Genesis *and* Geltung: *An Interview with Hans Joas*

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1.

Tullio Viola: One of the most relevant aspects of your intellectual career is your reflection on the link between historical and normative arguments with regard to values. This reflection goes back at least to your 1997 book *The Genesis of Values*, and may be seen to culminate in the methodological chapter of your 2011 book on *The Sacredness of the Person*, in which you talk about the need for an "affirmative genealogy" of values. As you have made clear many times (most recently in the article "Pragmatismus und Historismus" in the *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* for 2015, published in English in the new volume "The Timeliness of G. H. Mead" that you yourself edited together with Daniel Huebner), this historicist argument has many points of contact with pragmatism.

Hans Joas: In the debate about my book *The Sacredness of the Person* it has been remarked that the main foundation of my argument – and even the main foundation for the methodological chapter of the book – is not pragmatism. The main source of the argument itself is Emile Durkheim's sociology of religion, which I have applied to non-religious, mostly secular values; and the main foundation of the methodological chapter is the Protestant theologian, historian, and sociologist Ernst Troeltsch, and particularly his last work *Historicism and its Problems*. What I think I could show, however, is, first, that there are connections between pragmatism and Troeltsch's methodology; and second, that there are connections between William James' psychology of religion and the fundamental argument coming from Durkheim about the sacredness of the person. (Actually I even realized that William James in several passages uses the expression "sacredness of the individual.") So, in both respects pragmatism is not the main source of my inspiration here, but something with which my main sources of inspiration in this book have strong affinities. And the article in the *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* that you have mentioned has been written precisely to demonstrate in detail the connection between American pragmatism and the most mature version of German historicism, as we find it in Troeltsch.

However, your later books seem to push pragmatism more into the background in comparison with your early work. Is there something specific you could not find in pragmatism, which has now become more important?

When you say that I'm coming from pragmatism, this is of course true in some sense. But I'm not American and I was not originally trained in America. From the very outset, my interest in pragmatism was filtered through German historicism. And this is true even in my first book on Mead. As a young man, I had the (megalomaniac) ambition to write a biography of G. H. Mead in the same sense in which W. Dilthey had written a biography of Schleiermacher – i.e., to study an author of the past who, for a reason that you may understand at first only intuitively, is totally attractive to

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you, so that you have the feeling you want to read everything that author has ever written, and you want to understand in detail why that author changed opinion or attitude at certain points in time, and you want to give a genetic reconstruction of an author who is totally fascinating to you individually. So, when I began my research on Mead and found out – here where we are sitting, in the archive of the then East Berlin University – that Mead had indeed studied with Dilthey, that fact had a kind of "electrical" importance for me. Not only was Dilthey the methodological role model for my study about Mead, but there was indeed an intellectual connection between the two. This connection told me that Mead's own move in the direction of a pragmatist philosophy that is oriented toward the social sciences was already influenced by Dilthey's historicism. So, as you can see from this story, I've always moved within the tension between pragmatism and historicism, and I now feel to be at the point at which I can spell this out more clearly and contribute to a possible synthesis of these two great schools of thinking.

So let us try to delve a bit deeper into the connections between pragmatism and what you now call "affirmative genealogy." One such connection, it seems to me, is the idea that human action is inherently creative, as you describe it in your 1992 book *The Creativity of Action*.

In my book on creativity I emphasize that every creative process has a passive dimension. To put it bluntly, you cannot find the creative solution to a problem if that solution does not come to you. You can decide that you would like to solve the problem, but you cannot decide that you *will* indeed solve the problem! The inspiration for your creative act has to come from somewhere. Now, when we deal with the emergence of values, this passive dimension is even stronger. You may not even have thought about solving a problem in this case; and yet, you are confronted with the attractive qualities of certain values – of certain evaluative, holistic orientations. And I say "confronted" in the sense that you realize only after the fact that something in you had already been pre-disposed to accept what has suddenly come to you. This is something that William James, in his psychology of religious conversion, has described very vividly. But the same is true when no proper conversion takes place, and you simply experience an oscillation with regard to your values: in some phases of your life, your value orientation may somehow lose its vitality, or needs to be revitalized. That is true for individuals and it is true for collectivities. So, for example, when I write about the abolition of slavery, and about how important Christian motivations were for that movement in the U.S., people sometimes object that Christianity had been around for a long time, so it cannot simply be Christianity that led to the abolition of slavery. But this is exactly my point: You need a kind of collective "re-awakening" (I take that term from American religious history), which I call an intensification of a motivation derived from a morality that had already been your morality before.

The notion of "affirmative genealogy," in turn, refers to the idea that the processes of the genesis of values – of the emergence of new ideals – in human history are indeed highly contingent; but that the contingency of the emergence of a value does

not mean that the value can only be relevant to the people somehow immediately connected to the processes of this emergence. Something comes into the world as a point of orientation under very contingent circumstances; but can then become a point of orientation for people who have nothing to do with the cultural, economic, political processes that led to the emergence of those values. To put it less abstractly, we could say that – whether we are Christian believers or not – Christianity somehow emerged in a strange corner of the Roman Empire, as a sort of revolutionary transformation of Ancient Judaism. But the relevance of Christianity has not been confined to the Roman Empire, or to Jews. On the contrary, it has become an important source of inspiration for contemporary people, say, in South Korea. Why? In the process of the emergence of an ideal, something has come into the world that can develop its attractive force towards people who have nothing to do with the conditions of its emergence. So, the objectivity, here, is not an objectivity in the neo-Kantian sense of a separate realm of values. It is an objectivity in the sense that people experience it as going beyond what they can produce by themselves. Already in my book on *The Genesis of Values* I referred to Max Scheler's seemingly paradoxical expression: *ein An-sich für-mich*. Scheler's expression refers to something that I may experience as indepedent from me, but in the awareness that other people will also experience *other* values as true in themselves. This argument, therefore, introduces an experiential level into the debate about subjectivity versus objectivity.

The attempt to conjoin objectivity and contingency may even go back to your 1980 book on Mead, where you make the example of secondary qualities of the world, such as colors. On the one hand, colors are objective; but on the other, they are contingent, because they are not independent from our constitution as bodies in the world. In retrospect, this looks like a blueprint for your philosophy of values.

Yes, I think that this is indeed the relevance of my interpretation of those very long texts by Mead in which he embarks on a critique of empiricism and rationalism. They are mostly about the problem of objectivity in the epistemological sense. But subsequent works on values (think of John Dewey's *Theory of Valuation*) were able to draw a parallel between these epistemological debates and the debate about the status of valuation.

In your 2015 article on pragmatism and historicism, you hint at the possibility of conjoining affirmative genealogy with what you call the "semiotic anthropology" of certain pragmatists. Could you expand on this point?

Indeed, I do think that pragmatism – though not all pragmatists to the same extent, but certainly Peirce and Mead – very much emphasized, in an anthropological sense, that the human being is a being that uses signs. And that we cannot understand the specific way in which human beings relate to the world and to themselves if we do not see how these relationships are mediated through a particular type of signs. I think

that Peirce was the first to have that idea, and that James never really understood the epochal importance of that idea. In my current work, I contend that one of the weaknesses of James's theory of religion is that, although he has such fantastic things to say about the dynamics of religious experience, he did not understand that he also needed a theory of the *articulation* of these religious experiences. And this would have been the systematic place where he would have had to incorporate a Peircean semiotics into his psychology of religious experience. Now, I have been aware of that weakness in James since writing my book on the *Genesis of Values*, but what I was not aware of back then is that there is another figure – a close friend of both James's and Peirce's – who already realized exactly that weak spot in James, and tried to synthesize Peircean semiotics with James's psychology or phenomenology of religious experience. And that figure is Josiah Royce.

Let me go back to an expression you have just used: that of "articulating an experience." This expression pops up rather often in your work. In particular, there is a passage of your last book in which you pit the *articulation* of experience against the idea of a total *linguisticization* of experience. Now, do you think it is possible to look at the notion of articulation as a "metaphor of creativity," in the sense in which you use this notion with regard to other concepts (such as the concepts of "life," "production," "creative intelligence") in your book on the creativity of action? I am asking this because it seems to me that it is the very notion of articulation which allows you to have an open or liberal understanding of the relation between experience and its conceptualization.

I have never thought about this with regard to my „metaphors of creativity". I would have the inclination to say no, and to add that articulation has to be a component of my fifth metaphor, namely creative intelligence. When you had an intense experience, you cannot simply move on without integrating it into the interpretive frameworks of your everyday life. And this means that we either have to reduce the experience to something we have already known, or we have to modify our interpretive frameworks. This is a real challenge, of course. And it is all the more a challenge as we do not tackle it in a completely lonely manner. We cannot change our interpretive framework without being asked *by others*: why do you suddenly change the way you think about the world? That is the point where Mead's article about "Scientific Method and Individual Thinker" would come into the picture. When I have had a deviant experience – something that deviates from what I expected on the basis of shared patterns – and I start to articulate that, I do that in a world of shared symbols (not necessarily in language). And I have to tell others: it is not only *me* who has to transform his or her interpretive patterns, but *you* have to change too. And I can only do that by producing something that is attractive or convincing to others. It could be *attractive* in the sense of poetic expression. Others will then recognize in my poetic expression that I have articulated an experience that they have also had, without being able to articulate it. But it could also be *convincing* in the sense that I derive from my experience a propositional statement about which I claim: this is closer to the truth

than what we have thought so far, and you are therefore forced to accept this new description of the world, and can only evade the force of my argument if you offer me a description that is convincing to me even in light of the new experience I have had. So, articulation is not an additional metaphor of creativity, but is an elaboration of what happens intersubjectively when we are in a process of creative intelligence.

2.

Let me ask you a few questions about your interlocutors. A few decades ago, especially in America, when people started thinking seriously about the relationship between pragmatism and historicism, there was a prominent way of understanding pragmatism that seems to me very different from yours. I am referring to the neo-pragmatism of Richard Rorty. How would you describe the differences between Rorty's and your own attempts to move pragmatism closer to historicism?

I have to say immediately that I am grateful to Richard Rorty: he contributed more than anybody else to the renaissance of an interest in American pragmatism, at least within the U.S. and in the circles of people trained in analytical philosophy. Rorty did a vast amount for the sake of pragmatism. I also knew him personally. It was him who approached me when I published my book *Pragmatism and Social Theory*. We saw each other on several occasions and I found him an absolutely brilliant interlocutor. So, I don't want to distance myself too sharply from him. However, there are clear differences in our interpretation of pragmatism. His understanding of pragmatism is dominated by what he calls "conversation," and that is not a typical notion of pragmatism. On the contrary, it is bereft of what would be a typical pragmatist notion, namely the notion of "inquiry." To put it in a nutshell: the pragmatists treated reality as a source of our learning processes, and said that we encounter the hardness of reality in our action, and while this does not impose on us an unambiguous understanding of what reality is, it certainly rules out certain understandings of reality. I have to modify my description of the world on the basis of my encounter with the world.

This is what Peirce would have called the "outward clash" of reality…

Exactly. And I would say that Rorty's pragmatism ignores this "outward clash," and writes as though we were free to use this or that or another vocabulary for our description of the world, just in the sense of an arbitrary choice of a liberated individual. This, I think, is both deeply un-pragmatist and the source of many problems in Rorty's philosophy. Now, saying that something is un-pragmatist is not an argument in itself; it is only an argument if we are talking about whether Rorty's is a correct interpretation of pragmatism or not. There were many debates with Rorty that you can read in printed form in which Rorty admitted that his interpretation of Dewey is not a philologically appropriate interpretation of pragmatism.

Another difference is that Rorty was a militant atheist. Not only a non-believer, but an atheist in the sense of really thinking that we have to overcome religious faith; and

this is certainly very far from what I am driven by. And I personally think that some of his interpretations of pragmatism (for instance of William James) are somehow distorted by this militant intention.

You have proposed to locate your own stance on values and the role of genealogy mid-way between Nietzsche and Kant. Do you think we can place Rorty on the Nietzschean side?

I would say that Rorty has a more Nietzschean than pragmatist understanding of creativity. But he was a democrat like John Dewey, and very far from Nietzsche in political respects. The way he tries to combine a Nietzschean understanding of creativity with a Deweyan understanding of politics is by privatising the impulses coming from a theory of creativity. As a private individual, you are free to do what you want, and there should not be a collectively imposed morality (this is how he retains the Nietzschean liberation from Christian morality). At the same time, he avoids the political consequences of Nietzscheanism, as you find them in the history of the German (or Italian) right, as well as – because of the French transformation of Nietzsche after the second world war – in leftist versions of academic radicalism. Rorty was an outspoken critic of this Nietzschean academic radicalism. Politically, he was more of a social democrat.

The fact remains that he has tried to combine two philosophies – pragmatism and Nietzscheanism – that might seem hardly reconcilable.

There is a certain affinity between Nietzsche and pragmatism, which has nothing to do with an internal ambiguity of pragmatism itself. At the end of the nineteenth century you have a parallel revolution taking place in different countries in the direction of a reflection about creativity. The German version of that is Nietzsche, together with some followers of Nietzsche, who did not share everything that Nietzsche thought, such as Georg Simmel. At the same time, the American pragmatists are the American version of that (I say "American pragmatists" although there are many differences in the pragmatist "family," as Richard Bernstein has aptly put it). And I would add Henri Bergson as the French version of the same movement. Moreover, I would say that although Bergson and Durkheim are often seen as polar opposites, they also share very much with one another. Durkheim's theory of religion, too, is a version of this general late-nineteenth-century, early-twentieth-century movement in the direction of an inquiry into the creativity of human action. So, the fact that people tend to be Nietzschean under the label of pragmatism has probably more to do with this original affinity.

If we now move on to the other extreme of the Nietzsche-Kant polarity, we find another important interlocutor of yours who has been looking with interest at pragmatism. I mean, of course, Jürgen Habermas.

Habermas and Apel relied on a very selective reception of pragmatism, a reception that is led by their interest in the logic of the discourse, in the sense of the processes of rational deliberation and argumentation. Now this is clearly a component of both Peirce's and Mead's philosophy. (Not so much of James's, which is why there is hardly any trace of James in Habermas's work; and in Apel's writings James appears as a sort of second-class thinker, as opposed to the first-class thinker Peirce – which I think is totally unfair, but comes from the fact that he never had an affinity for what is important in James.) Both Apel and Habermas use pragmatism to get away from a monological understanding of reason and to move in the direction of collective or social processes of rational argumentation. And I'm all with them on that. But I think that in the work of Peirce, Mead, etc., there is a closer connection between genesis and validity than you find in Kant or in the Kantianised reception of pragmatism such as Habermas's or Apel's. One can spell out this point on the purely cognitive level, by saying that Apel and Habermas are mostly interested in how we *justify* cognitive validity claims. Peirce, however, was very much interested also in how we *arrive* at interesting validity claims that are worth being justified. For Peirce, the scientific process does not simply depend on the rational justification of validity claims, but on the emergence of validity claims that lead to experimental practices, and lead to results that have to be rationally justified. This is a holistic approach, which contains both the formation of creative hypotheses and their rational justification. Not every hypothesis is an interesting hypothesis that is worth being experimentally tested. If the opposite were the case, you could produce hypotheses just arbitrarily or randomly. But this is not the case. Human beings need to *come* to the conclusion: "this could be the solution to our problem." In other words, there is an interaction between the formation of a hypothesis and the processes through which we justify the validity claims derived or implicit in this hypothesis. Certainly for the cognitive level, on which I haven't elaborated very much. But I think I did elaborate the internal connection between genesis and validity on the level of values.

Another way to characterize your reflections on history against the backdrop of your interlocutors may be to compare it with the broadly Hegelian ideal – still well alive today – of a "reconstruction" of the historical past.

In fact, the English-speaking world has often brought Hegelianism and German historicism very closely together. But in the German intellectual history, this is more of an alternative. The first is a more or less teleological philosophy of history, the other lays emphasis on historical contingency. And I side with historicism in being very skeptical with regard to teleological outlooks. Now, my idea of an affirmative genealogy of values does have a dimension of "reconstruction," in that it says that if I believe in the validity of something today, I cannot avoid *retelling* history in light of this contemporary validity claim. So, for instance, when I think that human rights are a good thing, I will have to look at history in light of this and ask who the forerunners of human rights were, who contributed to their genesis, and so on. But it is important for me to do so without *reconstructing* history in the sense that somehow the historical

process had to lead to the point where we are now. In other words, I want to leave open the "implicit futures" of certain historical pasts. Some readers of *The Sacredness of the Person* took me to say that there is an ongoing process of sacralization of the person. Not at all! There are only *episodes*, and it is a totally empirical question, for example, to ask to what extent the nineteenth-century abolitionists relied on the eighteenth century declarations of human rights. In principle, they could have! But often they didn't. For them, the American document was written in the spirit of slaveholders. So they didn't say: "the declaration of independence has already proclaimed that all men are created equal, from which we derive that we have to respect the slaves as equal human beings." No: they had other sources. But this is not something I derive from philosophy. You have to derive it from empirical research. You have to read the abolitionists and see what's the case. There is a difference here with Axel Honneth who uses the term "reconstruction." And it seems to me that this term in the work of this old German colleague of mine clearly has teleological implications. People struggle for recognition and something has to come out of this struggle. To this I answer: no, many struggles just lead to very negative outcomes for all participants, and no moral progress comes out of that at all.

3.

Let me now go back to *The Sacredness of the Person*, about which I would like to raise a possible objection. You often express your skepticism toward the idea that values can be justified in a purely argumentative manner. But I am worried that this could end up in an overly strong distinction between "narratives" and "rational accounts."

But that is exactly what I would not want to do! Your objection is similar to a point recently made by German philosopher Matthias Kettner, who has in a very intelligent and constructive manner criticized my conception of rational discourse.[1] And I have replied to Kettner by making the following point, which I take to express a deeply pragmatist attitude. When we realize that we disagree in our evaluative judgments, the next step has, of course, to be rational argument. I have to tell you why, starting from something that we share, you derive a judgment that seems to me to be inconsistent with our shared foundations. And you may in turn try to show me why *you* are consistent, and I am not. This is a purely rational argument. But it presupposes that we *do* share certain things. Maybe, we share our belief in the ten commandments; or in Kant's moral philosophy. If this is the case, we have a common basis and we can go on to argue in a purely rational way about what follows normatively from our common basis. Now the pragmatist would say: this is good in most cases. That is, in most cases there is no need for narration and affirmative genealogy, because there is space for rational argumentation. What happens, though, when we discover that we do not share either our belief in the ten commandments or our belief in Kant's moral

1. Matthias Kettner (2014), "Affirmative Genealogie und argumentativer Diskurs. Ein Vergleich im Anschluss an Hans Joas," *in* Hermann-Josef Große Kracht (ed.), *Der moderne Glaube an die Menschenwürde. Philosophie, Soziologie und Theologie im Gespräch mit Hans Joas*, Bielefeld.

philosophy, or in short, that we do not share anything? Let us imagine that I have a debate with somebody who belongs to the NSU – the German right-wing extremists who killed at least ten Turkish immigrants. These are people who are as far from my moral intuitions as possible. You could say that in this case nothing helps, that these people are just enemies. And politically, that's probably true. We have to arrest these people and I do not get the feeling that talking to them could modify my opinions. But as a matter of principle (although perhaps not in the empirical reality), I feel obliged to do as much as I can to understand what drove children who grew up in Thuringia to become anti-immigrant terrorists. I therefore imagine that it should be possible to enter into a process of communication with them. And this communication cannot be restricted to rational argumentation. I would have to tell the other person that I realize we are so far from each other that we seem not to share anything in moral respect. "You believe in the superiority of the Aryan race" – I could say, – "and I find this belief not only completely unjustified on the cognitive side, but also normatively abominable. So, tell me: how have you come to that? What happened to you, biographically? If, for instance, this was not already the worldview of your parents, you must have had some act of conversion to a neo-nazi conviction." In turn, the other person will have the right to ask me a similar question: to ask me why I do not see the "obvious" superiority of the Aryan race. That is the point where narration comes into the picture. So, I am not saying: let's replace rational argumentation with narration. What I am saying is: let's enlarge the scope of human communication beyond the limits of rational argumentation. And beyond these limits there is not only the possible clash of worldviews, but there is the possibility to talk to each other (at least, in principle), and when we talk to each other in a narrative way, we can use autobiographical, historical, or mythical narration. And then we *may* find out that we do share certain things. I may, for instance, understand what happened to you that made you convert to a neo-nazi worldview, and although I would say "no, that's still the *wrongest* possible direction you could have taken in that situation!," I understand better now that you are a human being like me, and that I have to understand what makes you go in this terrible direction. So, I do not contrast narration and rational argument, but I use certain structures of narration to go beyond the merely rational-argumentative form of rational argumentation into something more comprehensive.

Your book aims to be both a scholarly account of the genealogy of human rights, and a meta-theoretical reflection on how such genealogies may affect the public. My question, then, is the following: empirically, what do you think is the difference between a situation in which discussions about values are sustained by books like yours (i.e., scientifically informed accounts) and a situation in which the affirmative genealogy of values is articulated by non-scientific means, such as journalism, art, political discourse, and everyday life? Is there a qualitative difference between these two levels, or can we think of a continuous spectrum?

I could give a long answer by saying that mankind was deeply steeped in narration until the Axial Age. Up to that point, the justification of values passed through

mythical stories. Then, a kind of critical distance toward mythical narratives emerged. The question arose: is this story you are telling me a real story, or did somebody make it up? Can I improve this story by looking at facts independently from the story I have been told? As of that moment, there is a tension between narration and the rational criteria that makes us critical narrators. Historians do not simply tell a mythical story, but claim that what they are saying is a *true* story. However, after that innovative introduction of a kind of theoretical distance from mythical stories, myths do not die out. But books like mine make the claim that, although there are many narrations of the genesis of human rights, many of them simply cannot be defended. It is simply not true, for instance, that human rights have developed only in the West. Let's look at the facts; but we also have to reintegrate all these facts into a new story. Now, for me the result of the critique of certain narrations cannot be – as some historians have claimed in Germany over the last decades – "let's give up on narration." Rather, we have to rethink the fundamental structure of narration. So, my problem in the book was to integrate three levels: the given conventional histories, the fundamental structure of an alternative history, and the methodological reflection on this process.

4.

Is it possible to enlarge your reflections on *Genesis* and *Geltung* beyond the scope of a philosophy of values? I think, for instance, that there are strong affinities between your philosophy of values and your predilection for a historical contextualization of philosophical accounts.

I share your interpretation. I wrote a biographical work on Mead at a time in which among German historians it was extremely unfashionable to write a biography. Biography was seen as over-estimating the role of individuals (whereas sociologists were supposed to study much wider processes of collective transformation) or simply naive, because if we are interested in social sciences, what counts is the social scientific explanation as such, and not the way some social scientists have found that explanation. Even today, the typical attitude of sociologists is: let's take interesting hypotheses, let's tear them out of the work of a given writer, and then let's put them to a test. I was intuitively against this attitude, for at least two reasons. The first is that I do not think that interesting cognitive statements come in such isolated form. A more holistic approach is more appropriate. Secondly, you understand even a cognitive validity claim better when you study it in connection with the genesis of this cognitive validity claim. Why did that author make that claim? All thinkers have interlocutors, and therefore emphasize something because they are influenced by other thinkers, or because they are struggling for independence from those thinkers, and so on. People like Quentin Skinner have elaborated on this idea, and although I do not share all Skinner said, I think this is true (morever, it is also a fundamental historicist assumption in the study of intellectual history).

In the history of science, this emphasis on holism has been developed under the label of "paradigms." Now if we follow Thomas Kuhn, paradigms are not exclusively

cognitive, but they contain values. And this means that although it is true that an isolated cognitive statement can be tested empirically, totally irrespective of who the speaker is (or of what her or his motivations were), paradigms cannot be evaluated like that. So, the bridge between my affirmative genealogy and the cognitive question is, I think, the evaluative dimension of major cognitive frameworks. And this is even a bridge to the history of science. When we try to reconstruct the history of science and its fundamental transformations, it is not sufficient to look at the falsification of isolated cognitive statements. The transformations in the history of science bear clear similarities to conversion processes in individual biographies or in collective changes, in that a new paradigm is seen as more attractive, more satisfying, more fulfilling than the other.

Alongside your interest in the history of ideas, part of your work certainly falls under the category of historical sociology. I am thinking for instance of your book *Kriege und Werte. Studien zur Gewaltgeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts* (2000) (English: *War and Modernity*, 2003). Would you say that pragmatism has played a role there too?

I would certainly suscribe to the label "historical sociology," although I am moving between several disciplines. But I am not doing so as an act of arbitrary choice. Rather, I feel that I cannot deal adequately with the problems I have if I confine myself to only one discipline. Already at this level, however, I think you could say that this is a pragmatist attitude, because there is a *priority of the problem*. And problems do not come in disciplinary forms. I see the system of scholarly disciplines as a pragmatic form of the division of labour which we should adhere to if it's good for the solution of problems. But if the solution of certain problems asks us to transcend disciplinary boundaries, then we clearly have to do so. So, I do indeed write again and again about the history of philosophy, but my work is always driven by certain systematic questions related to historical sociology that necessarily drive me to take seriously the contribution of non-sociological thinkers as well. So, I have a feeling that I remain a pragmatist even when I do not talk about pragmatism.