual powers of the “I” cannot be captured at all by any purely biological model of consciousness but requires an account of the hybrid form of reflexive intelligence (“self-consciousness,” if you like) that dawns only with the mastery of language and its accommodating culture. As I say, the “I” is thoroughly artifactual, the continually ramified achievement of the power of enlanguaged self-reference; whereas “mind” is initially emergent in the biological sense: in the human case, of course, the “I” is inseparable from the culturally “penetrated” (transformed, second-natured, hybrid) powers of what is originally given (biologically) as mind.

Both Chalmers and Taylor go terribly wrong. Both miss the deeper issue: the discovery that what belongs to the subjective experience and agency of persons is already inextricably implicated in *their functional ability to hear and comprehend speech, to see a Vermeer interior, to produce Michelangelo's David, to test a mathematized hypothesis of physical theory with regard to what may be sensorily perceived (in the way Cassirer stipulates).* There's the heart of the matter, the still-elusive link that ensures the common ground that the arts and sciences share. The functional treatment of computers need not be the same as the functional treatment of selves. Chalmers puts the point memorably – and innocently – thus: the easy problems [of consciousness] are easy precisely because they concern the explanation of cognitive *abilities and functions*. To explain a cognitive function, we need only specify a mechanism that can perform the function. The methods of cognitive science are well-suited for this sort of explanation, and so are well-suited to the easy problems of consciousness. By contrast, the hard problem is hard precisely because it is not a problem about the performance [or “causal role”] of functions [“in the production of behavior that a system might perform”]. The problem persists even when the performance of all the relevant functions is explained.³⁰

But that is also what is being contested! For if Chalmers's problem of consciousness remains unresolved – that is, if the consciousness *implicated in* the human version of the “functions” he concedes is not demonstrably reducible, if function and consciousness cannot be disjoined in the central human cases – then selves and persons (and *their* functions) cannot be reduced either. Until we find a satisfactory resolution, the theory of the human and natural sciences and of the sciences and arts will never escape the constructivist alternative I've been hinting at. Chalmers embraces as a problem what Sellars appears to dismiss in the way of a solution! But he fails to see that in advancing his worry about “consciousness” he himself has, by conceding Nagel's original challenge about reflexive experience, inadvertently opened the inquiry to include the enlanguaged and encultured complexities of “self-consciousness.” Seen this way, it's an open question whether, in the human paradigm, Chalmers's reductive solution of the “easy problems of consciousness” is not generally dependent on the solution to the “hard problem”; hence, that the extension of the reductive solution to so-called easy problems without invoking the hard problem of consciousness at all remains a benign concession condoned by the intransigence of the other.

There are, of course, different models of phenomenological perception to choose from – and, indeed, others that will surely appear in due time. But we can already see that it would be advantageous if our phenomenology avoided every form of cognitive privilege and foundational presumption (of the sort one finds in Descartes and Locke, in the original *Protokolsätze* of the Positivists, in Husserl's account of transcendental phenomenology,³¹ and of course in Kant's apriorism) without abandoning the artifactual nature of phenomenology itself. For phenomenology essentially features the conditions of reportage vis-à-vis what is “given” in any mode of first-person experience; and *that* cannot fail to be culturally penetrated.

There's the fatal limitation of any Kantian approach to phenomenology: Kant insists on the passivity of sensuous intuition. Hence, we must make provision, phenomenologically,

for the transformed (or *gebildet*) or culturally “penetrated” nature of the “given” (as sound is “perfused” by meaning when transformed into speech). This would account for a pertinent form of conceptual “adequation” between world and mind – within the working space of our artifactual modes of cognition (or interpretation or appreciation or the like). It also confirms a rough similarity between the point of Wittgenstein’s original question about action and bodily movement and Husserl’s question about the “natural” and what is putatively “pure” in the phenomenological sense: except that Wittgenstein eschews all privilege and Husserl’s solution relies on privilege.

You may then also anticipate that to admit the *gebildet*, hybrid, “second-natured” nature of our particular mode of life suggests a generic formula for specifying any and all versions of encultured mind (within the sciences or other possible “symbolic forms” of cultural engagement), according to which what counts as information, meaning, semiotic import of any kind can be effectively accessed by apt agents and selves whose brains and bodies and enviroing world are already coded for such feats. Notably, both Peirce’s theory of signs and Cassirer’s semiotics³² need not disallow the accessing of information outside the brain – as among computers, biochemical processes, causally affective actions, suitably constructed artifacts such as musical performances and paintings.³³

Considerations of these sorts begin to impose conceptual liens on what to suggest as a reasonable theory of the human self without actually privileging any particular “metaphysics.” Embracing the minimal lesson of Kant’s Copernican turn (corrected along Hegelian lines), as that has been construed from Kant’s time to ours, we may indeed acknowledge that there are always a number of promising – potentially incompatible – ways of modeling the human “subject” or “agent” with an eye to providing an adequate theory of culture or of the unity of the natural and human sciences or the sciences and the arts. Whatever has been adduced thus far is meant to be as neutral as possible relative to arguments already mounted. Seen this way, we are, I would say, plainly pressed in a direction that has not yet been seriously considered among the most influential movements of Western metaphysics, nor satisfactorily defined by other movements known to be sympathetic to conceptions like the one I have in mind.

Here an obvious (entirely provisional) economy suggests itself. For one thing, eliminativism has never come to terms with the “dangling” status of persons and their intentions,³⁴ which (as reported) Sellars is content to add (rhetorically) to what he calls his “scientific image”: I say, dismiss the option as completely inoperative – for instance, for failing to accommodate Cassirer’s insight about the import of the shift in physics from Galileo and Newton to Helmholtz and Hertz. For another, reductionism may be put on indefinite hold, inasmuch as no satisfactory exemplar has ever been formulated, though reductionism itself need never disallow the central mass of anthropocentric distinctions (including consciousness) normally invoked in speaking of selves and persons: I say, put reductionism on hold until it can bring a promising materialist (or functional) paraphrase to the table. For a third, dualism is a philosophical scandal or a seriously inchoate intuition; in fact, failed reductionisms often appear as disappointing dualisms. I say, dismiss dualism in

the same spirit in which it would be right to dismiss eliminativism. If, with me, you go this far, then I suggest there is no promising strategy left except a constructivism that accords with what I've been calling internal and external *Bildung* – particularly an account in accord with the latter, since the latter is meant to explain the sense in which the former is operative at all. If you allow this much, then it should be clear as well that our theories are bound to be guided by the Darwinian discovery. I see no better advice than a word in favor of combining these last reflections with the positive gains due to admitting the primacy of phenomenology and the penetration of the cultural.

I have not yet said what we should mean by the terms “person” and “culture” – or by “a person” and “a culture”; actually I've kept myself from answering. Because, for one thing, the argument I've just laid out is something of a prolegomenon to any fruitful answer of the definitional sort; and for another, because what we learn informally from what we take to be salient in that prolegomenon is likely to be more important in our grasp of a larger world of relations than whatever precision we may bring to theories and definitions grounded in a contingent and shallow intuition. I shouldn't want any quarrel about the limited merit of any specific posit of mine (regarding the definition of “person”) to detract from the force of an ampler line of reasoning (the one just sketched) that seems (to me at least) to lead irresistibly in the direction of:

(a) construing *persons* or selves as artifactual transforms of the members of *Homo sapiens*, constructed or constituted by acquiring certain fluent *sui generis* powers unique to themselves: speech for instance; self-reference; enlanguaged thought, perception, feeling, intention, judgment, interpretation, choice, commitment, creativity, and learning;

(b) construing *culture* as a historically specific ensemble of processes of internal and external *Bildung*: artifactually formed, collectively shared and transmitted among cohorts of aggregated persons, through the effective force of which new generations of persons are first formed and continually transformed, and through which, also, societies are kept viable, under the condition and effect of their self-transforming histories.

These are the touchstones of my theory, valid (if they are valid at all) in virtue of one very large conviction: namely, that the whole of the specifically human world is the upshot of the transformation of our biological talents – the incarnation of meaning in sound for instance, as in transforming sound into speech (internal *Bildung*) – a process first made possible, evolvingly, by the *sui generis* emergence from animal sources of true language and its attendant cultural powers (external *Bildung*). Whatever of the human world may then rightly claim independent standing of any kind – speech, history, behavior, institutions, art and technology, archives of any sort – will be seen to be hybrid artifacts “uttered” by individual and aggregated persons, intrinsically open to interpretation and altered meaning as a result of having been produced or interpreted or submitted to interpretation under the evolving powers of human inquiry.

But what does that entail, you ask, when contrasted with dualism, reductionism, and eliminativism? Minimally, the only possible answer that I can think of is some *sui generis* form of emergentism: *artifactual*, for one thing, because it depends on the artifactual incipience and evolution of true language, *not* Darwinian though it requires the overlapping contributions of biological and cultural evolution, where the second cannot be reduced to the first and is essentially different from it; and, for another, *indissolubly incarnate* in biological things (preeminently, our self-constituting selves and their second-natured aptitudes) or incarnate in mere physical things, as what selves can utter, do, create, or produce (as, say, speech, actions, paintings, machines, technologies, histories, traditions

and the like), hybrid transforms of natural things so constituted by virtue of the enlanguaged and encultured activities of apt selves.

If, now, we turn back to Wittgenstein's prescient question: "what is left over if I subtract the fact that my arm goes up from the fact that I raise my arm"³⁵ – a question Wittgenstein does not explicitly answer – we ourselves may now venture a distinctly worthwhile answer by way of construing "my raising my arm" as a metonym for encultured "utterances" of any and every kind. For one thing, there *can* be nothing "left over" since subtraction here, read literally, would entail an unacceptable dualism. *Per contra*, if the question is meant to query what is it that transforms a physical movement into an action (or a sound into a word, or a painted canvas into a painting), the answer is that it is rightly construed as what is duly "uttered" by the "utterance" of some person or persons – what, minimally, remains as culturally significant when the subtraction is completed.

Rearing an infant in a society of apt persons is, effectively, uttering a new person – transforming the infant into an apt agent within its home society. I utter a formal garden and a curse and a murder and a poem in different ways, but they all implicate the same "internalist" form of causality (if you agree to call utterance or agency a kind of causality). Our world is becoming increasingly artifactual, so that physical nature itself is abstractly constituted by a sort of subtraction akin to what Wittgenstein has in mind; that is, nature is so designated by the subtractive efforts of an artifactual science, even if it is not itself ught to have been culturally uttered or constituted as such.

That explains at a stroke the difference between the kinds of "objectivity" accorded the physical and the human sciences and arts and the sense in which inquiries and activities of every human kind implicate the role of persons in essentially the same way. We may then answer Wittgenstein thus: whatever might otherwise be deemed to be a "natural thing" (a thing that may be rightly described and explained in terms of natural causes) is judged, when deemed to belong intrinsically to the world of human culture, to have been transformed or penetrated so that it is rightly said to possess in a public way – *its* "nature" being adequated to its possessing in some objectively determinable way – indissolubly incarnate attributes of cultural significance and signification (expressive, representational, signfic, symbolic, semiotic, linguistic, intentional, institutional, normative, historical). Which, therefore, profoundly alters our conception of objectivity, a valid science, causality, the causal closure of the physical, the laws of nature, scientific inquiries beyond the scope of causal explanation among the physical sciences, truth, universality, material necessity, the rigor and nature of a human science and cognate disciplines, and the very idea of a science of interpretation.

This much, I think, is relatively uncontroversial to all philosophies that eschew eliminativism and dualism or that oblige reductionism to provide a reasonably promising exemplar of a science or discipline of its own choosing before reductionism itself may claim more than second-class citizenship. These are philosophies prepared to enrich our theory of selves or persons in ways that compare favorably with what is usually taken to be the normal run of competences of the apt members of a society of persons. Beyond all that, questions turn quarrelsome as they become more detailed – often therefore more interesting. In the meanwhile, we begin to see the general lineaments of a conception of the unity of the natural and the human sciences, and of the arts and sciences, that goes entirely contrary to the reductive motivation of the canonical accounts. It's the ubiquity of the self

that entails the unity of all the forms of human inquiry and agency. And the self is itself an artifact of the human form of life produced at long last by the processes of external *Bildung* now ubiquitously regularized in the historied forms of internal *Bildung*.



Michele Marsonet

Pragmatism and Political Pluralism

Pragmatists always had clear ideas about the relations between the natural and the social worlds. Most of them tell us, first of all, that human beings have evolved within nature as creatures that solve their survival problems through intelligence. The emergence of intelligence, on the other hand, must not be seen as a purpose of nature itself, but rather as our functional version of survival mechanisms such as physical force or numerousness. The systematic use of this intelligence in a context which is eminently social and communicative creates – through *cultural* evolution – a methodology of rational inquiry that enables us to develop, and test, *cognitive* models of the real to explain the structure of our experience. No doubt our science is the best instantiation of these cognitive models, but pragmatist thinkers, unlike the positivists old and new, by no means claim that it is also the completion of this work. Other responses are always required. In particular, we must create a sort of “superstructure” made up of values, many of which (i.e., cognitive values like coherence, comprehensiveness, simplicity, etc.) are useful instruments within the cognitive project itself. This explains why, for instance, economic considerations are certainly important in the conduct of our cognitive affairs.

However, when it comes to conducting our socio-political affairs,¹ these values, which can always be tested pragmatically, are also under determined. In other words, they do not lead to a specific and exact resolution of the issues at stake, but leave rather room for alternative and competing ways of conducting our inter-personal affairs. This means that abstract rationality alone is insufficient to enforce a consensus on social issues, and on a larger scale, ideological and political issues as well. The problem is that, on the purely theoretical side, such dissonance has no dramatic consequences. But on the *practical* side of public policy, any attempt to achieve resolution on these issues can have – and many times actually has – unfortunate consequences by way of producing conflicts. This should explain well enough why the criticism of all theories based on *consensus* is the starting point of many pragmatists’ social and political philosophy.

Nicholas Rescher, for example, deems the idea that social harmony must be predicated in consensus to be both dangerous and misleading. Rather, he argues that an essential problem of our time is the creation of political and social institutions that enable people to live together in peaceful and productive ways, despite the presence of *ineliminable* disagreements about theoretical and practical issues. These remarks, in turn, strictly recall the *practical* impossibility of settling philosophical disputes by having recourse to abstract and aprioristic principles. In the circumstances, the social model of team members cooperating for a common purpose is unrealistic. A more adequate model is, instead, that of a classical capitalism where – in a sufficiently well developed system – both competition and rivalry manage somehow to foster the benefit of the entire community (theory of the “hidden hand”). Certainly the scientific community is one of the best examples of this that we have, although even in this case we must be careful not to give too idealized a picture of

¹ It should be noted that no clear and neat border-line exists between the social and the political realms.

scientific research. Rescher, eventually, finds many similarities between the scientific and the business communities:

The pursuit of knowledge in science can play a role akin to that of pursuit of wealth in business transactions. The financial markets in stocks or commodities futures would self-destruct if the principle, my word is my bond, were abrogated, since no one would know whether a trade had actually been made. In just this way, too, the market information would self-destruct if people's truthfulness could not be relied upon. Thus in both cases, unreliable people have to be frozen out and exiled from the community. In cognitive and economic contexts alike, the relevant community uses incentives and sanctions (artificially imposed costs and benefits) to put into place a system where people generally act in a trusting and trustworthy way. Such a system is based on processes of reciprocity that advantage virtually everyone.²

Let us ask: why Rescher thinks that the idea of consensus may – and in many cases does – cause dangerous consequences? After all consensus, i.e. the uniformity of belief and evaluation, has been considered by many prominent philosophers of the Western tradition as an ideal both good and worth being pursued. Consensus, however, is essentially a matter of *agreement*, and the fact is that people sometimes agree on various sorts of things and sometimes (or, maybe better, most of the times) do not. At this point we are faced with two basic positions. On the one side (a) the “consensualists” maintain that disagreement should be averted no matter what, while, on the other, (b) the “pluralists” accept disagreement because they take dissensus to be an inevitable feature of the imperfect world in which we live. A pluralistic vision, therefore, tries to make dissensus tolerable, and not to eliminate it. Rescher clearly sides with the pluralistic field, and his pro-pluralism arguments pivot on the following remarks:

“The long and short of it is that consensus appertains to rationality as an ideal, not as a realizable ‘fact of life’. The points of ‘universal agreement among rational people’ are not a matter of an ultimately discovered de facto universal consensus people independently predetermined as rational. It is simply a matter of the meaning-standards that we who use this notion impose upon the idea of ‘rationality’ in the first place.”³

It follows that we use the concept of “consensus” in a rather circular way. Someone might bona fide believe that he or she is using it in a perfectly neutral manner but, actually, we always use predetermined standards in order to define who a “rational person” is.

Things being so, all theories of idealized consensus present us with serious setbacks. This is the case, for instance, with Charles S. Peirce. As is well known, Peirce takes truth to be “the limit of inquiry,” i.e. either what science will discover in the (idealized) long run, or what it *would* discover if the human efforts were so extended.⁴ By taking this path, thus, truth is nothing but the *ultimate* consensus reached within the scientific community. We can be sure that, once a “final” answer to a question has been found which is thereafter maintained without change, *that* is the truth we were looking for. This fascinating theory, however, has various unfortunate consequences. What concerns us in this context is that, for Peirce, there really exists an ultimate method of question-resolution which produces

² N. Rescher, *Cognitive Economy*, University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, 1989, p. 44.

³ N. Rescher, *Pluralism*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1993, pp. 9-10.

⁴ See C.J. Misak, *Truth and the End of Inquiry. A Peircean Account of Truth*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1991.

results acceptable by everyone and that, furthermore, equates factual truth with a sort of “long-run” consensus. Rescher rightly notes that “for Peirce, science is effectively a latter-day surrogate – a functional equivalent – for the medieval philosopher’s conception of the ‘mind of God’.”⁵

In our day the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas has in a way revived these Peircean insights, putting forward an influential theory to the effect that consensus indeed plays a key role in human praxis, so that the primary task of philosophy is to foster it by eliminating the disagreement which we constantly have to face in the course of our daily life. In his “communicative theory of consensus,” furthermore, he claims that human communication rests on an implicit commitment to a sort of “ideal speech situation” which is the *normative* foundation of agreement in linguistic matters. Consequently, the quest for consensus is a constitutive feature of our nature of (rational) human beings: rationality and consensus are tied together. A very strong consequence derives from Habermas’ premises: were we to abandon the search for consensus we would lose rationality, too, and this makes us understand that he views the pursuit of consensus as a regulative principle (rather than as a merely practical objective).

Rescher thus opposes both Peirce’s eschatological view and Habermas’ regulative and idealized one. To all those authors who contend that science, for example, is a typically consensus-seeking enterprise, he replies that, even in this context, consensus remains an aspiration. Agreement is usually achieved on issues of concrete particularity, but never extends to broader, theoretical domains, because controversy is all too common in the scientific domain. If we take into account Rescher’s stance about scientific realism, it may be easily verified that, for him, there is no scientific knowledge as such, but just *our* scientific knowledge, which turns out to be relativized to the kinds of experience *we* have. Science always is a two-sided enterprise, in which both nature and experiencing subjects have a fundamental role to play. We may not plausibly assume that the science of different civilizations will significantly resemble ours. But we can proceed even further, by supposing that the very topics of an alien (extraterrestrial) science could differ dramatically from our own, probably due to the fact that they experience nature in quite different ways. After all, we developed electromagnetic theory because our environment provided us with lodestones and electrical storms, but this is not a *necessary* feature of all natural environment present in the Universe at large. To sum up, we have the following kind of picture:

To what extent would the *functional equivalent* of natural science built up by the inquiring intelligences of an astronomically remote civilization be bound to resemble our science? To begin with, the *machinery of formulation* used in expressing their science might be altogether different. Specifically, their mathematics might be very unlike ours. Their dealings with quantity might be entirely a-numerical – purely comparative, for example, rather than quantitative. Especially if their environment is not amply endowed with solid objects or stable structures congenial to measurement – if, for example, they were jellyfish-like creatures swimming about in a soupy sea – their “geometry” could be something rather strange, largely topological, say, and geared to flexible structures rather than fixed sizes or shapes. One’s language and thought processes are bound to be closely geared to the world as one experiences it.⁶

⁵ N. Rescher, *Pluralism*, cit., p. 24n.

⁶ N. Rescher, *The Limits of Science*, University of California Press, Berkeley-Los Angeles, 1984, pp. 176-178.

This sort of mental experiment, as distant as it may seem at first sight from the issues we were discussing above, is instead likely to tell us something important about the problem of consensus. For it is clear that, as we may assumedly “scan” nature in a way partially or totally different from that of hypothetical alien creatures, so we normally “scan” the social world in a way partially or totally different from the other intelligent beings with whom we share it. And this simply is a *fact* of life that everybody can personally verify, and not a mere theoretical assumption. Right at this level of analysis Rescher finds a good confirmation of a basic thesis of his: conceptualization (and value-endowment as well) is always with us, and forms part and parcel of the world-as-we-know-it. To put it in a slightly different way, cognitive usage of different bodies of experience takes naturally different inquirers to achieve diverse results, so that cognitive dissensus is an inevitable outcome of the experiential diversity among inquirers.

At this point, a theorist of consensus like Habermas might as well reply that, after all, he never meant to deny the presence of disagreement and cognitive dissensus in human society. But it is just because dissensus leads to the enhancement of disorder in the social body that we must try to overcome it, thus transcending the actual course of things. Rescher’s position in this regard is that such a transcending step entails the presence of a privileged viewpoint that we do not have at our disposal, so that “truth and consensus converge only in the ideal limit – only when we can contemplate the sort of agreement that would be reached by ideally rational inquirers working under ideally favorable conditions.”⁷ But such conditions are never given in practical life. In science our discoveries, although theoretically “secured” by the scientific method, constantly need corrections, adjustments and, often, even replacements. Just the same is valid in the practical conduct of our cognitive affairs, where the “ideal inquiry” would require an “ideal rationality” on the part of the inquirers and the absence of limitations on our resources: neither of these two conditions are practically achievable in the concrete world of our actions and deliberations. To use an all-encompassing slogan: We must learn how to *live with* dissensus, because this is what the normal course of things forces upon us.

At this point, an important question still needs to be addressed. One is in fact entitled to ask: Does pluralism lead to skepticism or syncretism? No doubt this is one of the *possible* outcomes of a pluralistic theory like Rescher’s, and our author points out that this possibility has often been exploited in the history of Western philosophy. Leaving aside the ancient skeptics, it is interesting to note that Rescher takes Richard Rorty to be a good representative of the skepticism of our day, since he claims that the standards of the community are the only subjectivity-transcending resource at our disposal. As for syncretism, Rescher observes that Paul Feyerabend’s famous motto “anything goes” is the best contemporary example of this trend of thought, according to which men must endorse the whole set of cognitive alternatives they meet in everyday life.

Rescher, instead, sees no direct linkage between pluralism on the one hand, and skepticism or syncretism on the other. Certainly we have no direct access to the absolute Truth, the only path at our disposal being determined by what we conscientiously believe. But the fact that other people may think differently from ourselves is no reason for preventing us from having confidence in the correctness of our views; in other words, neither the others’ agreement with us nor their disagreement shows that we are actually holding false beliefs. No contradiction shows up between the “defining principles of rationality” and the pluralistic differentiation that stems from the many available answers to

⁷ N. Rescher, *Pluralism*, cit., p. 54.

the question: “What is it rational to do?” The sphere of rationality, in fact, is a flexible structure formed by what Rescher calls a “hierarchy of levels.”

We have thus a pluralism without indifferentism, in the sense that “the absence of consensus simply is not – in the very logic of the situation – a decisive impediment to rational validity and impersonal cogency.”⁸ As long as we see our own position as rationally appropriate and are able to argue in its favor, we must have the courage of our convictions. If one accepts these basic tenets it is all too natural to think that personal positions can indeed be supported by standards of impersonal cogency. Those who take relativism to be a logical and natural consequence of pluralism erroneously think that, given the diversity of the various positions, we cannot choose among them. To the contrary,

A pluralism of potential basis-diversity in rational inquiry is altogether compatible with an absolutistic commitment to our own basis. One can certainly combine a relativistic pluralism of possible alternatives with a monistic position regarding ideal rationality and a firm and reasoned commitment to the standards intrinsic to one’s own position. Rational is as rational does – it hinges on the norms, standards, and criteria that we ourselves can endorse as rationally appropriate on the basis of what best qualifies – from where we stand – as a well-considered position as to what is appropriate for anybody.⁹

For sure we must recognize the presence of different perspectives, but on the other hand our experiential indications provide us with criteria for making a rational choice. The fact that no appropriate universal diet exists does not lead to the conclusion that we can eat anything, and the absence of a globally correct language does not mean that we can choose a language at random for communicating with others in a particular context. For these reasons he concludes that “an individual need not be intimidated by the fact of disagreement – it makes perfectly good sense for people to do their rational best towards securing evidenced beliefs and justifiable choices without undue worry about whether or not others disagree.”¹⁰

So we are left with the question: To what extent are Rescher’s doubts about consensus applicable to the real social and political situations? As it was remarked before, in fact, consensus is deemed by many authors to be a *sine qua non* condition for achieving a benign political and social order, while its absence is often viewed as a premonitory symptom of chaos. Needless to say the feelings are usually strong in this regard, because political and social philosophy has a more direct impact on our daily life than other such traditional sectors of the philosophical inquiry as, say, metaphysics or epistemology. It might be argued that these latter disciplines’ importance for our life is at least as great (although less visible) than that of political philosophy, but this is not our task in the present context.

What deserves to be pointed out now is that the search for consensus has many concrete contraindications, which can mainly be drawn from history. Think, for instance, of how Hitler gained power in Germany in the 1930’s. As a matter of fact he obtained a resounding victory through democratic election, because he was able to make the political platform of the Nazi party consensually accepted by a large majority of citizens. It would be foolish, however, to draw the conclusion that Hitler and the Nazis were right just because they were very good consensus-builders. On the contrary, the United States is a good example of a democratically thriving society which can dispense with consensus, and where dissensus is

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

deemed to be productive (at least to a certain extent). Another striking fact is that the former Soviet Union was, instead, a typically consensus-seeking society. Dissensus there was severely banned and punished, and that situation matches well Rescher's words:

Not only is insistence on the pursuit of general consensus in practical matters and public affairs unrealistic, it is also counter-productive. For it deprives us of the productive stimulus of competition and the incentive of rivalry. In many situations of human life, people are induced to make their best effort in inquiry or creative activity through rivalry rather than conformity. Productivity, creativity, and the striving for excellence are – as often as not – the offspring of diversity and conflict. Dissensus has this to be said for it, at least, that it is at odds with a stifling orthodoxy. A dissent accommodating society is *ipso facto* pluralistic, with all the advantages that accrue in situations where no one school of thought is able to push the others aside.¹¹

By adopting this line of reasoning, the commonsense view about the subject is practically reversed. Homogeneity granted by consensus is not the mark of a benign social order, since this role is more likely to be played by a dissensus-dominated situation which is in turn able to accommodate diversity of opinions. It follows, among other things, that we should be very careful *not* to characterize the consensus endorsed by majority opinion as intrinsically rational. In the industrialized nations of the Western world the power of the media (especially TV) in building up consensus is notoriously great. It may – and does – happen sometimes, however, that the power of the media in assuring consensus is used to support bad politicians, who repay the favor by paying attention to sectorial rather than to general interests. It is thus easily seen that consensus is not an objective that deserves to be pursued no matter what.

All this seems plausible and reasonable, despite the fact that many theorists nowadays continue to view consensus an indispensable component of a good and stable social order. It is the case, once again, with Jürgen Habermas. The Marxist roots of Habermas' thought¹² explain why the German philosopher is so eager to have the activities of the people harmonized thank to their interpersonal agreement about ends and means. The basis of agreement is thus both collective and abstractly universal. Consensus, in Habermas' view, is a pre-requisite for cooperation and the fundamental task of philosophy is to foster it by eliminating the possibility of disagreement. The quest for consensus is so important that its abandonment would make us lose our rationality. What type of consensus, however, are we talking about in this context? It must clearly be a sort of ideal whose pursuit is more an highly idealized and regulative principle than a practical goal. Interestingly enough, Rescher both sees many points of contact (*mutatis mutandis*, of course) between the aforementioned stance and John Rawls' well known social-contract theory, and many points of difference between Habermas and Rawls on the one side and himself on the other:

A theory geared to utopian assumptions can provide little guidance for real-life conditions. What is needed is, clearly, a process attuned to the suboptimal arrangements of an imperfect reality. A perfectly sensible approach to the rational legitimation of the political process can substitute for the contractual-idealization approach of social-contract theory (Rawls), or ideal-consensus theory of 'discourse ethics' (Habermas and Apel), the

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

¹² Obviously the non-traditional Marxism of the Frankfurt School is different from other, more familiar brands of the same doctrine which have been so popular in Europe for many decades. But, no doubt, the typical Marxist utopian quest for perfection and homogeneity is still there.

older and better-known mechanism of rational decision. And against the ‘utopian unrealism’ of the contractarian and consensus theorists, the present approach takes the more ‘realistic’ line of hard-nosed cost-benefit economics.¹³

Another key word – “acquiescence” – needs at this point be introduced. Given that the insistence on the pre-requisite of communal consensus is simply unrealistic, we must come to terms with concrete situations, i.e. with facts as *real* life presents us with. If, according to contractarian lines of thought, we take justice to be the establishment of arrangements that are (or, even better, *would be*) reached in idealized conditions, then we cannot help but noting that justice is not a feature of our imperfect world. “Life is unjust” is bound to be our natural conclusion, together with the acknowledgement that real-life politics is the art of the possible. It is obvious as well, however, that even in real-life politics we constantly need to make decisions and to take some course of action. How should we behave, then, given the fact that the so-called communal consensus turned out to be unachievable?

The answer is that a modern and democratic society looks for social accommodation, which means that it always tries to devise methods for letting its members live together in peace even in those – inevitable – cases when a subgroup prevails over another. As Rescher has it,

“the choice is not just between the agreement of the whole group or the lordship of some particular subgroup. Accommodation through general acquiescence is a perfectly practicable mode for making decisions in the public order and resolving its conflicts. And, given the realities of the situation in a complex and diversified society, it has significant theoretical and practical advantages over its more radical alternatives.”¹⁴

The reader will not find it difficult to recognize that *this* is just the strategy constantly adopted within the democratic societies of the Western world, which, in turn, distinguishes them from all forms of tyrannies and monocratic forms of government still thriving nowadays on our planet.

Acquiescence is not geared to the necessity of finding agreement with others: its characteristic feature is, rather, the willingness to get on *without* agreement. Daily life teaches us that, when conditions of reciprocal respect are maintained and enforced by law, we are able to go along with other people even though we do not share their views (and, obviously, vice-versa). We have, in sum, an acquiescence of diversity that makes toleration of others’ opinions possible. Unlike John Stuart Mill, Rescher does not take the merit of such tolerance to be a requisite for progress towards the realization of ultimate Truth, but, rather, as a pre-condition for pursuing in peace our own projects. It should be clear, thus, how distant he is from the positions of Francis Fukuyama, who claims that the end of Marxism means the end of history as well, accompanied by the foreseeable final triumph of Western democracy over any other form of political/social organization.¹⁵ However appealing this kind of democratic messianism may be to the media and the large public, it resembles too closely the Marxist brand of messianism which it took such a long time to defeat.

Acquiescence is thus a matter of mutual restraint, a sort of “live and let live” concrete politics that permits to any individual or subgroup belonging in a larger group to avoid fight

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 178-179.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

¹⁵ See F. Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, Free Press, New York, 1992.

in order to gain respect for its own position. Rescher cites in this regard an historical episode that is more helpful than any theoretical definition for understanding the difference between acquiescence and consensus:

Shortly after the end of the Civil War, in early 1866, Robert E. Lee, generalissimo of the just-defeated Confederacy, was asked to testify before a hostile Joint Committee on Reconstruction of the US Congress. Interrogated about the stance of the former secessionists towards Washington's plans and programmes for them, Lee was pressed on whether the Southerners agreed with these and whether 'they are friendly towards the government of the United States'? Choosing his words carefully, Lee replied, 'I believe they entirely *acquiesce* in the government'. The difference between *acquiescence* and *agreement* cannot be shown much more clearly.¹⁶

Thus acquiescence, and not consensual agreement, turns out to be the key factor for building a really democratic society. In a situation like that of the former Yugoslavia, for instance, it would be foolish to ask for consensus given the historical and ethnical roots of the war that was fought. But a search for acquiescence would be much less foolish, with all factions giving up something in order to avoid even greater damages and losses.

If we want to be pluralists in the true spirit of Western democratic thought, we must abandon the quest for a monolithic and rational order, together with the purpose of maximizing the number of people who approve what the government, say, does. On the contrary, we should have in mind an acquiescence-seeking society where the goal is that of minimizing the number of people who strongly disapprove of what is being done. We should never forget, in fact, that the idea that "all should think alike" is both dangerous and anti-democratic, as history shows with plenty of pertinent examples. Since consensus is an absolute unlikely to be achieved in concrete life, a difference must be drawn between "being desirable" and "being essential." All in all, it can be said that it qualifies at most for the former status. The general conclusion is that "consensus is no more than one positive factor that has to be weighed on the scale along with many others."¹⁷

It is worth stressing the similarity between Rescher's epistemology and political/social philosophy: they both rest on his skepticism about idealization. In neither case we can get perfect solutions to our problems, short of supposing an – actually unattainable – idealization. We have to be fallibilists in epistemology because we are emplaced in suboptimal conditions, where our knowledge is not (and *cannot* be either) perfected. In other words, we have to be realistic and settle for imperfect estimates (that is, the best we can obtain). In politics, however, the situation is similar. Since we cannot (for the aforementioned reasons) realize a Habermas-style idealized consensus, we must settle for what people will go along with, i.e. "acquiesce in". This may not be exactly what most of us would ideally like but, in any case, if we insist on "perfection or nothing," we shall get a situation very far away from our ideal standards. In the socio-political context, "realism" means settling for "the least of the evils" because, as history teaches, disaster will follow if we take the line that only perfection is good enough.

¹⁶ N. Rescher, *Pluralism*, cit., pp. 164-165.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 199.



Jaime Nubiola and Sara Barrena

*Charles Peirce's First Visit to Europe, 1870-71: Scientific Cooperation and Artistic Creativity**

Charles S. Peirce has been commonly identified as the most original and versatile intellect that America has ever produced (Weiss, 1934: 403; Fisch 1981a: 17, etc.). He was not only a philosopher, but a true polymath. His reflections cover a wide range of disciplines. Peirce's thought combines a rich knowledge of the philosophical tradition and the history of science with his valuable personal experience as a logician and as an experimental researcher. His deep involvement in scientific activity over a period of several decades provided him with a genuine acquaintance with scientific practice that enabled him to develop a theoretical understanding of scientific creativity and of the real logic of discovery. Moreover, Peirce was also sensitive to the artistic dimension of creativity. Even though his theoretical remarks about Art are sketchy at best, he always remained fascinated by the phenomenon of art. In this respect, one ought to keep in mind that, as a youngster, he read and studied Friedrich Schiller's theory of art as expressed in his *Aesthetische Briefe*. But, as Peirce confesses in 1905: "As for esthetics, although the first year of my study of philosophy was devoted to this branch exclusively, yet I have since then so completely neglected it that I do not feel entitled to have any confident opinions about it" (CP 5.129, 1905).

Both elements—real interest in science and personal connection with art—which already appear in the early stages of Peirce's thought may in some sense be seen as a mirror of his experience of life. In this respect, the aim of the project entitled "Peirce's European Correspondence: Artistic Creativity and Scientific Cooperation", as developed by the [Grupo de Estudios Peirceanos](#)¹ during the years 2007-09 and funded by the Plan of Research of the University of Navarra (PIUNA), is precisely to explore this in some detail. More specifically, the main goal of this project is to scrutinize Peirce's *European* letters, that is to say, the letters written during his five visits to Europe between June 1870 and September 1883, as well the correspondence that he maintained throughout his life with a good number of European scientists and intellectuals of his time. It is our firm conviction that a careful reading of these letters, – until now not easily accessible –, may change the common image of Charles S. Peirce as an isolated thinker, locked up in his house in Milford, PA. A clear understanding of his "cosmopolitan period" – to use Max Fisch's expression (1986: 227) – shows that Peirce was in several ways an European scientist and philosopher and—maybe unexpectedly—an above average expert in art.

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¹ Taking advantage of the on-line nature of this journal, we have introduced in the texts a lot of links to the more illustrative pages of our project. Most of the links go to pages in Spanish according to the target of our Group. We hope that in the future some of the more valuable documents may be translated to other European languages by a European Peirce Network.

So far, the research of the project that will stretch over several years to come, has focused on the 17 surviving letters of Peirce's first trip to Europe (June 1870- March 1871), and the letters addressed to eight of his European correspondents: Mario Calderoni, Augustus De Morgan, Hermann Helmholtz, Stanley Jevons, Edward H. Palmer, Ventura Reyes y Prósper, Victoria Lady Welby and Wilhelm Wundt.

This article gives an account of the research developed so far and of its main results. First, there is a description of the initial plan and of the context in which the research was framed. Secondly, several historical and biographical data of Peirce's first visit to Europe will be presented. Indeed, the inventory of these data constitutes the heart of the project. Thirdly, the results will be analyzed according to our main points of interest: 1) Peirce's conception of science and of the scientific community and 2) Peirce's view of artistic creativity. Moreover, there will be a brief summary of the results of his correspondence with the European scientists. Finally, the paper will conclude with a general summary of the achievements of the project.

1. Outline and description of the project

From its very beginning, several years ago, the [Group of Peirce Studies](#) as a team, has aimed at making an original and novel contribution to the study of the figure and thought of Charles S. Peirce. So far, our main contribution –including a good number of *doctoral dissertations* on C. S. Peirce and other pragmatists- has focused on the [translations of Peirce's](#) texts into Spanish and on the reception of Peirce in the Hispanic world (Nubiola & Zalamea 2006). The extensive work over a number of years in this area has put our Group visibly on the map of international research concerning Peirce, particularly so in the Spanish-speaking countries.

Charles Peirce's abundant correspondence, most of which is preserved in the Houghton Library at Harvard University and is registered in [Robin's catalogue](#), seemed to us an element of Peirce's immense written production that had been neglected by most of scholars. This neglect may be due largely to the difficult access to those letters. They were available exclusively at the Houghton Library, the [Institute for Studies in Pragmaticism](#) in Lubbock, Texas, and the [Peirce Edition Project](#) in Indianapolis. Within the project, the expression "European letters," which constitute but a small part of the thousands of letters written by Peirce, refers to those letters that were written by Peirce during his visits to Europe, as well as those he addressed to European scientists and intellectuals in the course of his life. The letters written from abroad provide a very valuable picture of Peirce's complex personality, his opinions regarding aesthetics, his artistic evaluations and also his concerns and anxieties, all of which complement in a significant way the philosophical standard approach to Peirce that has been developed by most of scholars who simply had no access to those letters. More specifically, we were deeply attracted by the letters that Peirce wrote to his wife Zina and to other members of his family during his first trip of 1870-71. The set of [these letters](#) may be read as a delightful chronicle of the adventures of a young American – Peirce was thirty years old at the time – visiting a string of widely different European countries: England, Germany, Austria, Turkey, Greece, Italy, Spain, France, Switzerland.

Our research focused primarily on the aspects of creativity and scientific cooperation. We were particularly interested in Peirce's aesthetic evaluations expressed in the letters, and in his effective collaboration with some of the most prominent European scientists of his time.

In the first phase of the project, the focus of our attention concerned the 17 surviving letters of Peirce's first visit to Europe. The letters, which were written by hand, also included [skillful drawings](#). Because they were evidently not intended to be typed out or printed, we decided to reproduce the manuscript of the letters on the [webpage of the project](#), as they were taken from the microfilms bought from the Harvard Photographic Service (which do not include the family correspondence) or from the photocopies available in the Peirce Edition Project². Peirce's handwriting, which is in itself very revealing, is usually very clear, and it provides a better and deeper picture of his personality, deeper than what typed transcriptions can offer.

In more detail, the project – over the period from December 2007 until August 2009 – has included the following tasks:

a) A careful transcription of the original English text of the 17 letters, minus the deletions, corrections, misspellings, etc., since the reader has the copy of the manuscript at hand. In this task, we have gratefully made use of Max Fisch's transcriptions of most of the letters, which have been made available at the Peirce Edition Project.

b) A faithful translation into Spanish of each text with frequent annotations in which the meaning of obscure passages is (almost always) clarified. These notes provide complementary information that substantially enriches the reading of Peirce's letters.

c) The publication of the translation of the letters on the web site of the project. Use was made of a good number of links – both in the text of the letters and in the notes – to illustrations, photographs, sources, etc. These links refer the reader to other pages of our web site as well as to external resources available on the internet.

Our overall aim is to give a global description of Peirce's European trips (in the first phase of our project, only the first trip of 1870-71), with an emphasis on what Peirce learned from Europe and on the way in which these trips changed his mind, particularly in respect of creativity and scientific cooperation. Moreover, we like to show, as a byproduct of our research, how internet may be used – and advantageously so, when compared to traditionally printed volumes – to publish this type of handwritten documents, by making them available to a wider community of scholars. The method may significantly contribute to the achievement of a greater degree of accuracy in transcriptions, translations and annotations of the texts. It moreover illustrates how the web can further the Peircean spirit of cooperation between scholars³.

II. C. S. Peirce's first visit to Europe: general description and biographical data

Charles S. Peirce traveled to Europe on five different occasions. The five trips occurred between the years 1870 and 1883, all of them “in the service of the Coast and Geodetic Survey, at that time the chief scientific agency of the United States. Peirce was in the first place a scientist, and his career was in the service of that agency. The years of Peirce's five European sojourns were: (1) 1870-71; (2) 1875-76; (3) 1877; (4) 1880; and (5) 1883. The five sojourns together added up to nearly three of those thirteen years” (Fisch 1981b: 13). These trips made it possible for Peirce to get acquainted with European scientists and to

² Without the generous help of the Peirce Edition Project our project could not have been done. We are extremely grateful to Nathan Houser and André de Tienne for all the extensive support they have provided us.

³ In 2006, our project was presented to the Government of Navarra, which issued a positive evaluation. Unfortunately, budget limitations made it impossible for the government to provide the necessary funds. Fortunately, the Plan of Research of the University of Navarra approved the required funding for the first phase. In our web it is possible to check our applications to the [Gobierno de Navarra](#) and to the [University of Navarra](#) where the antecedents, methodology and goals of the project are described in detail (in Spanish).

further his international reputation as a researcher. In 1875 Peirce took part in the meeting in Paris of the Special Committee on the Pendulum of the International Geodetic Association, and in 1877, he was invited to the general conference of the Association held in Stuttgart. "Peirce attended the conference as accredited representative of the United States Coast and Geodetic Survey. That was the first formal representation of an American scientific agency in the sessions of an international scientific association" (Fisch 1981b: 15). In 1877, he was elected a member of the National Academy of Sciences.

The first trip to Europe, the examination of which is at present at the core of our project, extended from the 18th of June of 1870 to the 7th of March of 1871, all in all almost nine months. When leaving, Peirce was a young man of thirty years, with "high hopes," as he writes to his mother in his brief [goodbye letter](#) from Sandy Hook, New York, on the 18th of June. Young though he was, he had already been working successfully as a scientist since 1861. After finishing his studies at the Lawrence Scientific School at Harvard, he had started working as an aide to his father, [Benjamin](#), for the U. S. Coast Survey. He also had taught two series of lectures at Harvard on the logic of science (the Harvard Lectures of 1865 and the Lowell Lectures of 1866), followed by a second series in which he lectured on the British logicians (Harvard, 1869). Moreover, he had been elected to be a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (1867) and in 1869 he had been appointed as an assistant at the Harvard Observatory.

The main goal of Peirce's first trip to Europe was to identify possible locations suitable for establishing observatories in order to study the [total solar eclipse](#) that was to take place at noon of December 22nd, 1870 over the Mediterranean Sea. Moreover, his father Benjamin Peirce wanted to introduce his son to several European scientists. On June 18th, Peirce sailed for London in the company of his brother Jem, on the steamer [S.S. Deutschland](#). The brothers separated in London, and Charles crossed to the continent. In the fall, Charles would be joined by his father, Benjamin, his wife [Zina](#) and the rest of the team of observers in charge of the observation of the solar eclipse.

Already in 1869, Charles S. Peirce had been a member of one of the [teams in Kentucky](#) that studied the total [eclipse of the sun](#) of August 7th of that year. The observation of the solar corona and its protuberances through telescopes, and the detection of helium by use of the spectroscope, led the American astronomers to formulate new theories regarding the composition of the sun that were received with a certain skepticism by European astronomers. The eclipse of 1870 provided the perfect opportunity to test those theories. Apparently, this eclipse made a deep impression on Peirce. Thus, he writes twenty five years later, in 1894:

Of all the phenomena of nature, a total solar eclipse is incomparably the most sublime. The greatest ocean storm is as nothing to it; and as for an annular eclipse, however close it may come to totality, it approaches a complete eclipse not half so near as a hurdy-gurdy a cathedral organ. Few people who do not make journeys on purpose ever see a total eclipse (CN 2.59, 1894).

Charles Peirce's itinerary led him from [London](#), [Berlin](#) [Dresden](#), [Prague](#), [Vienna](#), [Pest](#), the Danube river, Varna (Bulgaria), the Black Sea, and, finally, Constantinople. From Constantinople Peirce traced the [path of totality](#), that is to say, the path of the locations where the total eclipse would be visible, scouting for the most suitable locations of scientific observation. Thus, he pointed out such locations in Greece, Italy, and Spain, and thereby contributed to the success of the scientific expedition under the command of his father Benjamin. But, on the way, he also visited [Amy Fay](#), his sister-in-law, in Berlin, who

accompanied him during a delightful visit to Dresden. In Vienna he was kindly received by Edmund Weiss and Karl L. Littrow, director of the Observatory, and in Constantinople he enjoyed the guidance of the British orientalist *Edward H. Palmer* and his friend *Charles Drake*. All in all, Peirce traveled through the part of Europe that since July of 1870 had been involved in the Franco-Prussian War. In the end, he joined the team that observed the eclipse in the *vicinity of Catania* (in Sicily).

This journey constituted a really important experience for the young Charles Peirce, who was visiting Europe for first time. His letters are full of accounts of the impressions that the various places made upon him. For instance, he obviously enjoyed London, but not Berlin, where he complains in several letters of the awful smell (letters of June 30th, August 11th and September 4th). He describes Pest as “a rather pleasant place to stay” (letter of August 25th) and he writes that Constantinople is “by all odds the most beautiful & fascinating place I have been in yet” (letter of September 2nd). Greece captivates him, but of Thessaly he writes that “on the whole I don’t think Thessaly is very nice” (letter of September 15th). In a letter to his mother written in Chambéry in the Savoy region of France, Peirce enumerates the eighteen very different languages he heard spoken during his journey. On another occasion, he expresses his amazement at the large number of languages in which the newspapers of Constantinople are published (letter of September 2nd) or again, at the astonishing polyglot fluency of a lady he meets in the train (August 28th), which leads him to explain that even his fluency in French is inadequate (letter of August 28th).

The letters also show the human side of Peirce, like when he worries about getting robbed or ill, or when he is subject to his mood swings and sentiments. As a cosmopolitan traveler, Peirce writes pages and pages with comments about the climate and the weather, the dirt of the cities and places where he stays, about wines and food, prices and bargaining, clothes, means of transportation, and, in sum, about the customs and curiosities of the many places he is visiting. There are days where he feels on top of things, and there are days where he feels wretchedly homesick. Thus, on the 15th of September, he confesses to his mother in a letter written from Messina, Sicily, that “I begin now to feel the shortness of my time acutely at the same time that I am often quite homesick & long to be home”. A few days before, on the 2nd of September, he writes to his mother: “Considering how much pleasure I have had, I ought to be willing to put up with a fortnight pain,” while on the 16th of November he writes, again to his mother: “This traveling about alone is good to teach a man the gift of silence. You won’t find me such a rattle pate when I return.”

Clearly, Peirce feels himself confronted by a world entirely different from the one he was used to. In a letter written from Constantinople and addressed to his wife (on August 28th 1870), he comments “If you could see what another world this is, you would wonder.”

III. Results of the project:

a) The notion of science and of scientific community

From a scientific point of view the expedition of the U. S. Coast Survey in which Charles Peirce took part was a real success. It was very useful in its reinforcement of the observations done during the previous year with regard to the solar eclipse in Kentucky, in the sense that the effects observed in the solar corona and the protuberances confirmed the new theories of the American astronomers. “On the whole, the American observations and inferences of the preceding year were vindicated. This was Peirce’s first experience of

large-scale international scientific cooperation" (Fisch 1981b: 14). The observation of the eclipse, which occurred in a joint effort by American and European astronomers of several countries, was a genuine international experience. The "Reports of observations upon the total solar eclipse of December, 22, 1870" was published as Appendix n° 16 of the [Annual Report of the Superintendent](#) of the Coast Survey of 1870. It makes for really worthwhile reading, especially so when it comes to the brilliant [report written by Peirce's wife](#), including her drawing.

During the years preceding his first European trip, Charles Peirce had developed, under the supervision of his father, an extensive philosophical study, first on Kant and the categories, and later on logic, and particularly on the theories of the British logicians. Furthermore, between 1868 and 1869, Peirce had already published three of his most important texts, also known as to the "Cognition Series," in the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*: "[Questions Concerning Certain Faculties Claimed for Man](#)", "[Some Consequences of Four Incapacities](#)" and "[Grounds of Validity of the Laws of Logic](#)".

Given his lectures on the British logicians, Peirce naturally wanted to get acquainted in London with some of the most outstanding logicians of his time. We know that on the 11th of July, he sent to [Augustus De Morgan](#) a letter of [introduction from his father](#), together with a copy of his father's paper, "[Linear Associative Algebra](#)" and a copy of his own article "Description of a Notation for the Logic of Relatives, Resulting from an Amplification of the Conceptions of Boole's Calculus of Logic," which has been claimed to be "one of the most important works in the history of modern logic [for its being] the first attempt to expand Boole's algebra of logic to include the logic of relations." (Merrill: 1984, W 2, xlii). Though De Morgan was seriously ill, he did receive Peirce. We also know that Peirce presented a copy of his article to [Stanley Jevons](#) and that the latter replied to Peirce, because Peirce in turn replied to Jevons's reply in a letter from Pest on the [25th of August](#). Given the fact that De Morgan and Jevons were key contributors to the development of exact logic, one can better appreciate the importance of Peirce's paper. For indeed, his paper was discussed as part of the broader discussion concerning Boole's *Laws of Thought* at the Liverpool meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science in September (Fisch: 1984, W 2, xxxiii). Peirce's paper was published in the [Memoirs of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences](#) (vol. 9, 1870, 317-378).

For Peirce, this first trip through Europe was the right occasion to establish his prestige as a scientist and to get in contact with several scholars, most evidently astronomers (Lockyer, Littrow, Plantamour, Weiss, etc.), but also with important representatives of other fields such as mathematics and logic (Clifford, De Morgan, Jevons, etc.). It was his ambition to take an active part in the community of researchers. But this ambition was less of a personal nature than that it was the expression of his conviction that the search for truth was necessarily a collective project. And even though the letters studied so far, which for the most part were addressed to members of his family and therefore did not refer to his notion of science, they exhibit some traces of his scientific activities during the trip. Thus, Peirce writes to his father about the purchase of scientific instruments (letter of July 12th), about the suitability of various places –for instance, Kavala in Greece– for the observation of the eclipse (letter of September 5th), and about his visit to the British Museum and his contact with De Morgan (letter of July 12th).

Although there is no doubt that the study of the letters written during Peirce's later overseas travels may yield a more complete picture of the way in which his acquaintance with the professional practice in Europe influenced his notion of science, the letters studied so far show that his active participation in a scientific project that required an effort by an

international scientific community reflected or reinforced his belief that science is a profoundly creative activity aiming at the discovery of truth, and that such activity is marked by two irreducible properties: it must be communitarian, and it must be fallible.

One finds a good example of a reference to the communal nature of science in Peirce's letter from August 25th to Stanley Jevons, in which he establishes an interesting dialogue with the British logician about his conception of logic, in which one finds one of his earliest formulations of his distinction between different kinds of signs: "icons," "indexes," and "symbols." Peirce ends his letter by saying: "I trust you will feel enough interest in this discussion to continue it," thereby expressing that the dialogue is at least as important as his own view of the matter.

Later, Peirce would characterize the scientist as someone whose life is animated by the desire to find out the truth (*MS 615*, p. 14, 1908), by "an impulse to penetrate into the reason of things" (*CP 1.44*, c.1896), and he would state, as he always did, that the scientific method is the only correct method to develop that search. For Peirce, science is a particular application of a method that enables us to deal creatively with reality. The construction of hypotheses constitutes the heart of that method. What constitutes science "is not so much correct conclusions, as it is a correct method. But the method of science is itself a scientific result. It did not spring out of the brain of a beginner: it was a historic attainment and a scientific achievement" (*CP 6.428*, 1893). Contrary to the popular image of science as something finished and based on a dead and rigid methodology, science is for Peirce "a living historic entity" (*CP 1.44*, c.1896), "a living and growing body of truth" (*CP 6.428*, 1893), something that is alive and enables our thought to continuously grow towards the truth.

Peirce's notion of science as a living activity, carried on throughout centuries by different persons of different ages, derives from his own intense involvement in scientific practice. For Peirce this activity always takes place within the one and only community of research which itself generates the scientific method, and extends beyond the past and the present, into the future. Already in 1868, Peirce had written that:

[t]he real, then, is that which, sooner or later, information and reasoning would finally result in, and which is therefore independent of the vagaries of me and you. Thus, the very origin of the conception of reality shows that this conception essentially involves the notion of a COMMUNITY, without definite limits, and capable of a definite increase of knowledge. And so those two series of cognition – the real and the unreal – consist of those which, at a time sufficiently future, the community will always continue to re-affirm; and of those which, under the same conditions, will ever after be denied. (*CP 5.311*, 1868).

The members of this community try to explain and make publicly accessible the results they have achieved, as well as the method by which they have arrived to the opinions they hold. The scientist must take into consideration the opinions of the other members of the community, for only in this way is it possible for the search of truth to progress, in the hope that it will be achieved, independently from any individual member of the scientific community. In 1901, Peirce writes:

The scientific world is like a colony of insects, in that the individual strives to produce that which he himself cannot hope to enjoy. One generation collects premises in order that a distant generation may discover what they mean. When a problem comes before the scientific world, a hundred men immediately set all their energies to work upon it. One

contributes this, another that. Another company, standing upon the shoulders of the first, strikes a little higher, until at last the parapet is attained. (CP 7.87, 1901).

This typically Peircean view appears in some way in a casual remark he makes in a letter written from Pest to his brother Jem on the 25th of August of 1870. Apparently Jem had been trying to convince his brother not to travel to Greece because of the danger of catching the yellow fever. To this, Peirce replies:

I think myself that to go into Greece is not entirely safe but I shall reduce my stay there to a minimum. I cannot well avoid going there & if as is not after all probable I get the fever why I shall not for my own sake care at all & I should be no great loss socially. You will have done what you could to keep me away, but it is quite absurd to be made unhappy by the regular & normal course of human events. If I should never come back I trust my friends will remember that the less they care for it the more they conform to my ideas.

Clearly, Peirce is convinced that in the search for truth, the contribution of an individual is relatively unimportant, because the achievement of truth will in the long run be the result of the work of the community of scientists over many generations.

In this communal effort, individual scientists continually stimulate and criticize one another, for their work must to be open to the judgment of others. The scientist needs the approval of the community. However, as Peirce points out in 1870, the same year in which he embarks upon his first European journey, that 'community' is not synonymous with 'majority': "Then by the truth concerning a thing we do not mean how any man is affected by a thing. Nor how a majority is affected. But how a man would be affected after sufficient experience, discussion, and reasoning." (W 2.440, 1870). It is not the community as such, but the experience, discussion and reasoning that takes place within the community that paves the way for the real advancement of science towards the achievement of truth.

This stipulation leads us to the consideration of the second condition which Peirce, from the very beginning, thinks is of the greatest importance to scientific thought. Every scientific proposition must be fallible. One must not mistake "whatever I am clearly convinced of" with what is true (cf. CP 5.265, 1868). Fallibilism does not mean that there is no hope to ever obtain sound knowledge or that it is not possible to reach the truth in the long run. The methods of science are successful, but in the short term they may yield both errors and successes. We always must attempt to overcome doubt (CP 7.109, c.1910), we must always trust that a question "has one answer decidedly right, whatever people might think about it" (CP 2.135, c.1902), and that error has a positive effect in bringing out the truth. Peirce writes: "The essence of truth lies in its resistance to being ignored." (CP 2.139, c.1902). Far from being a pessimistic view, Peirce's fallibilism stems from the combination of his unshakeable belief in the possibility of achieving truth, with his conviction that progress must always remain open-ended. Thus, doubt, a living and real doubt, as opposed to a doubt on paper, together with error, make for the twin engine that drives scientific research. The scientist – Peirce writes – "stands ready to abandon one or all [of his or her beliefs] as soon as experience opposes them." (CP 1.635, 1898)

We will end this section with a suggestive text that sums up all we have said so far about Peirce's conception of science and the scientific community:

But if I am asked to what the wonderful success of modern science is due, I shall suggest that to gain the secret of that, it is necessary to consider science as living, and therefore not as knowledge already acquired but as the concrete life of the men who are working to

find out the truth. Given a body of men devoting the sum of their energies to refuting their present errors, doing away with their present ignorance, and that not so much for themselves as for future generations, and all other requisites for the ascertainment of truth are insured by that one. (CP 7.50, n. d.)

b) Aesthetics and artistic creativity

Although Peirce affirms not being well acquainted with aesthetics (CP 1.191, 1903), he always was interested in it. It is unclear why he did not write more on this field: perhaps due to the scientific atmosphere in which all his life turned out. In spite of the fact that Peirce did not develop widely the point, aesthetics is located in a very important place in all the architecture of his conception, when in the turn of the century he develops his idea of aesthetics as the foundation of the other normative sciences. Aesthetics as the first of normative sciences has for Peirce a special quality of firstness. "Aesthetics considers those things whose ends are to embody qualities of feeling" (CP 5.129, 1903). Its task is to determine which is the *summum bonum* that has to serve as an end to the other two normative sciences; to tell "what it is that is admirable without any reason for being admirable beyond its inherent character." (CP 1.612, 1903)

Thus, while for the scientist the main thing is thought and nothing seems great but reason, the artist has to be busy with his or her feelings. Men who create art, Peirce writes, are those "for whom the chief thing is the qualities of feelings", differing from the practical men, who carry on the business of the world, and the scientists (CP 1.43, c.1896).

Thus, for Peirce, art is related to "qualities of feelings," to whatever is or exists independently of whatever other thing, without any element of being relative to, or of mediation (cf. CP 6.32, 1891). Beauty is for Peirce the only thing that we admire in itself and not in respect of something else. But, this does not answer the question how beauty is to be recognized? What works of art may be considered beautiful? Here, the letters that were examined in our project provide an excellent source of insight into Peirce's conception of beauty. The specific experiences to which he refers in those letters, his comments on the works of art that he saw in Europe, and his personal way of observing them give us a glimpse of the conception of art that he would develop in later years.

In his letters Peirce often dwells on his admiration for beauty, whether in nature or in artifacts, and he enjoys sharing with his reader the feelings which the contemplation of beautiful things elicits in him. The core of his aesthetic experience is often related to this admiration, whether it be for the greatness of nature or for manmade things. Some works of art struck him as particularly beautiful. Thus, he felt great admiration for the Tiergarten in Berlin which he describes as "enchanting," for Potsdam and Sans Souci, for the mosque of Suleiman in Constantinople, for a bust of Faustina in Catania "which I couldn't tire of looking at" (letter of September 22nd), and for the basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, which he mentions in a letter of October 14th, addressed to his mother and where he writes that he "was greatly struck by this church."

But he also marvels at the Bohemian mountains, the Hungarian hills, the Carpathian Mountains, the Danube-of which he writes, while sailing down the river towards the Black Sea that "I believe no river in the world is so fine as this part of the Danube." (letter of August 28th)-, and the Bosphorus. He expresses his sense of awe as he experienced the famous view of Constantinople when approached from the sea, and he marvels at the sight of Ossa and again at the appearance of Pelion in Greece.

Whenever Peirce explains why he likes or dislikes something, he always does so in function of its capacity to convey something to the beholder. Thus, in his letter written from Berlin on July 30th of 1870, he remarks that the sculptures and architecture of the city fail to produce any real effect on the visitor:

The architecture and sculpture have a very artificial and made up look, generally imitations of classic style and fail altogether of any real effect even when you must acknowledge them to be fine. The finest thing is the Victory over the Brandenburg Thor [sic] and that has the effect of a small bronze. The artist has taken no advantage at the large size to produce any particular effect of greatness or sublimity.

Similarly, when he refers to St. Peter's cathedral in Rome, he remarks that "there is an absence of true belief about St. Peter's. Its got up. [...] It is the enormous size & perfect proportions of St. Peter's that impresses one. Beyond that there is nothing great about it" (letter of October 14th). He applies the same criterion of the effect of a work of art upon the beholder when he speaks of literature. In a couple of letters Peirce refers to his reading of Balzac. On the 4th of September he writes that he enjoyed reading the author's *Honorine* and he expresses his admiration for Balzac's grasp of human nature. In a letter written on the 14th of October, he reiterates his admiration for the French author, praising Balzac's power of description, but then he adds that the author disappoints him to the extent that he fails "to interest the reader very much in any of his characters; it is all a mere study without sympathy". This capacity, or lack thereof, of touching the beholder of a work of art is for Peirce the touchstone whereby good works of art can be distinguished from lesser creations. Another example of this may be found in his comment regarding the poverty-in his estimation-of ideas in Muslim architectonic style when compared with the Gothic style: "Saint Sophia is fine but the style of it is altogether below the Gothic & I thought the Saracenic a style of architecture rather poor in ideas." (letter of 4th September).

Sometimes, the outcome of his evaluations may be surprising. Thus, he was totally smitten by the expressive force of Antonio Canova's sculptures, whereas his evaluation of Michelangelo is devastating. In the [letter of October 16th](#) from Rome, he writes:

There are two monuments by Canova here. One of them very striking. I greatly admire Canova. My opinions on the subject of painting & sculpture I am generally hold very timidly but not this one. I think Canova great – very, very great. I was first struck – indeed quite overwhelmed – by his Theseus Killing the Minataur in Vienna. Then I was greatly pleased with his Pauline Borghese & now this monument of Clement XIV I think has great power.

But when it comes to the sculptures of Michelangelo, he thinks they are "horrid and misproportioned":

I then went into the monastery adjacent to this church & saw a monument by Michael Angelo. But to appreciate Michael Angelo's statues requires more knowledge of the history of art than I have got. They seem to me horrid misshapen & misproportioned things.

One month later, on the 16th of November, in a letter written in Chambéry and addressed to his mother, Peirce complains of the absence of motivation and convictions that characterizes his era. By this he means that there is nothing modern artists want to express to their public. In other words, he bemoans the formalism of contemporary artists.

Canova's statues & some few pieces of modern art make one feel that all this age needs in order quite to eclipse all others in art is the Motive – but that you see is totally wanting. Art is a mere plaything or luxury now. What are our artists! Are they the representative men of our age at all or do they even at all comprehend it? The difficulty is our age has no belief; it doesn't half believe in itself even. As long as that is so it yet asks for critics & scientific men & not artists.

This complaint too foreshadows Peirce's later conviction that art consists precisely in expressing something and in producing some effect in those who contemplate the work of art; art must represent a quality of feeling, which as such is purely possible, so as to make that possible quality of feeling actually felt in the interaction between the work of art and the beholder. The true creative power of the artist is to capture what cannot be grasped, and making it reasonable. The artist grasps and expresses what otherwise would remain hidden, unrealized, and merely a possible. In 1903, Peirce writes:

It seems to me that while in esthetic enjoyment we attend to the totality of Feeling –and especially to the total resultant Quality of Feeling presented in the work of art we are contemplating–yet it is a sort of intellectual sympathy, a sense that here is a Feeling that one can comprehend, a reasonable Feeling. I do not succeed in saying exactly what it is, but it is a consciousness belonging to the category of Representation, though representing something in the Category of Quality of Feeling. (CP 5.113, 1903; our italics)

For Peirce art has precisely this capacity of grasping or fixing these qualities of feeling and of exhibiting them so they can be contemplated. The artist takes as a source of his work the matter found in his experience of the world, the sentiments, the impressions that his life, historical contexts or social occasions cause in him. But, contrary to other people, the artist is able to express this matter in a peculiar way that calms the initial anxiety. For Peirce, the artist is someone who in a surprising and almost magical way grasps feelings of qualities that by their very nature are isolated and hidden, and who then succeeds in making them in some sense reasonable, understandable.

Contrary to most people, who consider aesthetics as something completely opposite to the rational, Peirce sees art as a form of thirdness, or reasonableness in art. According to this conception, the artistic phenomenon requires the combination of three elements. To begin with, there is firstness, the quality of feeling that the artist perceives without even being conscious of it; then there is the reaction to this firstness, as it appears in writing, in painting or in another form of creation, and thus giving rise to something that exists in the actual world, a work of art in a world of facts, which in Peircean terms is of the order of secondness; and finally there is representation (in Peircean terms, of the order of thirdness), which is the capacity to grasp ineffable firstness, and translating it in something communicable by means of sentences, lines, or a succession of musical sounds. Together, the three categories are at the heart of the artistic phenomenon.

In his letters Peirce refers to the amazing multitude of feelings, sensations and impressions to which he is exposed and which he wants to hold on to. In his letter of August 28th, he writes: "I thought today I would rest & write letters. I have seen so much that unless I go over it in my mind it will escape me. I feel I have now forgotten ever so many things which interested me greatly". The sheer wealth of such feelings may explain why Peirce's letters to his family sometimes feel more like a journal than of letters. In his letter of September 4th, written while sailing towards Greece and addressed to his wife, he

literally writes, “for the next few days I shall be able to keep a regular journal,” and two days before, in a letter from Constantinople, he regrets not having more time to describe everything that appears around him: “There is such a flood of complete novelty before my eyes everywhere that I have no time to get used to it at all even enough to describe it. What shall I begin with?”

At the same time, his great desire to give an account of the strong impressions raining down upon him is matched by his awareness of how difficult it is to do justice to them, simply because their character of firstness resists all attempts to put them into words or even drawings. This is particularly so for the beauty of nature which no art can express. In his letter of September 22nd, addressed to his wife, he points out that “[i]t is difficult to give a notion of the character of a country so unlike what you have seen”, and then goes on to describe the sunrise as seen from the [Greek theater of Taormina](#); but then he surrenders and writes:

But how can I give you any sort of notion of the enchanting, enchanting view? I was standing in a very lofty promontory in the pure undeceptive light of morning looking down upon the sea. Just below me, 50 feet or so, was this ancient theatre. In ruins but enough left to show readily how it used to be with its beautiful columns, circles & arches, quite enough to be very beautiful still. Enough to make you think the people who selected this enchanting site for it hadn't been gone so very long. I was not at the summit of the promontory, though very high. High above me was an awful rocky head, the ancient acropolis, crowned with a formidable looking fortress. For many miles along the shores stretched such hills as I had seen the day before with sunny valleys beneath them & the sea rolled in onto the beach. I could see many villages both in the valleys & on the hills – nearest of course the curious little town of Taormina & much verdure. Across the sea on one side the shores of Calabria were very prominent & in the opposite direction over the land rose Etna majestic & awful. It is to see such things as this that it is worthwhile to come abroad, things which no art can reproduce.

But, while Peirce appears to recognize the limitations of art to the degree that it can not do justice to nature, Peirce is even more aware of his own limitations in conveying his feelings and admiration for the works of art he sees, and more specifically his limitations in the reproduction of what he has seen. For instance, in a letter of 28th of August, he writes that he is seeing things which his imagination is incapable of drawing and his memory is unable to remember. For instance, he tried to reproduce the bust of the empress Faustina that he had enjoyed so much in Catania, but he did not succeed in doing so: “Here was another thing not to be reproduced. Memory itself cannot do justice to this beautiful work” (letter of September 22nd). In the same letter he adds that his drawings of a Venus that had struck him as being so beautiful that it in some sense it surpassed even Titian's Venus, were incapable of expressing the essence of that work of art, and were therefore no more than “positive libels.”

All in all, Peirce's European experience may well have been an important source of Peirce's later view of the artist as a person who is able to give a form to what cannot be expressed, to soothe the anxiety, and to express the admiration which something inspires in him. Peirce's attempt, many years later, at writing a literary tale, the only surviving fiction by Peirce, may be seen as his attempt at being an artist. In the tale he tries to express the impressions and feelings that he had experienced during his journey through Greece. This tale, entitled *Topographical Sketches in Thessaly, with Fictional Embroideries*, may be considered as a practical experiment of Peirce's notion of art. Art makes it possible for human experience, in all its variety and its resistance to comprehension, to become

reasonable to the degree that, by providing a point of view from which mere feelings receive meaning (in Peircean terms, 'thirdness'). Thus, metaphorically Art may be said to colonize and to tame feelings. Beauty arises when harmony and equilibrium come into the picture, when a perfect adjustment is achieved between the feelings expressed and the form in which they are expressed, so that a "reasonable embodiment" occurs. In this way, in order for a work of art to be beautiful, it should move us or it should provoke in us some type of emotion, of feeling, and at the same time move us to some reflection. These reactions may have been what Peirce hoped for when he read his tale about Greece to an audience in the Century Club of New York (*MS L387*: letter to Francis C. Russell, 4th of May, 1892), and then again in the homes of one or two friends. And he may have been successful in obtaining this effect, as is testified by a letter in which John Fiske, who attended one of those sessions, wrote to Peirce: "I was wildly interested in it and believed every word while you were reading. It was as real as them 'ere grapes of Zeuxis which the birds pecked at." (*MS L146*, 14th of June, 1893). Certainly, Peirce would have endorsed Picasso's words: "A work of art must not be something that leaves a man unmoved, something he passes by with a casual glance. It has to make him react, feel strongly, start creating too, if only in his imagination. He must be jerked out of his torpor." (Huffington 1989: 291).

c) Peirce's European correspondents

Part of our project, entitled "Peirce's European Correspondence: Artistic Creativity and Scientific Cooperation," was the creation, over the past two years, of a number of webpages featuring, respectively, eight of the main European correspondents of Peirce. These pages – some of which are still being constructed- together with the correspondence included in those pages between Peirce and some of the most prominent figures of the contemporary scientific and cultural European scene, offer, albeit in an often fragmentary way, a good picture of Peirce's belief in the social nature of science and creativity, and in the need for integration in the international community of scholars, the "unseen brotherhood of science," to use the words of his father Benjamin in [the letter of the 17th of June](#) in which he introduces his son Charles to Augustus de Morgan.

In a manuscript from around 1907, Peirce openly acknowledges the importance of his European journeys, because they enabled him to obtain a direct acquaintance with the most relevant opinions of his time. The following passage, which we have chosen as the [motto of our project](#), says it all in a nutshell:

Philosophy is a study which needs a very protracted concentrated study before one so much as begins to be at all expert in the handling of it, if one is to be precise, systematic, and scientific. I gave ten years to it before I ventured to offer half a dozen brief contributions of my own. Three years later, when I had produced something more elaborated, I went abroad and in England, Germany, Italy, Spain, learned from their own mouths what certain students at once of science and of philosophy were turning in their minds. (Letter to The Sun, *MS 325*: 4, c.1907).

First and foremost in the list of Peirce's European correspondents were the two British logicians, Augustus de Morgan and Stanley Jevons. In his work, Peirce often quotes De Morgan (1806-1871), the co-founder and first president of the London Mathematical Society. The admiration he always felt for the man, who died within ten days after Peirce

had returned from Europe, finds its expression in the [obituary of De Morgan](#), which Peirce wrote in *The Nation* on April 13th, 1871:

As a writer and a teacher, he was one of the clearest minds that ever gave instruction, while his genial and hearty manners in private and in the school-room strongly attached to him all who came in contact with him. He was a man of full habit, much given to snuff-taking; and those who have seen him at the blackboard, mingling snuff and chalk in equal proportions, will not soon forget the singular appearance he often presented. (CN 1.42)

We see another aspect of this admiration in a text of 1898, in which Peirce recalls his meeting with De Morgan in London in 1870 during his first trip to Europe. During that meeting, Peirce had apparently pointed out the revolutionary importance of Boolean algebra. Here is how he describes De Morgan's reaction:

[...] the immense superiority of the Boolean method was apparent enough, and I shall never forget all there was of manliness and pathos in De Morgan's face when I pointed it out to him in 1870. I wondered whether when I was in my last days some young man would come and point out to me how much of my work must be superseded, and whether I should be able to take it with the same genuine candor. (CP 4.4)

The importance for Peirce of that meeting appears in another letter (December 5th 1908) from Peirce, this time to the British logician Philip Jourdain (1879-1919), in which he makes reference to that meeting:

As far as my recollection goes, I was in London in 1870 for some months and called on De Morgan and carried him my paper and he then presented me with his; and I should say from memory unchecked, that almost all my acquaintance with De Morgan's system was derived from that and his Syllabus which he gave me the same day. (NEM 3.383)

Stanley Jevons (1835-1882) is remembered nowadays as one of the main characters of the "Marginalist Revolution" in the political economy of the 19th century and as one of the champions of the mathematical approach to economy. Besides being the author of other interesting developments in logic (for instance, his defense of the inclusive interpretation of the disjunction), Jevons invented a mechanical procedure to perform inferences. Peirce's references to Jevons are numerous and show a sound knowledge of his work. But they also show the strong differences of opinions between the two men which sometimes forced Peirce to be very critical of an author he nevertheless sincerely admired. That the admiration was reciprocal may be seen from the few occasions when Jevons lavishes praise on Peirce. For instance, he writes that "[t]he most elaborate recent contributions to mathematico-logical science, at least in the English language, are the memoirs of Prof. C. S. Peirce, the distinguished mathematician, now of the Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore." (Jevons 1881)

Our study of the European scientists who communicated with Charles Peirce includes also [Wilhelm M. Wundt](#) (1832-1920) and [Hermann L. F. von Helmholtz](#) (1821-1894). Helmholtz decisively influenced the course of the modern development of a number of disciplines, such as physiology, psychology, optics, acoustics and electrodynamics. When he visited the United States in 1893, he met with a number of American scientists. Peirce was one of them. He very often mentions Helmholtz in the context of his reference to the first law of thermodynamics, which was undeniably one of the most outstanding scientific discoveries of that time. It was again Peirce who wrote the [obituary of Helmholtz](#) for *The Nation*, in which he displays his great appreciation of the German scientist, "the acknowledged and worshipped head of the scientific guild." Peirce added that "a reward

was due from organized humanity to the man who had thus lifted man's mind to a higher vantage ground":

In every case he so conducted himself as to bespeak an imperious desire to find out the truth and to publish it; and every approach to personality was avoided or flung away from him as a pestilential infection. The world owes much to the intellectual clearness and integrity of Hermann Helmholtz, M.D.

We also paid particular attention to the only Spaniard on the list of Peirce's correspondents, the mathematician [Ventura de los Reyes y Prósper](#) (1863-1922), who remarks that "Peirce knows how to find exceedingly curious connections between things that at first glance seem not to exist." (Reyes, 1892: 171).

When it comes to the discipline of linguistics and semiotics, Peirce's correspondence with [Victoria Lady Welby](#) (1837-1912) was of special importance, both for Peirce himself and for the reception of Peirce's thought in Europe. Lady Welby was a distinguished British aristocrat who functioned as a mediator of ideas between a number of British, Continental and American intellectuals of the last decades of the nineteenth, and the first decade of the twentieth century. She denounced above all the "linguistic anarchy" (Macdonald 1912: 155) that governed philosophical discussions, and in some way she anticipated the therapeutic approach to the use of language that would later be attributed to the later Wittgenstein (Deledalle 1990: 134). Peirce's correspondence with Lady Welby started in 1903 and lasted until 1912 when Welby died. The correspondence actually started after the publication of her book *What is Meaning?* Lady Welby contacted Peirce, after having read several of his entries written for Baldwin's *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology* (1902). But it seems that both already knew about one another several years before (Schmitz 1985: cxlviii). In fact, Welby already mentions Peirce in 1893. In her reply (letter from August 17th 1893) to a letter from Paul Carus, the editor of *The Monist*, in which the latter describes Peirce as "a very ingenious and personally highly interesting thinker, a genius of great power" (letter of August 2nd, 1893), she answers "I am very much amused at what you say about Mr. Peirce, whose ability is well-recognized here, especially on the side of Logic" (August 17th, 1893). In his review of *What is Meaning?* (CN 3.143-145, CP 8.171-175), Peirce points out that the valuable distinction which Welby makes between three orders of signification corresponds more or less with his own distinction between three kinds of interpretants.

Besides studying the above mentioned European correspondents, we also paid attention to the interesting figure of [Edward H. Palmer](#) (1840-1882), a Cambridge professor of Arabic languages whom Peirce first met in Constantinople on the [2nd of September of 1870](#) and subsequently in England on several occasions. Peirce refers to him in several places and states that it was under the influence of Palmer that he began to study Arabic. Finally, we must mention our study of Peirce's correspondence with the Italian moral philosopher [Mario Calderoni](#) (1879-1914). In 1905, Peirce addressed a very important letter to Calderoni in which he explained his own notion of pragmatism and its link with scholastic realism. Thus, he writes: "[Pragmatism] is not a system of philosophy. It is only a method of thinking; and your correspondent, *Giuliano il Sofista* [the pseudonym of his opponent Giuseppe Prezzolini in *Leonardo*], is quite right in saying that it is not a new way of thinking".

IV. CONCLUSION

Our project on “Peirce’s European Correspondence: Artistic Creativity and Scientific Cooperation” may be said to have achieved its main goal with regard to the completion of the transcription, the translation into Spanish, the annotation and illustration, and the internet publication of the 17 letters written by Charles Peirce during his first European journey. To this must be added the construction of additional web pages featuring eight of his European correspondents. In the development of this project so far, we made two genuinely new discoveries: 1) [Peirce’s signature in the Reading Room](#) of the British Museum on the 18th of July; and 2) [Charles Drake’s diary of 31 August of 1870](#) in which his visit of Constantinople in the company of “Mr. Peirce (an American)” is accurately described. Moreover, dozens of annotations and links in the letters provide a clearer image of the things and places which Peirce actually visited during his European trip.

Given the additional funds we expect to obtain, these positive results of our study of Peirce’s first European trip pave the way for the other planned stages of the project, in which the later European visits and Peirce’s later correspondence with other European scholars will be investigated. We are also considering the possibility of translating the letters and our annotations into other European languages.

Generally speaking, our investigation has shown that the importance of the letters written by Peirce during his first visit to Europe by far exceeds their anecdotal content. In fact, they may be said to have contributed in a significant way to Peirce’s personal development as a scientist and as a philosopher. Moreover, the letters cast a light on the special combination of intelligence and sensitivity that is so characteristic of Peirce. Furthermore, one finds in the letters the seeds of several theories that he would develop in later years.

We also have tried to show the significance for Peirce of his participation in his first international scientific mission and of his first contact with the European community of scientists. More specifically, the experience may be said to have confirmed two of his most profound convictions regarding science: the conviction that science is a communal effort, and the paradoxical conviction that science, in order to be science, must be fallible. Similarly, we have seen the impact on Peirce of his contemplation of the many works of art he saw in a great variety of places of Europe, and how that experience decisively influenced his conception of art as the capacity of expressing qualities of feeling so as to make them reasonable.

Our project has helped us to better understand Peirce, as a scientist and as a philosopher, but moreover as somebody profoundly human and alive, always open to the full impact of the experiences and impressions to which he was subjected while traveling. The seeds of the feelings he experienced in Europe would have a lasting effect, so as to yield a harvest in which new ways of understanding science and art would be developed. Peirce’s thought cannot be separated from his life, and his first European visit provides us with a better understanding of one of the greatest American thinkers of all times.

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- CP** Peirce, C. S., (1931-1958). *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, vols. 1-8, C. Hartshorne, P. Weiss, and A. W. Burks, editors. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press.
- MS** *The Charles S. Peirce Papers*, (1966). 32 microfilm reels of the manuscripts kept in the Houghton Library. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Library, Photographic Service.
- NEM** Peirce, C. S., (1976). *The New Elements of Mathematics*, vols. 1-4, C. Eisele, editor, The Hague, Mouton.
- W** Peirce, C. S. (1982-). *Writings of Charles S. Peirce: A Chronological Edition*, vols. 1-6. M. H. Fisch et al, editors. Bloomington, IN, Indiana University Press.

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Fernando Zalamea

Peirce and Latin American “razonabilidad”: forerunners of Transmodernity

After Modernism and Postmodernism, Transmodernism has been advocated as a more faithful coining for our plastic and transient age. Introduced by the Spanish philosopher Rosa María Rodríguez Magda, the term “Transmodernity” –both diachronic and methodological- hopes to reintegrate many awkward postmodern differentials, to balance some supposed breaks with more in-depth sutures, to counter relativism with a topological logic where some “universal relatives” provide invariants beyond the flux of transformations. In many ways, Peirce’s architectonic system of philosophy included already most of the salient features of Transmodernity, a situation which perhaps explains the unusual relevance of Peirce’s thought in the beginning of a new millennium. In fact, Peirce’s system is essentially *topological*, open to all sorts of continuous transformations (pragmatic maxim, triadic semiotic, classifications of sciences, synechism, etc), and the system is particularly able to represent a bimodal net (Petitot) of *both* differentials and invariants, providing a full understanding of the *TRANS* prefix. On the other hand, a steady tradition of Latin American thought at the beginning of XXth century has advocated the importance of some sort of “razonabilidad” (term introduced by the Uruguayan philosopher Carlos Vaz Ferreira, merging “razón”/reason and “sensibilidad”/sensitivity) which must explore the borders (*TRANS*) of thought. A subcontinent fully traversed by change, Latin America has been able to construct various sophisticated synthetic fabrics, weaving autonomous and foreign threads, where the social and cultural transits of the region have acquired some of the highest artistic expressions of the XXth century. Beyond Postmodernist skepticism towards reason and universality, both Peirce’s system and Latin American *TRANS* culture help to reinterpret universals as partial invariants of a logic of change, where the *borders of reason and sensibility* appear as objects of reason in their own right. The important crisis revealed by Postmodernism (impossibility of unique perspectives, impossibility of cutting out antinomies, impossibility of stable hierarchies, etc.) can nevertheless be well understood using a *continuous geometrical logic of reason and sensibility*, open both to changes and invariances. This short article is intended as a programmatic one, pointing out the possible relevance that some *non-standard pragmatic thinking* (Peirce’s “pragmaticism”, Latin America’s “razonabilidad”) may have for our Transmodern epoch. The article is divided in four sections: (i) Transmodernity; (ii) Peirce’s system; (iii) Latin America’s *TRANS* essayists; (iv) A sought gluing for our epoch.

I. Transmodernity

In the received views, Modernism stresses variants of self-consciousness, self-evolving vitalism, hope for unity along the borders of reason, while Postmodernism, with its proclaimed break (“post”), emphasizes singularities, differentials, richness of artificial life and supposed deaths of reason and universality. In fact, one can already discover the full seeds of both movements in some gigantic Romantic thinkers. In Novalis’ *Allgemeines*

*Brouillon*¹, the stage is carefully set to an investigation of fluxions of consciousness, *both in their differential and integral* trends, with all sorts of remarks elucidating the tensions between ("modern") relative fabrics with invariants and ("postmodern") residues and singularities. Novalis, as many other Romantic geniuses, was indeed an early explorer of the *TRANS* phenomena: all his work, both philosophical and poetical, focuses on *motion* and studies knowledge as transformation. In the same vein, some truly exceptional Modern universalists, like Valéry² or Florenskij³, have been attentive to *both* swings of the pendulum, towards the differential and the integral. Of course, the same can be said of the great founders of Postmodernism, particularly of the "amplitwist" mind of Deleuze⁴, but the excesses of lesser postmodernists towards the differential are certainly far away from the broad views of their Masters.

"Transmodernity", introduced as a serious tendency which would help to balance some dogmatic Postmodernist claims, was proposed by Rosa María Rodríguez Magda some twenty years ago⁵. Transmodernism maintains the open dissemination spirit of Postmodernism, as well as some of its main emphasis (not conquests: already in Novalis, Valéry, Florenskij, etc.) around Truth fragmentations and Antinomy conjunctions, but goes well beyond the mere register of singular breakdowns and tries to propose new relative nets to encompass residuation. A rich *counterpoint* emerges between Postmodernism and Transmodernism: break, locality, differentiation, contradiction, ambiguity, impossibility of universals, "all is worth", Death – sort of Postmodern dissonances – are to be contrasted with revision, local/global dialectics, oscillation differentiation/integration, partial gluing of relative coherences, fabric vagueness/exactness, relative universals, "some is worth", Renaissances – sort of Transmodern harmonics –. *Both* the dissonances and the harmonics are fundamental for our epoch, but one should not forget the *necessary* swingings of the pendulum.

Many forms of European thought have been well aware of the Postmodern/Transmodern counterpoint, without any need of cataloguing or labelling the tension. Warburg's works⁶ (1889-1929) on the Renaissance of Pagan Antiquity show how art criticism is a form of seismography which uncovers whole trends of thought by the exploration of small aesthetic residuals. Benjamin's *Passages*⁷ (1927-40) studies an extraordinarily rich example of local, differential, singular forces, weaved/glued in a net of oscillating significances, a fabric of relative universals, which, far from dissolving, give to Paris its complex, multifarious identity. In his last writings (1958-61)⁸, Merleau-Ponty

¹ Novalis, *Opera filosofica* (2 vols.), Torino, Einaudi, 1993.

² Paul Valéry, *Cahiers*, Paris, Éditions du CNRS (facsimile edition, 29 vols.), 1957-1961. Paul Valéry, *Cahiers 1894-1914*, Paris, Gallimard (critical edition, 10 vols.), 1987-2006. Paul Valéry, *Cahiers*, Paris, Gallimard / Pléiade (anthology, 2 vols.), 1973-1974.

³ Italian bibliography has been particularly attentive to the reception of Florenskij's works: from early compilations (*La colonna e il fondamento della verità* (ed. E. Zolla), Milano, Rusconi, 1974; *Le porte regali. Saggio sull'icona* (ed. E. Zolla), Milano, Adelphi, 1977; *La prospettiva rovesciata e altri scritti* (ed. N. Misler), Roma, Casa del Libro, 1983), to many other editions multiplied in the past decade (in charge of L. Zak and N. Valentini).

⁴ Gilles Deleuze, *Différence et répétition*, Paris, PUF, 1968. Integral system in Philippe Mengue, *Gilles Deleuze ou le système du multiple*, Paris, Kimé, 1994.

⁵ Rosa María Rodríguez Magda, *La sonrisa de Saturno. Hacia una teoría transmoderna*, Barcelona, Anthropos, 1989. Full circle in Rosa María Rodríguez Magda, *Transmodernidad*, Barcelona, Anthropos, 2004.

⁶ Aby Warburg, *Opere* (2 vols.), Torino, Nino Aragno, 2003-2008.

⁷ Walter Benjamin, *I "passages" di Parigi (Opere complete IX)*, Torino, Einaudi, 2000.

⁸ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Notes des cours du Collège de France* (1958-59, 1960-61), Paris, Gallimard, 1996; *L'oeil et l'esprit* (last text published in life, 1961, magnificent door to entry Merleau-Ponty's work), Paris, Gallimard, 1964; and its two great posthumous works, *La prose du monde*, Paris, Gallimard, 1969; *Le visible et l'invisible*, Paris, Gallimard, 1964.

approaches a body which operates on the field of knowledge as a *sheaf* of functions relating vision and motion, interior and exterior, reality and imagination, attentive to the borders and antinomies where creation evolves. In these, and many other endeavors, all dualities disappear, a continuum is looked for, and the cultural web is understood as a complex topological space where all sorts of breaks/sutures of continuity give rise to the most interesting artistic, philosophical and scientific expressions of the epoch. As we will see in the following section, it is our contention that Peirce's *pragmaticist* system can be seen as *THE* perfect context for understanding this state of affairs.

II. Peirce's modal, multipolar and topological system

The pragmaticist maxim – as Peirce came to call it, to distinguish it from other interpretations (behaviorist, utilitarian and psychological) – was reformulated many times in his intellectual development. The most famous statement is that of 1878, but those from 1903 and 1905 are more precise: "Consider what effects which 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" (1878, CP 5.402) – "Pragmatism is the principle that every theoretical judgement expressible in a sentence in the indicative mood is a confused form of thought whose only meaning, if it has any, lies in its tendency to enforce a corresponding practical maxim expressible as a conditional sentence having its apodosis in the imperative mood" (1903, CP 5.18) – "The entire intellectual purport of any symbol consists in the total of all general modes of rational conduct which, conditionally upon all the possible different circumstances, would ensue upon the acceptance of the symbol" (1905, CP 5.438). The 1905 statement stresses that the knowledge of symbols is obtained by following certain "general modes" across a spectrum of "possible different circumstances." This modalization of the maxim (remarked in the odd repetition of "conceivability" in the 1878 statement) introduces into the Peircean system the problems of *links* between the *possible* contexts of interpretation that we can have for a given symbol. In turn, in the 1903 statement we see, on the one hand, that the practical maxim should be expressible as a conditional whose *necessary* consequent must be contrasted, and, on the other hand, that any indicative theoretical judgment, within the *actual*, only can be specified by a series of diverse practices associated with the judgment.

Broadening these precepts to the general context of semiotics, for knowing a given arbitrary sign (the context of the *actual*) we must run through the multiple contexts of interpretation that can interpret the sign (the context of the *possible*), and within each context, we must study the practical (imperative) consequents associated with each of those interpretations (the context of the *necessary*). In this process the *relations* between the possible contexts (situated in a *global* space) and the relations between the fragments of necessary contrastation (placed in a *local* space) take a fundamental relevance; this underscores the conceptual importance of the logic of relations, which was systematized by Peirce himself. Thus the pragmaticist maxim shows that knowledge, seen as a logico-semiotic process, is preeminently contextual (as opposed to absolute), relational (as opposed to substantial), modal (as opposed to determinate), and synthetic (as opposed to analytic). The maxim filters the world through three complex webs that enable us to differentiate the one in the many, and, inversely, to integrate the many in the one: the *modal* web already mentioned, a *representational* web and a *relational* web. Certainly, in addition to opening themselves to the world of the possible, the signs of the world must above all be capable of representation within the languages (linguistic or diagrammatical) that are used

by communities of interpreters. The problems of representation (fidelity, distance, reflexivity, partiality, etc.) are therefore intimately linked with the *differentiation of the one in the multiple*: the reading of a single fact, or of a single concept, which is dispersed through multiple languages, through multiple "general modes" of grasping the data, and through multiple rules of organization, and of stratification, of the information.

One of the virtues of Peircean pragmatism, and, in particular of the fully modalized pragmaticist maxim, consists, however, in making possible it to *reintegrate anew the multiple in the one*, thanks to the third-relational-web. Indeed, after decomposing a sign into subfragments within the several possible contexts of interpretation, the correlations between the fragments give rise to new forms of knowledge, which were hidden in the first perception of the sign. The pragmatic dimension stresses the *connection* of some possible correlations, discovering analogies and transferences between structural strata that were not discovered until the process of differentiation had been performed. Thus, although the maxim detects the fundamental importance of local interpretations, it also encourages the reconstruction of the global approaches by way of adequate *gluing* of the local. The pragmaticist maxim should accordingly be seen as a kind of abstract *differential and integral calculus*, which can be applied to the general theory of representations, i.e. to logic and semiotics as understood, in a more generic way, by Peirce.

Underlying the good use of the pragmaticist maxim, applicable in theory to the broadest range of problems of knowledge, is a *hypothesis of continuity* between the world of phenomena and the spectrum of representations of those phenomena. That means that the relational links between the signs, and, in particular, the semiotic cascades between the Peircean interpreters, can be placed in a *non-artificial generic ground*. Peirce's *synechism* postulates a real operation of the continuum in nature and allows us to trust in a certain continuity that helps to bring together, in a natural way, phenomenology and logic. On the other hand, from a merely intuitive point of view, the spectrum of modalities that emerges in the pragmaticist maxim immediately involves the postulation of a generic and abstract continuum that makes it possible to link the different modal gradations and correlations (a general intuition that Peirce will try to reproduce concretely with his "tinctures" in the existential graphs). A full modal and relational understanding of the pragmaticist maxim thus brings us to the Peircean continuum.

Peirce's modal, multipolar and topological system⁹ investigates then the study of transferences of information around regions and borders on such a continuum. The TRANS motto is a crucial one for Peirce. His many classifications of the sciences¹⁰ show how one can "tincture" the regions of knowledge using his cenopythagorical categories (1-3), and Peirce's most creative ideas (for example, the logic of abduction, iterated continuous semiosis, existential graphs, etc.) lie precisely on the *borders* of regions where information is being transferred (for example, hypothesis (1) considered as a retro-demonstrative web (3), asymptotic behavior (3) of signs' action-reactions (2), iteration and deiteration (2) of the line of continuity (3) on the Phemic Sheet (1), etc.) Many fundamental Peircean techniques, such as *modalizing, correlating, connecting, gluing, differentiating and integrating*, are in fact geometrical techniques applied to a very broad range of problems,

⁹ For many precisions and developments of these ideas, see, for example, Jérôme Havenel, *Logique et mathématique du Continu chez Charles Sanders Peirce* (Doctoral Thesis), Paris, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 2006, or Fernando Zalamea, *El continuo peirceano*, Bogotá, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2001.

¹⁰ See the recent Marco Annoni, *Peirce, Pragmatism and the Words of Science* (Doctoral Thesis), Pisa, Università di Pisa, 2009, pp. 110-146, and the classic Beverly Kent, *Charles S. Peirce: Logic and the Classification of Sciences*, Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1987.

and are mainly motivated by a crucial *critical* study of *relativity, plasticity and contamination*. It may then be fair to say that Peirce's introduces a sort of "Einsteinian turn"¹¹ in general knowledge (of course, before the very Einstein), opening the way to the study of relative movements and invariances (categories, universal relatives, synechism, etc.), focusing attention on TRANS problems and techniques, and producing in this way a profound revision of Kant's more publicized "Copernican turn" in philosophy.

III. Latin America's trans essayists

Independently of Peirce's system and influence (even if, through Dewey, some simplified features of Peirce's ideas traveled the Continent), Latin America has had a rich tradition of first-class essayists involved with the TRANS problematic. Carlos Vaz Ferreira (Uruguay, 1872-1958), Pedro Henríquez Ureña (Dominican Republic, 1884-1946), Alfonso Reyes (Mexico, 1889-1959), Fernando Ortiz (Cuba, 1881-1969), Ezequiel Martínez Estrada (Argentina, 1895-1964), Mariano Picón Salas (Venezuela, 1901-1965), Ángel Rama (Uruguay, 1926-1983), Néstor García Canclini (Argentina, b. 1939), Jesús Martín Barbero (Spain/Colombia, b. 1937), among others¹², have been extremely attentive to many salient features of the *plastic* conformation of Latin American culture, with all sort of temporal phenomena (pre-modern, romantic, modern, postmodern, transmodern) *coexisting* together, and with all sorts of *hybrids* emerging between multipolar tensions. In fact, the logics of domination in Latin America have always been very complex, beyond bipolar left and right radicalizations. Many *reciprocal* seduction processes have occurred between the dominants and the dominated, with convenient social blends for both extremes, not just reducible to oppression instances. Beyond strong vertical forces, ubiquitous *diagonal passages* have molded the Continent. From the "ordered city" of the idealized colonial maps to the "revolutionary city" at the beginning of XXth century¹³, Latin American thought has been indeed systematically diagonal, mediating, hybrid, bringing together "internal traditions and syncretic constructions oriented to universal forms"¹⁴. The *contaminating thickness* of such mixtures is one of the characteristic features of Latin America.

Carlos Vaz Ferreira's "razonabilidad"¹⁵ (1910) and Fernando Ortiz's "transculturación"¹⁶ (1940) synthesize some of the main dynamical forces which weave the plastic fabrics of Latin America. "Razonabilidad" (a Spanish neologism blending "razón" and "sensibilidad") situates knowledge along Pascal's pendulum between "raison" and "coeur", not as a dramatic antithesis but rather as some sort of *natural continuity*. In turn, "transculturación" (another Spanish neologism) opens the way to *transit gluings* which escape dualisms between foreign culture ("aculturación") or forced culture ("inculturación"), and explores the multifarious melting pot of Latin American's popular/universal forms of expression, with its main subsequent achievements in literature (Borges, Rulfo, García Márquez, Onetti, etc.) or in the arts (Tamayo, Torres García,

¹¹ Fernando Zalamea, *Ariel y Arisbe*, Bogotá, Convenio Andrés Bello, 2000, pp. 150ss.

¹² For some panoramic perspectives, see: Fernando Zalamea, *Ariel y Arisbe. Evolución y evaluación del concepto de América Latina en el siglo XX*, Bogotá, Convenio Andrés Bello, 2000; *América – una trama integral. Transversalidad, bordes y abismos en la cultura americana, siglos XIX y XX*, Bogotá, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2009; and *Pasajes demediados. Memoria, utopía y frontera en el ensayo, la narrativa y el arte latino-americanos 1930-1970* (México, Siglo XXI, forthcoming).

¹³ Ángel Rama, *La ciudad letrada*, Montevideo, FIAR, 1984.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 121.

¹⁵ Carlos Vaz Ferreira, *Lógica viva – Moral para intelectuales*, Caracas, Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1979.

¹⁶ Fernando Ortiz, *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar*, Caracas, Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1978.

Reverón, Obregón, etc.) A peculiar *back or wrong side logic* (formally reminiscent of Peirce's arguments in Gamma's existential graphs, on the back of the Phemic Sheet) emerges then from a generic perspective: Latin America tries to construct a triad Memory-Utopia-Frontier, (i) starting from residues and shadow, (ii) pointing to Utopian transfigurations, and (iii) describing, in the borders between dead Memory and projected Utopia, the remaining *Elements of Disaster*.

The critical study of relativity, plasticity and contamination, that we pointed out as basic in Peirce's system, is also very much a central investigation for Latin American TRANS essayists. In his *Seis ensayos en busca de nuestra expresión*¹⁷ (1928), Henríquez Ureña points to the tension between tradition and rebellion repeated in each Latin American generation, with a double dialectics of oblivion and invention, which, on an awkwardly thin Present, forgets the Past and projects the Future. An *iterated* strategy of lifting entire constructions from residues explains both the region's fragility and ductility. The movement, the "liquidity", the topological contamination of Latin America follows. In *El deslinde*¹⁸ (1946), Reyes studies the frontier ("deslinde" = border) between "literary" and "non-literary" forms through an oscillating relative methodology: grammar, poetics, semantics, history, sociology, statistics, logic, mathematics, even theology. The result invokes a "principle of frontiers, contaminations, broadenings, fertilizations, metaphorical inspirations"¹⁹. Latin America follows as an *n*th order mixture: historical border of Western Civilization, cultural blend, sociological contamination, dialectical "razonabilidad". In *Radiografía de la Pampa*²⁰ (1933), Martínez Estrada breaks the very borders of reasoning, alternating grammatical forms (third singular / first plural), oscillating between poetical flashes and sociological disquisitions, looking for permanence behind variation (recall what we termed Peirce's integral and differential calculus), showing the inevitable place of chance behind structure (recall Peirce's dialectics between tychism and synechism). The Pampa as a reflection of Latin America (sort of a Phemic Sheet reflecting Peirce's architecture) codifies the complex transit between demolition and construction, residue and fabrics, comings and goings out of Modernity, figure and place, Man and Nature. As would happen some years later with Merleau-Ponty, the cuts between opposite notions are erased, a continuous sheaf emerges to control the transit, plasticity is acknowledged at every level.

As XXth century evolved, one can sketch summarily three main *optics* to understand Latin American thought. First, a sort of *panoptics* (essayists, 1920-1950: Henríquez Ureña, Reyes, Ortiz, Picón Salas, for example), which looked for globalizing unity in the transit between Europe and America and emphasized the strongly synthetic character of Latin American creativity. Second, a sort of *microscopics* (writers 1950-1970: Borges, Lezama Lima, Rulfo, Guimaraes, Onetti, García Márquez, for example), which elevated the microlocalization of their Universes (Buenos Aires, Habana, Comala, Sertao, Santa María, Macondo) to full reflections of humanity. Third, a sort of *telescopics* (critics 1970-2000: Rama, Gutiérrez Girardot, García Canclini, Martín Barbero, for example), which systematically connected the local and the global, and dissected the many contaminations

¹⁷ Pedro Henríquez Ureña, "Seis ensayos en busca de nuestra expresión", in: *Obra crítica*, México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1960.

¹⁸ Alfonso Reyes, *El deslinde*, México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1963 (Obras Completas de Alfonso Reyes, tomo XV).

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 418.

²⁰ Ezequiel Martínez Estrada, *Radiografía de la pampa*, Buenos Aires, ALLCA XX (Colección Archivos), 1996.

between "popular" and "higher" culture, "region" and "universe", "proper" and "foreign"²¹. The result, as before, *erases false bipolar considerations* and opens the way to a fair understanding of Latin America as some sort of multiplicatively incarnated – relative, plastic, contaminated – Peircean Third²². One has to say that, if Peirce's system provides extremely subtle *theoretical* tools for understanding the TRANS problematic, Latin American essayists, artists, writers and critics do complement the situation with some of its most plastic and profoundly beautiful *practical* incarnations available.

IV. A sought gluing for our epoch

The bottom of many crucial questions in our epoch lies in the study of reintegration, or critical gluing, of Postmodern differentials. Transmodernity emphasizes that such a connectedness lies in the very heart of Modernism, along a steady tradition of "pendulum" thinkers, attentive both to the local residue and the global structure. Novalis, Warburg, Cassirer, Benjamin, Auerbach, Blumemberg are examples of what would seem a German special capacity to deal with these dialectical problems. But also, as we have seen, Peirce enters the picture in a most central way, and Latin American XXth century thought may help to elucidate the panorama. To glue correctly our (contently) dispersed culture, a good initial step could be then to reintegrate these, and others, fragments of the diagram. But *precisely* what Peirce's pragmaticist maxim advocates is to study the scattered parts of a situation, *in order* to connect them as a fair understanding of the situation. Pragmaticism, thus, does not seem to be just a *casual* cultural machinery to be used by some adepts, but rather a *natural* tool to address the most urgent questions of our times.

A *programmatic construction of a sheaf of partial cultural gluings* could then be articulated around three main pieces of information: (I) Methodological forces: topological and transformational thinking, universal relatives, logic of sheaves, residuation theory, pendulum weaving, etc. (II) Cultural realizations: critical theory, metaphoric sedimentation, contaminating strata, mediating hierarchies, etc. (III) Projective goals: description of reflective residues (gluing local and global), dense fabrics (joining multipolar threads), plastic generic forms (allowing continuity and dislocating dualisms), etc. It is our contention that (i) Peirce's system and many mathematical tools, both modern (Riemann, Galois) and contemporary (Grothendieck), provide all the necessary theoretical background to support (I); (ii) Germany's critical dialectical tradition and Latin America's TRANS essayists give good examples of how to deal with (II); and (iii) the very "end" of Postmodernism as such, with its reformulations within Modernism and Transmodernism, show the imperative of the *integrated relativity, plasticity and contamination* sought in (III). Precise labours on these problems will take years, but, with many *non-standard* tools at hand, pragmaticism and "razonabilidad" can lead the way.

²¹ Long development of this "triadic optics" in: Fernando Zalamea, *América – una trama integral. Transversalidad, bordes y abismos en la cultura americana, siglos XIX y XX*, Bogotá, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2009, pp. 183-291.

²² Long defense of Latin America "identity" along Thirdness in: Fernando Zalamea, *Ariel y Arisbe*, Bogotá, Convenio Andrés Bello, 2000, pp. 91-147.

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Rosaria Egidì

Von Wright's philosophical humanism

Among the different topics that have marked the intersection of analytical thinking and other philosophical perspectives, such as phenomenology, hermeneutics, and pragmatism, “the study of man” is perhaps among those that have been less explored. With this expression, I intend to refer to that field of research crossing the whole Twentieth Century which aims at answering to contemporary challenges through the redefinition of the place of the modern man and of his relationships to the social and natural world. If we consider the strenuous interest of Husserl and his followers to the problem of intersubjectivity and of the life-world, the methodical reformulation of interpretation and of communicative processes in the hermeneutical tradition, the primacy of linguistic games in Wittgenstein's conception of *Weltbild* and, not lastly, Dewey's conception of a naturalistic humanism, we can easily identify in these different assumptions a shared philosophical intuition: that of a new humanism. Georg Henrik von Wright is one of the thinkers that have pursued with the greatest strength the task of joining together western philosophy and science in order to think anew the role and identity of the contemporary man. For this reason, he can be considered to be one of the last and most rigorous ‘humanists’.

In the “Intellectual Autobiography”, written in 1973 for the volume dedicated to him in the *Library of Living Philosophers*, von Wright had indicated the “search for a new humanist attitude” as the characteristic of the mature phase of his thought.¹ Seven years after, in the “Postscript 1980” to the “Autobiography” he came back on this subject to emphasise the presence in his research of an unresolved tension between the logical and epistemological intent behind his writings, on the one hand, and his “craving for a more ‘visionary’ grasp of the totality of human existence”, on the other. It is to the search for a *Weltanschauung* able to fill the gap within the “double soul” of his philosophy and to bring together the various elements that dwelt therein, that von Wright seems to tie the emergence of topics such as the man-nature relationship, the future of Western civilization, and the problems of scientific and technological progress; these issues, in fact, have appeared more and more frequently in his work over the past two decades.

Over the twenty years that have passed from the “Postscript” until his recent volume, *In the Shadow of Descartes: Essays in the Philosophy of Mind*,² von Wright's philosophical activity has, indeed, interwoven multiple directions of research, which have helped to create new links and to clarify the articulation of essential points of reference. But of more interest, perhaps, than an identification of the individual aspects of von Wright's research would be a search for the unitary ground, if it exists, that connects them. This could, in fact, be the same ground that lies at the basis of his conception of natural determinism and human acting, which had, even earlier, informed his attempts to identify the connections and differences between acting and causation, between time and truth. It could concern the “humanization of nature” which inspires, in his more recent work, the critique of the

¹ Schilpp and Hahn (1989), p. 41.

² Von Wright (1998).

misconceptions within the traditional dualisms of man-nature, freedom-necessity, good-evil, values-facts, and mind-body, as well as his reformulation of the problem regarding man's place in nature and the relationship between the human and the natural sciences.

In connection with the problems of temporality and determinism, von Wright published around the middle of the Seventies writings on the theme of "humanism," the importance of which he himself mentions in "Postscript 1980". In reality, this interest in what he called the "neo-humanistic attitude" is anything but new in von Wright's thought. In the Sixties his writings with a specific analytical commitment intersect with essays on humanistic problems. For example, some works published in 1963 like *The Varieties of Goodness, Norm and Action, The Logic of Preference* find their counterparts in essays like "The Tree of Knowledge" (1960), which will give the title to a later collection of papers (1993), and "Essay om naturen, människan och den vetenskapligt-tekniska revolutionen" (1963), which anticipate in many ways his reflections in the decades that followed.

Running throughout von Wright's entire itinerary is the philosophical practice that is shaped, not only by the problems and methods of logic and of philosophical analysis, but also by the "study of man", and that pays heed to the themes which, from the pre-Socratics to Nietzsche, have oriented philosophy toward the search for a "Weltanschauung" and a "Sinn des Lebens." He himself has also recently acknowledged the "double track" of his research and, in the brief but illuminating "Introduction" to *The Tree of Knowledge*, attributes its existence, in large part, to the influence exercised on him by the personalities of his two masters: Eino Kaila and Ludwig Wittgenstein.

In a page of the "Replies" included in Schilpp's volume, von Wright lists all of four phases in his investigation of humanism: the *first* youthful phase of aesthetic humanism, the *second* ethical phase of the Forties and Fifties, the *third* rationalist one of the Sixties, and the *fourth* social-humanist phase, which extends up to the mid-Seventies. The writings of those years reflect his reawakened interest in Hegel's and Marx's thought and the problems of the social and political *Weltbild*. Moreover, one can reasonably assume that the 1976 essay mentioned in the "Postscript": "What is Humanism?" opens a *fifth* phase in his studies on humanism. But in what way is this phase "new" in the context of von Wright's production over the last two decades? In his writings from 1976-1977 up to the essays collected in *The Tree of Knowledge* and beyond,³ it is clear that the "two tracks" of his research, while taking shape in ways of philosophizing that are distinct for their style and content, nonetheless present an affinity of conceptions and intents. Von Wright establishes a link, which had not been made explicitly in his previous writings, between his theses about free action and the problems of humanism. It could, perhaps, be said that, in the more recent "humanistic" essays, the problematic nucleus that had remained in the background of the "analytical" essays is laid bare and comes into the limelight.

The special relevance of the fourth social-humanist phase of von Wright's search for a humanist attitude could be identified in the revision of his previous rationalist conception, according to which the science of man must be modeled on the exact sciences of nature and integrated into a more comprehensive, unitary science.⁴ This revision will be carried to its conclusion in *Explanation and Understanding* (1971), where his dualistic vision of the study of man and of nature will develop a vision that von Wright considers very close to what he calls the "Aristotelian" tradition and opposed to the monistic and scientific

³ The main writings to which we are referring, directly or indirectly, in our reconstruction of von Wright's philosophical humanism are the following: von Wright (1960), (1979), (1987), (1989), (1990), (1991), (1997).

⁴ See on this topic the illuminating essay by Tranøy (1974).

positions which have kept alive up to our days the “Galilean” tradition.⁵ Nevertheless, in his writings on humanism in the past two decades, a perspective emerges which further corrects the point of view of *Explanation and Understanding*. Instead of the heritage of the Aristotelian tradition, there one can easily recognise the reflection of a new source of inspiration, precisely that of the “Kantian” tradition which we have seen underpinning von Wright’s most recent investigations into man’s place in nature, between the intelligible world of causal laws and the noumenal world of the ideals of reason. Significant traces of this inspiration are present in many works of the period, particularly in one of the more important and articulated essays of von Wright’s production: *Of Human Freedom* (1985). It is, perhaps, in the agreement with the special form of compatibility between natural necessity and free will, between causality and freedom, which Kant recognised when he considered the condition of man as a “citizen of two worlds,” that one can catch sight of the link that sums up von Wright’s way to escape from the “deterministic illusion,” on one hand, and from the “dream” of what he calls the “restoration” of a world that had seemed lost and of a human condition that had been fatally compromised by cognitive *hybris*.⁶

In contrast with the prevalent version of compatibilism, *i.e.* with its meaning as peaceful coexistence, as stability in principle, almost as mutual indifference, von Wright’s indicates with this name a relation that is anything but stable, anything but painless, perhaps a search for a balance that has always been sought and never achieved. The fact that human action is both free and determined is itself already a sign of its radical doubleness, of the instability and dramatic nature intrinsic to the condition of man in the world. Therefore his interpretation of the “dream” to escape from the dualism of freedom and determinism is, at heart, not so much with the view of “solving” it, in keeping with the style of problem-solving typical of the theoretical procedures of science, as it is to “dissolve” the illusion that pervades European culture in its most meaningful expressions – Greek and Judeo-Christian – that it is possible to treat the ideals of the reason with the categories of the intellect, and the problems of metaphysics with the tools of science. In effect the way out from the dualism of freedom and determinism is the central problem in the Tanner Lectures entitled *Of Human Freedom*, where it is “resolved” by showing that the irreconcilability traditionally accorded to these concepts is, in effect, a “pseudo-conflict.” The notion of determinism in the framework of actions for reasons cannot be confused with the notion of universal determinism used in the framework of the natural sciences. As Kant said, the liberty of the practical use of reason and submission to natural laws are not contradictory and therefore not incompatible. The clarification suggested by this distinction, which von Wright proposes as a “solution,” is, in reality, not a new “theory” that defends, with new arguments, the reconcilability of determinism and free will; rather, he is showing how the “problem” of that reconciliation, once the differences are made clear, simply disappears, and the “solution” to the problem is precisely this.

Von Wright’s philosophical neo-humanism consists precisely in showing the unrealisability – the “dream” indeed – of fusing the varied forms of human rationality, of crystallising them within a single and conclusive theoretical schema, which assumes the model of scientific knowledge as its paradigm. According to von Wright, the monistic tendencies present in the great traditions of the past survive in the positivistic and neo-positivistic programs of a unitary science, of the unification of the theories and methods of the natural and human sciences, and, above all, in the intellectual orientation of today’s scientific and technological revolution. This tendency aims to obscure the multiple forms in

⁵ Von Wright (1971), chapter I.

⁶ Von Wright (1990), pp. 196-97.

which the human condition is expressed, and it “provides a quasi theoretical justification for manipulations of society by individuals and groups who are in a position to ‘engineer’ or ‘steer’ the social process.”⁷ Once the impracticability of the monistic expectation has been made clear and the illusion that lies at its base has been unmasked, the problem of avoiding the contradictions between nature and reason, between causality and freedom, reappears under a new form, not that of their mutual reduction or identification, but of “a more articulate schema of understanding”⁸ which “dissolves,” that is, makes meaningless any form of dualism, as well as any form of reductionism. The concepts involved in the old dualism do not refer to substances which can be reduced or identified: their meaning is, as we know, determined by the contexts in which they are used, by their reference to the symbolic challenges (institutions, rules, and norms) to which they respond.

In the 1960 essay “The Tree of Knowledge,” which anticipates by about twenty years his more mature formulations on philosophical humanism, von Wright had manifested his first doubts about the optimistic belief in a positive outcome for the transformations in the style of human life stemming from scientific-technological progress and from the age-old search for a hegemonic form of rationality. Precisely because of the emblematic significance enjoyed by the biblical myth referring to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in representing the destiny of man when dominated by cognitive *hybris*, von Wright included this essay in the volume published in 1993 under the same title. In the two parts that constitute the book, he collected his autobiographical and historical-critical contributions to the formulation of the great themes of philosophical logic and analytical philosophy, as well as his considerations about the condition and the destiny of man in the modern age. Far from taking the form of a kind of “theory of culture,” these considerations express, instead, his attempt to offer a “diagnosis of our time,” the result of which is to bring to light those tendencies that, asserted throughout the course of Western culture, have proposed an illusory rationalisation of the relation between science and reason, between man and nature, and have given credit to the prevalence of forces whose aim is the dehumanization and self-annihilation of man and of his environment.

According to von Wright, the dangers deriving from the loss of identity of man, of his dehumanization are exemplified by the classical myths that narrate the expulsion from Eden, the punishment of Prometheus, and the damnation of Faust, are re-proposed, in one of von Wright’s most charming essays, in his reference to Dante’s invention of the final voyage of Ulysses and his shipwreck at the forbidden boundaries of the world.⁹ What is the significance of the mythological stories from a philosophical point of view? First of all, they show the doubleness of human rationality and, hence, its intrinsically tragic nature: that is, that knowledge can, at the same time, be an instrument of good and of evil, of emancipation and of damnation. In the conclusion to “The Tree of Knowledge” von Wright states that the three myths

are all tragic, either in the sense – as in the Paradise myth and in the Faust saga – that they show us man torn between the two poles of light and darkness, or in the sense – as in the Prometheus myth – that they depict a struggle of man for a fundamentally just cause, but blinded by self-overconsideration. (p. 153).

⁷ Schilpp and Hahn (1989), pp. 843-44.

⁸ Von Wright (1980), Preface.

⁹ See von Wright (1990) and also my Introduction in Egidi (1999).

The *leitmotiv* common to the three myths consists precisely in the double potential for good and evil intrinsic in the desire for knowledge that pervades human reason. In the biblical story, as in the myth of Prometheus and in the saga of Faust, von Wright sees a prefiguration of the human condition which he had so significantly expressed in "Determinism and the Study of Man" (1976) defining man as both a slave and the master of his own destiny, and his actions as intrinsically marked by the requirement of being both free and determined.

This basic doubleness cannot be eliminated without paying the price of progressive dehumanization, leading to self-destructive results: if man were not determined, he could not exercise his freedom; if he were not free, he could not act rationally. The risk to which the human condition is exposed, clenched between a desire for knowledge and the very limits of its nature, is obviously represented in the language of these myths: man in Eden, Prometheus, and Faust all share the human desire for knowledge, but, as their exemplary stories show, it can become a "lethal game" and, if turned into an absolute, can lead to sin, to damnation, and to death. Sin, damnation, and death are labels, or figures, for the destructive processes that man primes for firing when he tries to go beyond his nature, wishing to become omniscient and omnipotent, to be the equal of the gods in his sovereign power over the nature, to surpass the limits of his temporality by making the fleeting moment eternal. In this gallery of myths, von Wright gives a place no less important to Dante's Ulysses, who, "in pursuit of virtue and knowledge," finds death by overstepping the boundaries of the inhabited world.

By digging into the rich mythology of the biblical account and the tales of Prometheus, of Ulysses, and of Faust, and into the interpretations that philosophy, literature, and art have given them over the centuries, von Wright brings to light the profound similarities that the truths hidden in the language of myth have with "modern" expressions of the human desire for knowledge: science unbound from any form of authority (the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil), progress as the bearer of happiness (the gift of fire to man still in the wild state), the victory over time and death (the pact with the devil in exchange for one's soul) – these are all images, in turn poetic, philosophical, and religious, of the destiny that awaits a world and a society threatened by the absolutization of the proper values of technological civilization.¹⁰

Is the aspiration to knowledge, therefore, fatally destined to become tragedy? Do science and technology, born from the need to liberate and emancipate mankind, inevitably lead to a new form of slavery? In the face of the urgency of these questions, the classical myths lose their apparent, banal meaning of illustrating divine abuses with regard to man, the triumph of violence over justice, and assume the dimension of a severe warning: human reason, in the complex formed by its abilities and cognitive acquisitions, can contribute to making man freer, but also to making him more of a slave. Dante had pointed to salvation, in the form of the intervention of a higher grace, and the restoration of a lost equilibrium. For modern man, it is not possible to return to paradise lost; Dante's dream is over: "der Traum ist ausgeträumt," as Husserl would say. Nevertheless, it remains a regulating ideal: no power exists if not that of human reason itself to turn knowledge into an instrument of salvation rather than damnation:

There is no way back for us moderns either to Ancient belief in a self-preserving cosmic harmony or to Dante's dream of the restoration of a universal Christian commonwealth. We must try to attain our own self-reflective understanding of our situation. And I have

¹⁰ See von Wright (1989) and (1991).

wanted to say that it belongs to this achievement that we take warning of the fate which the poet foresaw for the non-Homeric Ulysses who steered his vessel beyond the pillars of Hercules and thereby entered the road to self-annihilation.¹¹

The “lesson” that von Wright seeks to draw from the warning implicit in the tales of the great myths is to conceive man’s place in nature from a perspective that we will call “humanistic,” with reference to a conception of the problem that harks back to the “Humanists” of the Renaissance, such as Pico della Mirandola, and reaches, I would say, up to Kant’s Copernican revolution. Contrary to Kepler’s later deterministic conceptions, Pico’s man, as he presented him in his 1486 work *Oratio de hominis dignitate*,

has no fixed place in the great order of things. It is up to man himself to choose his place, what he will be: beast or angel or something in between.¹²

Von Wright’s humanism can be seen in his conception of the dynamic relationship between man and the natural world, a relationship that, to a certain extent, incorporates his “very special” idea of compatibility formulated in *Of Human Freedom*.

¹¹ Von Wright (1990), pp. 200-1.

¹² Von Wright (1979), p. 4.

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Colin Koopman

Pragmatism as transition. Historicity and Hope in James, Dewey, and Rorty,
Columbia University Press, New York, 2009

Koopman's book revolves around the notion of *transition*, which he proposes is one of the central ideas of the pragmatist tradition but one which had not previously been fully articulated yet nevertheless shapes the pragmatist attitude in philosophy. Transition, according to Koopman, denotes "those temporal structures and historical shapes in virtue of which we get from here to there" (2). One of the consequences of transitionalism is the understanding of critique and inquiry as historical processes. The term transitionalism is the term of art Koopman chooses for identifying the historicist attitude of the pragmatist mode of thinking. With his book, Koopman aims at bridging the gap he sees between the classical – mostly Deweyan and Jamesian – version of pragmatism and the second wave of pragmatism – in particular, the Rortyan version. The banner under which Koopman proposes to understand pragmatism as a unified stream going from Peirce to Brandom (via James, Dewey, Rorty, and Putnam) is that of philosophy as "meliorist cultural criticism". A definition, we should note, which perfectly suit – and this is by no means by chance – James' and Rorty's philosophies. Transitionalism so conceived, in fact, is not simply a philosophy or metaphysics of history, nor in the Foucauldian vein, an ontology of history. Transitionalism express rather the conception of temporality implicit in the melioristic attitude shared by the pragmatist tradition: pragmatism, to that extent, is transitional because it is melioristic: it sees time as the sphere where transformations can be brought about and improvement achieved.

The aim of the book is twofold: firstly, to articulate the concept of transitionalism; secondly, to show how this theme runs through the pragmatist tradition and the extent to which it can bind together all its scattered strands. In this vein, Koopman offers us sketches of transitional epistemology, ethics, politics, and, as an open conclusion, a hint towards a rapprochement of pragmatist transitionalism and the genealogical tradition.

Transitionalism as Koopman proposes us to conceive it, is built upon the melioristic intuition, that Koopman urges us to acknowledge as the motivating inspiration of all the pragmatist tradition. The transformative attitude implicit in meliorism requires that we operate in a frame that is that of intentional and directed change: from worse to better. If we see pragmatism in this guise, it is clear why Koopman urges us to gather all pragmatist efforts under the label of transitionalism. Pragmatism as transitionalist places us in the middle of things (or better, of situations) and, from that vantage point, urges us to think *comparatively*: in a melioristic perspective, the focus is never on what is true, good, or just, but on how a present situation can be improved: how a belief can be made sounder, how a moral situation bettered, how the level of justice improved. Meliorism, to this extent, generalizes upon Dewey's ethical (but broadly philosophical) maxim that "growth is the only end in itself", or James' "life is in the transition" (this last quoted by Koopman, p. 12). Any fallibilistic epistemology, to that extent, might be termed 'transitional', as well as any ethical, political (or other) philosophy that conceives human processes of development as being open ended.

According to the transitionalist approach, “philosophy is best understood as a theory and practice of hopeful cultural criticism” (16). This cultural criticism presupposes hope as the motivating force: we engage in criticism because we hope that in that way we will ameliorate the present situation. To that extent, the melioristic approach presupposes an attitude of hope, which in turn is tied to pluralism (multiple worlds exist) and humanism (humans contribute to the worlds they inhabit). The world is in transformation, and humans take part to this process and, to a certain extent, can control it. Pragmatism is committed to the thesis that we can create better world and selves. This, according to Colin Koopman, is the central thesis of the pragmatist tradition.

Koopman – and this is one of the most important thesis of his book – believes that this ground offers an ecumenical perspective capable of bringing all the different strands of pragmatism (classical and neo) under a new ‘third wave’ synthesis.

The second chapter retraces the transitionalist theme to most of the classical and contemporary pragmatists, including thinkers such as Peirce and Quine. The aim is to show the extent to which this theme is present in the pragmatist tradition, even outside those figure whose transitionalist commitment is clear. Transitionalism is originally developed by Emerson and pass successively on to James and Dewey. This, in Koopman intentions, should count as a demonstration of the fact that the category of transitionalism can sustain the theoretical work needed in order to bring all the pragmatist tradition under a single umbrella. While interesting, this reconstruction underscores the shaping force of evolutionism, whose inspiration is explicitly at work in any deweyan (and many peircean) attempts at defining the temporal structure of human experience. Transition, change, novelty (p. 52) are also central categories of any evolutionary approach. To better defend the transitional paradigm, more detailed historical analysis would be required in order to distinguish the melioristic from the evolutionary theme in the different philosophies. Moreover, as it will become clear in the following chapters, the commitment of the pragmatists to the melioristic assumption is so differentiated in tone and degree that when Koopman tries to articulate its epistemological, ethical, and political implications, he will be obliged to get rid of Peirce and Quine, to set aside Putnam and Margolis, and grossly misinterpret Dewey, to the extent that at the end of his journey what remains in the hands of the third wave pragmatists is the affinity among James and Rorty as thinkers of hope.

That things would have gone that way the reader can feel it since the first chapter, where Koopman lay out as the epistemological pillar of his project is James’ theory of truth. I will only remark in passing that James’ insights into epistemology could have been defended more easily if they were discussed in a way not so totally oblivious of a century of speculation in logic and epistemology. This starting point, inevitably, drives Koopman to a gross misunderstanding of Dewey and Peirce epistemologies. He not only dismisses Peirce as an inspiring source of his transitional pragmatism (and this brings to zero his chances to “to integrate what is best in the two distinctive waves of pragmatist thought that have preceded it”, p. 3), but his appraisal of Dewey is paid at the too high cost of getting rid of his epistemology in order to make of him that critic of culture that Rorty wanted him to be. Many scholars will be astonished in reading that for Dewey “truth might be but one of the names for our self-salving” (43). But more is to come for those who take Peirce seriously and those who do not read Dewey after Rorty. A not small portion of people interested in pragmatism, I believe.

The chapter devoted to the articulation of a transitional epistemology opens with the acknowledgment that one of the main epistemological innovations developed by pragmatism concerns the introduction of temporality into epistemic relations. According to

pragmatism, knowledge is conceptualized as a historical relation between former expectations and subsequent consequences (practical eventualities). It is a definition broad enough to encompass pragmatists from Peirce to Rorty, and it is limited enough to usefully describe the pragmatist epistemology as opposed to different epistemological projects. Our practical engagements with the world stand as starting point of the epistemological work. The historical, sociological and anthropological conditions that qualify a given context are considered the inescapable reference of all epistemic acts. Then Koopman accomplishes a further step that reproduces the divide between those pragmatists that consider normativity a necessary part of epistemology (here I would list Peirce, Dewey, Margolis, Putnam) and those that consider that historicity replaces normativity (here I would list James and Rorty). Both camps (at least some of their participants) will acknowledge the inescapability of contextual elements in the production of knowledge as a temporal process, but while the first group will urge that this fact changes our understanding of normativity – a normativity free of universalistic pretences, the second would simply dismiss the need for a normative enterprise. Claiming that “epistemic success and failure are internally attributed *wholly* within practices” (p. 111, my emphasis), Koopman sides explicitly with the second group. It should be noted that none of the philosophers I put in the first group would agree to such a claim, unless specifications are offered that grant a specific place for normativity. As a paradigmatic exemplification of his transitional epistemology, Koopman offers the sociological work of Pierre Bourdieu, whose conception of practice is surely in line with the pragmatist outlook, but whose work is surely not a pertinent source for epistemology. Koopman is well aware of the objections that even pragmatists (of the first stripe) could move to his claim. He firstly reminds us that pragmatist epistemology refuses the spectator theory of knowledge and, in so doing, reclaimed the right of practice in the field of epistemology. Overcoming correspondence, coherence and proceduralist conceptions of truth, pragmatism paves the way for this epistemological role of practice. This surely accounts for the epistemological revolution brought about by pragmatism and constitute the common ground of most of the epistemological outlooks that traceable to pragmatism. Historical, sociological, and anthropological approaches are required in order to reconstruct the different ways human beings have developed in order to fix their beliefs. This, again, is a claim that most pragmatists would accept, and can be put at the basis of a general pragmatist epistemology. But the question remains open whether and how we could discriminate between competing ways (methods) of belief fixation. It is precisely on this point that the pragmatist tree splits in different and non reconcilable directions and that Koopman has to take side: he cannot have both in his group Peirce *and* James, Dewey *and* Rorty, Margolis *and* Bourdieu. To this extent, his transitional epistemology cannot function as a pragmatist *koiné*, and is forced to reproduce – instead of solving – those philosophical conflicts that since Peirce’s and James’ time characterize the philosophical conversation inside pragmatism. Koopman is fully right in reminding us that the pragmatist epistemology was born “in the crucible of probabilities” (113). But we should not forget that probable reasoning gives rise to two different strategies: the *betting strategy* that Koopman adopts in order to define the pragmatist-transitionalist conception of inquiry, and the *abductive strategy*, according to which rather than betting we accurately assess arguments, compare results, engage with experience. A bet, like the Pascal wager so dear to James takes place where reason offers no more evidence, while abduction takes place precisely as an act of reason. The second is controlled, the first relies on will. Beliefs, Peirce and Dewey said, are hypotheses, not bets. The epistemological and practical difference stands here as an irreducible divide. Of course, bets are not blind, but there are

nevertheless limitations to the validity of the metaphor, and words are never chosen by chance.

A similar strategy drives his effort at defining a transitional approach to ethics. He opens his chapter on this topic with a notion that some would consider an oxymoron and others would refuse with force: that of a *perfectionist pragmatism*. The background of this approach is given by the idea that the dominant moral doctrines of deontology and teleology should be overcome and that cannot be done by virtue ethics. Perfectionist pragmatism is advanced precisely as a solution to this diagnosis.

Claiming a perfectionist tone for pragmatism, Koopman sides obviously against Cavell, whose understanding of pragmatism and perfectionism posits an incompatibility between the two terms. According to Koopman, such an understanding is wrong because based upon a reductive conception of pragmatism (the same he will use in interpreting Dewey). Koopman's strongest argument for advocating a perfectionist tone for pragmatism is to rely on its melioristic attitude: meliorism is, for Koopman, a sure sign of perfectionism, as both share a tension towards perfecting the self. In this enterprise, Koopman assigns to James rather than Dewey the leading role. In following Cavell, Koopman considers perfectionism as not refusing but rather including teleology and deontology. The same, Koopman claims, is true of pragmatist ethics. Although it is not very clear why reference to will and pleasure should imply the endorsement of deontology and teleology, Koopman clearly identifies in the process of perfecting and in the refusal of a rule-based ethics a common theme of pragmatism and perfectionism. In James' notion of *effort* Koopman finds another perfectionist notion: while pragmatist meliorism does not necessarily depend upon an ethic of the effort, the Jamesian version proposes such a connection, and sides Emerson's perfectionism in emphasizing the crucial importance of individual acts of discontinuity in facing radical moral situations. On this side, too, Koopman's proposal is more Jamesian than Deweyan, so confirming an interpretive line joining Emerson, James, and Rorty. Although I am not sure that Cavell would be satisfied by Koopman's answer (acknowledging the necessity to combine acceptance of the given conditions – principle of moral pleasure – and will to transform them – principle of will – does not seem to satisfy adequately Cavell's criteria for perfectionism), the articulation of these two criteria offers a starting point for defining a progressive and melioristic attitude in ethics such as that can be found at the bottom of some pragmatist philosophies.

The chapter on politics follows the same scheme that structures that on ethics, only replacing deontology and teleology with utopianism and dystopianism as the contemporary political philosophies that pragmatism is supposed to replace. Among the rationalistic utopian approaches, Koopman includes Rawls'. Among the irrationalistic, dystopian thinkers, Koopman lists Benjamin, Heidegger, Derrida, and Žižek.

This frame is meant at drawing an opposition between over-rationalistic approaches that disregard the specific traits of political reality in order to follow only the idealities of reason, and irrationalistic and pessimistic approaches that focus exclusively on a reality considered as irremediably compromised with power and incapable of offering any reason for hope. The pragmatist move consists here, as in the field of ethics, in delineating an intermediate path, capable of bringing ideality and reality to terms. Pragmatism so conceived, in fact holds "that political reason is always situated within a context but in such a way as to provide the resources for its own improvement" (164). Surprisingly, Koopman tells us that this move approaches pragmatism to conservative thinking, namely to those conservatives "who articulate evolutionary, developmental, and situate conceptions of political practice". This is puzzling at the highest degree: not only there is no valid reason

for associating conservative with evolutionary and developmental arguments in political theory, on the contrary. But the association of pragmatism and conservatism is even more surprising, especially as this is justified because of a supposedly common engagement with reformism instead as revolutionism. That “we ought not flee from political reality in order to engage an ethical perspective” (164) seems to be at least a very inventive conception of conservatism. Nevertheless, if we leave aside this very unhappy categorization of political theories, what remains is a steady affirmation of a contextual principle. We are brought again back to that primacy of practice that characterizes pragmatist philosophies. Drawing on Dewey’s political philosophy, Koopman proposes to define a melioristic approach to politics “as the improvement of political realities on the basis of resources already available within the very realities on which we are working” (167). Here Koopman re-proposes the model of an absolute immanence, of a pure historicity in which situation, practice, or context cannot and need not be transcended in order to successfully act inside them. Situations and every kind of context are considered to be already provided of those normative criteria which are required in order to discriminate growth from its opposite: “we need not, nor could we ever hope to, transcend the present situations in which we find ourselves in order to locate the resources we need for meliorating that situation” (168). A definition that, once again, would better suit Rorty’s dismissal of epistemology and James’ will to believe than Dewey’s affirmation of the normative requirements of inquiry. The following paragraph traces parallels between this melioristic conception of politics in pragmatism and analogous conceptions in Williams’, Foucault’s, Young’s, and Sen’s political philosophies, underlying their common endorsement of the principle of the primacy of practice. Of these, the melioristic reading of Williams’ philosophy is particularly insightful.

In his concluding chapter, Koopman proceeds to trace a pathway aimed at bringing pragmatism near to genealogical thinking, on the basis of their common usage of the knowledge of the past for gaining guidance in the present and in the future. The use of history recommended by Koopman to pragmatism is genealogical in sort: it is a use of history aimed at understanding the processes through which we have become what we presently are. We are not far, as soon Koopman will explain, from Foucault’s project of an historical ontology. The pragmatist paradigm chosen in order to highlight pragmatism’s compatibility with genealogy is Dewey’s reconstructive model of inquiry. Koopman interprets Dewey’s injunction to place inquiry into the context of problematic situations as a call for philosophers to recur to social and historical sciences in order to deepen their understanding of practices on which they reflect. He completes his interpretation of reconstruction as the core of deweyan pragmatism adding that it proceeds on the basis of resources already present in the situation (principle of absolute immanence) and is intrinsically an ameliorative process. He then proceed, on the basis of a model he has applied in former chapters, to contrast this conception of thinking to more traditional conceptions – here what he terms realism and idealism, in order to show that pragmatism constitutes a third way that draws upon their resources but in order to frame a new conception. This is the only place where Koopman deeply tackles Dewey’s philosophy, engaging in a critical assessment of Dewey’s theory of inquiry. This last is heavily criticised for not having adequately explained how problematic situations are generated, because of an exclusive focus on their resolution. In the several pages devoted to Dewey, we find lots of very trenchant judgments such as: “Dewey simply had too little to say about how we might fashion forms of inquiry that help us bring the right kinds of problems into focus” (199). This is a bit too fast, especially as what is offered as evidence for such a

critique are only few quotes disparagingly taken from different texts. Koopman should have better taken a deeper look at Dewey's pedagogical and political writings, where we find accurate diagnosis of obstacles, constraints, causes that hinders political and educative practice. Or to his conception of the qualitative as the process through which the indeterminate situation becomes determinate. It is certainly true that Dewey did not provide detailed social analysis of reality, but this was not the focus of his research. It is astonishing that in his search for a general theoretical paradigm, Koopman does not see the fruitfulness of Dewey's theory of inquiry as an abstract description of the general process of how problems arise, are perceived, transformed through inquiry, faced, solved. His criticism of his conception of the notion of situation is based upon a very reductive reading of his texts (Burke, *Dewey's new logic* showed that in great details fifteen years ago, Sleepers, *The Necessity of Pragmatism* more than twenty years ago). Then, of course, the role of other traditions and approaches in the analysis of psycho-socio-political-economical-gender, etc. factors that contribute in shaping problematic situations is certainly of great and irreplaceable value. In this sense, and hopefully, sixty years of philosophy and social sciences has not passed in vain. The same treatment, not surprisingly, is then offered to Peirce, whose epistemology is too easily dismissed without even considering the potentialities implied not only in the doubt-belief paradigm, but even in Peirce's complex conception of the practice of research and of how subtle and complex is the experience of doubt in different forms of inquiry. To say that for Dewey and Peirce doubt is "an unanalyzable given state of mind" or a form of givenness that "do not stand in need of explication, justification, interpretation, or inferential articulation" (205) is simply a proposition so off the mark that no Peirce or Dewey scholar can take seriously.

In the end, which is the global contribution of Koopman's project to the advancement of pragmatism? A first remark is that, his statements notwithstanding, his account of pragmatism is decidedly not ecumenical but steadily biased towards a Jamesian-Rortyan understanding. While it is pretty clear that his melioristic and transitional concerns fit poorly with Peirce's vision (and practice) of philosophy, and with the epistemological outlooks it inspired (and which are still living and well inside the pragmatist tradition). It also tends to deeply misread Dewey, bringing him selectively towards the Rortyan reading. One of the unhappy consequences of this rehearsing of Rorty's interpretation of Dewey is a misunderstanding of the force and novelty of Dewey's epistemology and the rehearsal of an interpretative canon that prioritizes the image of Dewey critic of culture and thinker of reform and reconstruction over an image of Dewey where his evolutionary and epistemological sensibility find their proper place (Dewey as a theorist of rationality, as the inventor of an original theory of judgment, as bringing science into the evolutionary mould, etc.). This is a move many other have accomplished – especially after Rorty's lesson, but is a move that has also been deeply criticised and that I think should be resisted. For these and similar reasons, his proposed definition of the pragmatist movement under the label of "transitionalism" is too narrow for his scope. But could have it been otherwise? Bringing Emerson and Peirce (under Rortyan auspices) under the same umbrella is simply a too hard task, unless the chosen umbrella is so broad to become irrelevant. According to Peirce and (to a great extent) Dewey, philosophy is simply NOT a critique of culture, although philosophers could (and for Dewey probably should) engage ALSO in the critique of culture.

And this is the second risk that Koopman enters: his transitional philosophy, aptly inspired by non pragmatist thinkers such as Iris Marion Young and Michel Foucault, is in a way too broad to serve the purpose: as a kind of historicism, transitionalism apply to too

many thinkers to be aptly used for defining a single tradition of thought, i.e. pragmatism (be it its third wave). If, following Koopman, we consider that “philosophy is best understood as a theory and practice of hopeful cultural criticism” (16), and if we define meliorism as the will to contribute to the “epistemic, ethic and political realities in which we find ourselves flowing”, which philosopher, scientist, or practitioner would deny to adhere to the melioristic claim? Is not any research by default engaged in bettering the epistemic condition of his discipline? His not any practitioner or socio-political theorist engaged – at least provisionally – in improving the ethical, social, and political conditions of his time? Wouldn't we say that even of non pragmatist thinkers such as John Rawls? Meliorism and transitionalism so conceived are probably best conceived as the signs of our time: a time of increased degrees of transformation, of generalized experimental and fallibilistic approaches to reality, of extraordinarily shortened life-cycles for any product, idea, institution produced by humans. Pragmatism, with the works of Dewey and James, has surely been one of the first philosophical traditions to interpret this new configuration of human societies (but let's not forget Marx's famous claim that in capitalist societies “all that is solid melts into air”). In this, pragmatism was of course indebted to the fluxive interpretation of nature offered by the Darwinian revolution. After that, many philosophers and scientists have attempted to articulate this evolutionary and progressive outlook in different guise, so giving rise to a transitional way of thinking (surely in tone with a society increasingly based on dynamical processes of change at all levels).

For these reasons, I think that the ecumenical project of overcoming the opposition of classic and neo pragmatist in the ‘new synthesis’ of a third wave of transitional pragmatism fails: we hardly needed Koopman to acknowledge the similarities between James and Rorty, and the debate between those that consider Rorty a follower of Dewey and those that consider him a ‘traitor’ won't be close by this book. Moreover, there will be no ‘peace’ as he puts it, simply leaving Peirce (and the part of Dewey's thinking much indebted to him) outside the group. What Koopman proposes here as a ‘new synthesis’, is probably no more than the furthering of a fruitful and well established line of interpretation in the pragmatist tradition, going from Emerson to Koopman himself via James, McDermott, Rorty, Stuhr and many other classical and contemporary philosophers. Along this line, Koopman's is surely an interesting book that pushes the fringes of the pragmatist tradition a bit further.

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