# From German Idealism to American Pragmatism—and Back

## I.    Kant and Hegel

Developments over the past four decades have secured Immanuel Kant's status as being for contemporary philosophers what the sea was for Swinburne: the great, gray mother of us all.  And Kant mattered as much for the classical American pragmatists as he does for us today.  But we look back at that sepia-toned age across an extended period during which Anglophone philosophy largely wrote Kant out of its canon.  The founding ideology of Bertrand Russell and G.E. Moore, articulating the rationale and fighting faith for the rising tide of analytic philosophy, was forged in a recoil from the perceived defects of a British idealism inspired by Hegel.  Mindful of the massive debt evidently and self-avowedly owed by Hegel to Kant, and putting aside neo-Kantian readings of Kant as an empiricist philosopher of science that cast him in a light they would have found more favorable, Russell and Moore diagnosed the idealist rot as having set in already with Kant.  For them, and for many of their followers down through the years, the progressive current in philosophy should be seen to have run directly from Locke, Leibniz, and Hume, to Mill and Frege, without any dangerous diversion into the oxbow of German idealism.

What did the pragmatists learn from Kant?  I want to focus on two of Kant's master ideas: what I'll call his *normative turn*, and what I'll call (tendentiously but only

proleptically) his *pragmatist* methodology.  I think that we should still care today about these ideas—ideas which were for complicated reasons largely invisible to classical analytic philosophy.  As I understand his work, Kant's most basic idea, the axis around which all his thought turns, is that what distinguishes exercises of judgment and intentional agency from the performances of merely natural creatures is that judgments and actions are subject to distinctive kinds of *normative* assessment.  Judgments and actions are things we are in a distinctive sense *responsible* for.  They are a kind of *commitment* we undertake.  Kant understands judging and acting as applying *rules*, concepts, that determine *what* the subject becomes committed to and responsible for by applying them.  Applying concepts theoretically in judgment and practically in action binds the concept user, commits her, makes her responsible, by opening her up to normative assessment according to the rules she has made herself subject to.

The responsibility one undertakes by applying a concept is a task responsibility: a commitment to *do* something.  On the theoretical side, what one is committed to doing, what one becomes liable to assessment as to one's success at doing, is integrating one's judgments into a whole that exhibits a distinctive kind of unity: the synthetic unity of apperception.  It is a systematic, rational unity, dynamically created and sustained by drawing inferential consequences from and finding reasons for one's judgments, and rejecting commitments incompatible with those one has undertaken.  Apperceiving, the characteristically sapient sort of awareness, is discursive (that is, conceptual) awareness.  For it consists in integrating judgments into a unity structured by relations of what judgments provide reasons for and against what others.  And those rational relations

among judgments are determined by the rules, that is the concepts, one binds oneself by in making the judgments. Each new episode of experience, paradigmatically the making of a perceptual judgment, requires integration into, and hence transformation of the antecedent constellation of commitments. New incompatibilities can arise, which must be dealt with critically by rejecting or modifying prior commitments. New joint consequences can ensue, which must be acknowledged or rejected. The process by which the whole evolves and develops systematically is a paradigmatically rational one, structured by the rhythm of inhalation or amplification by acknowledging new commitments and extracting new consequences, and exhalation or criticism by rejecting or adjusting old commitments in the light of their rational relations to the new ones.

Kant's new normative conception of what the activity of judging consists in, of what one must be *doing* in order to be judging (a corresponding story applies to acting), puts important structural constraints on how he understands the judgeable *contents* for which one is taking responsibility in judgment. The dominant order of logical and semantic explanation of the tradition Kant inherited began with a doctrine of terms or concepts. On that base, a doctrine of judgments was erected, and then finally a doctrine of consequences or syllogisms. But the minimal unit of *responsibility* is the judgment. It is judgments, not concepts, that one can invest one's authority in, commit oneself to, by integrating them into an evolving constellation that exhibits the rational synthetic unity of apperception. Accordingly, in a radical break with his predecessors, Kant takes judgments to be the minimal units of awareness and experience. Concepts are to be understood analytically, as functions of judgment—that is, in terms of the contribution

they make to judgeable contents.  To be candidates for synthesis into a system exhibiting

the rational unity characteristic of apperception, judgments must stand to one another in

relations of material consequence and incompatibility.  So if one is to understand judging

also as the application of concepts, the first question one must ask about the contents of

those concepts how the use of one or another concept affects those rational relations

among the judgeable contents that result.  This methodological inversion is Kant's

commitment to the *explanatory primacy of the propositional*.  It is a methodological

commitment that will be seconded by Frege, whose *Begriffsschrift* is structured by the

observation that it is only judgeable contents to which pragmatic force can attach, and by

Wittgenstein, who in the *Investigations* gives pride of place to sentences as the only kind

of linguistic expression that can be used to make a move in a language game.

Kant's thought here, I think, is that alongside the *local* order of explanation, which

looks to the contents of the particular concepts applied in judging to explain the specific

possibilities of rational integration of judgeable contents containing them (their inferential

grounds, consequences, and incompatibilities), there is a *global* order of explanation

according to which one must understand what conceptual content *is* in terms of what

judgeable contents are, and must understand that in terms of what one is *doing* in judging,

in making oneself responsible for such contents.  The *functionalism* about conceptual

contents that consists in understanding them as functions of judgment, which is the

practical expression of methodological commitment to the explanatory primacy of the

propositional, is motivated by an overarching methodological *pragmatism* according to

which semantics must answer to pragmatics (in a broad sense).[1] It is the strategy of understanding discursive *content* in terms of what one is *doing* in endorsing or applying it, of approaching the notions of <u>judgeable</u>, and therefore <u>conceptual content</u> generally, in terms of the constraints put on it by requirement derived from the account of the *activity* of judging.

Though I have for expository reasons focused my sketch on the cognitive, theoretical side of Kant's thought, it is important to be clear that pragmatism in the sense I am attributing to Kant is *not* a matter of giving explanatory priority to the practical over the theoretical, to exercises of agency over exercises of cognition. Rather, within both the practical and the theoretical spheres, it is understanding *content* in terms of *force* (in Frege's sense): what is judged, believed, or done in terms of one must *do*, what activity one must engage in, to be judging, believing, or doing it. Kant, I am claiming, should be thought of as a pragmatist *avant la lettre* because of the way his normative theory of conceptual *activity* (theoretical and practical) shapes his account of conceptual *content* (both theoretical and practical).

I read Hegel as taking over from Kant commitment both to a normative account of conceptual doings, and to a broadly pragmatist approach to understanding the contents of our cognitive and practical commitments in terms of what we are doing in undertaking those commitments. I see him as taking an important step toward *naturalizing* the picture of conceptual norms by taking those norms to be instituted by public social recognitive practices. Further, Hegel tells a story about how the very same practice of rational

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1    Later on (in Section V) I will suggest a somewhat narrower use of the term "methodological

integration of commitments undertaken by applying concepts that is the synthesis at once of recognized and recognizing individual subjects and of their recognitive communities, is at the same time the historical process by which the norms that articulate the contents of the concepts applied are instituted, determined, and developed.  He calls that on-going social, historical process "experience" (Erfahrung), and no longer sees it as taking place principally between the ears of an individual.

## II.       <u>Classical American Pragmatism</u>

In the broadest terms, the classical American pragmatists, Peirce, James, and Dewey, developed this German idealist tradition by completing the process of *naturalizing* it, which had begun already with Hegel.  In their hands, it was to take on the shape of an empirical scientific account of us and our transactions with our environment. The sort of understanding they sought was decisively shaped by two new models of scientific explanation, codifying new forms of intelligibility characteristic of late nineteenth century science.  Principal among these, of course, was Darwinian evolutionary explanations.  The other form of explanation that was coming to maturity in the science of the day was statistical explanation.  Pragmatism begins with a philosophy of science, pioneered by Peirce, that saw these two explanatory innovations as aspects of one conceptual revolution in science.

pragmatism".

One dimension along which evolutionary and statistical explanations differ from those of the older mathematical physics concerns the dominant *modality* in which they are expressed. The modality of Newtonian laws is *necessity*. One explains something by showing that it is necessitated by eternal, exceptionless, universal laws. Evolutionary and statistical explanations explain *contingent* happenings, by displaying conditions under which they can be seen to have been *probable*. Both are ways of making intelligible the contingent emergence of collective order from individual randomness.

The original subject-matter of evolutionary explanations was, of course, the process by which biological species arise and diversify. Taking his cue from the way in which statistical explanation had been generalized from its original applications in social science to provide the basis for the triumph of thermodynamics in physics, Peirce substantially generalized evolutionary-statistical forms of intelligibility in two different directions. Most important was an idea that was picked up and developed by James and above all by Dewey: the recognition that *evolution*, at the level of species, and *learning*, at the level of individuals, share a common *selectional* structure. Both can be understood as processes of *adaptation*, in which interaction with the environment preserves and reproduces (selects) some elements, while eliminating others. This insight is encapsulated in the concept of <u>habit</u>, and the picture of individual learning as the evolution-by-selection of a population of habits. This master idea made possible the naturalistic construal of a cognitive continuum that runs from the skillful coping of the competent predator, through the practical intelligence of primitive hominids, down to the traditional practices and common sense of civilized humans, all the way to the most

sophisticated theorizing of contemporary scientists. All are seen as of a piece with, intelligible in the same general terms as, biological evolution.

The other direction in which Peirce generalized the evolutionary statistical selectional model of explanation was to *in*organic nature. What those older scientific naturalists, for whom the paradigm of scientific understanding was Newtonian physics rather than Darwinian biology, had taken to be eternal, immutable, necessary, universal laws of nature, Peirce now sees as themselves in the largest sense "habits" of the universe—a kind of order that has arisen contingently, but ultimately statistically explicably, by a selectional-adaptational process operating on a population of such regularities, which in turn provides the dynamic habitat to which all must collectively adapt. There is no guarantee that any such accommodation will succeed permanently. As with habits learned by individuals, some of the lawlike regularities may prove more robust and others more fragile. The older picture of laws shows up as at best only approximately true, an idealization extrapolating a situation that actuality approaches at most asymptotically.[2] The naturalism of the classical American pragmatists was shaped by the new sort of nature they had been taught about by the best science of their times—a nature viewed through the lens of the new forms of statistical and selectional explanation.

The pragmatists' new form of *naturalism* was coupled with a new form of *empiricism*. The experimental scientific method is seen as just the explicit, principled distillation of the selectional learning process that is the practical form common to intelligent creatures at all stages of development. Dewey's term for that process, in all its

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2    James endorses this Peircean idea in Lecture II of *Pragmatism*. [ref.]

varieties, is 'experience'—the axial concept of such central works as *Experience and Nature* and *Art as Experience*. (So central is the concept to Dewey's thought that sometimes in reading these works it is difficult to overcome the impression that he is, as Rorty once put it, "using the term 'experience' as an incantatory device to blur every conceivable distinction.") Experience in this sense is not the ignition of some internal Cartesian light—the occurrence of a self-intimating event of pure awareness, transparent and incorrigible to the subject of the experience. Experience is *work*: the application of force through distance. It is something *done* rather than something that merely *happens*—a process, engaging in a practice, the exercise of abilities, rather than an episode. It is experience, not in the sense of *Erlebnis* (or *Empfindung*), but of Hegel's *Erfahrung*. It is the decidedly non-Cartesian sense of 'experience' in which a want-ad can specify "No experience necessary," without intending thereby to invite applications from zombies. Earlier empiricists had thought of experience as the occurrence of conscious episodes that provide the raw materials for learning, via processes such as association, comparison, and abstraction. For the pragmatists, experience is not an input to the learning process. It just *is* learning: the process of perception and performance, followed by perception and assessment of the results of the performance, and then further performance, exhibiting the iterative, adaptive, conditional-branching structure of a Test-Operate-Test-Exit loop. The result of experience is not best thought of as the possession of items of *knowledge*, but as a kind of practical *understanding*, a kind of adaptive attunement to the environment, the development of habits apt for successful coping with contingencies. It is knowing how rather than knowing that.

Ontological naturalism and epistemological empiricism are both encouraged by the idea that the rise of modern science, the most successful social institution of the past three hundred years, can teach philosophers the most important lessons both about how things really are and how we can best understand them. But from the beginning they have typically stood in significant tension with one another. The furniture of Newton's natural world does not include Locke's mind. And Hume can find nothing in experience by which we could come to know or understand laws such as Newton's as having the necessity that distinguishes laws from mere regularities. Nor is this tension a characteristic only of Enlightenment naturalism and empiricism. It equally afflicts the twentieth-century versions. The two principal wings of the Vienna Circle, which Carnap struggled heroically to keep from flying off in different directions, were distinguished precisely by their answers to the question: when empiricism and naturalism conflict, which should be relaxed or given up? Schlick urged the preeminence of empiricism, while Neurath was committed to the priority of naturalism. Quine never fully reconciled his (logical) empiricist hostility to modality with his naturalist privileging of the deliverances of science.

The classical pragmatist versions of naturalism and empiricism, though, fit together much better than the versions that preceded and succeeded them. Far from being in tension, they complement and mutually support one another. Both the world and our knowledge of it are construed on a single model: as mutable, contingent products of statistical selectional-adaptational processes that allow order to pop to the surface and float in a sea of random variability. Both nature and experience are to be understood in

terms of the processes by which relatively stable constellations of habits arise and sustain themselves through their interactions with an environment that includes a population of competing habits. There is no problem in principle in finding a place for experience construed as learning in nature construed as evolving. Nor is there any analog of the traditional complementary problem of understanding how experience construed as the dynamic evolution of habits can give its subjects access to the modally robust habits of the things those knowers-and-agents interact with, adapt, and adapt to. The pragmatist forms of naturalism and empiricism are two sides of one coin.

The pragmatists' conception of <u>experience</u> is recognizably a naturalized version of the rational process of critically winnowing and actively extrapolating commitments, according to the material incompatibility and consequence relations they stand in to one another, that Kant describes as producing and exhibiting the distinctive synthetic unity of apperception. For that developmental process, too, is selectional (though not statistical). Some commitments (theoretical and practical) thrive and persist, in concert with their fellows, while others are modified or rejected as unable to flourish in that environment. It might be thought fanciful to focus on this common structure in light of the substantial difference between the conceptions: Kant's process is structured by *rational*, conceptual relations of incompatibility and consequence, while the pragmatists' version is structured by *natural*, causal relations of incompatibility and consequence.

But the pragmatists would disagree. For they introduce not only a new conception of <u>experience</u>, but also a new conception of <u>reason</u>. They understand the rationality of the theoretical physicist as continuous with the intelligence of the culturally primitive hunter

and the skill of the non-human predator.  The grooming and development of discursive cognitive and practical commitments is a learning process of a piece and sharing a structure with the achievement of practical attunement to an environment and the acquisition of habits successful in that environment that in one form or another is a part of the natural history of all sentient organisms.  Reason and intelligence in this sense can be seen (albeit in an inflexible and unlearned form) already in the maintenance of an equilibrium by that emblem of the industrial revolution: the fly-wheel governor.  The nature of the pragmatists is through and through a rational nature—not just the part of it that is intelligible as experience.

### III.   Fundamental Pragmatism

The more specific strategy by which the classical American pragmatists sought to naturalize the concept of <u>experience</u>—to demystify and domesticate it, to disentangle it from two centuries of Cartesian encumbrances—is what I will call *fundamental* pragmatism.  This is the idea that one should understand knowing *that* as a kind of knowing *how* (to put it in Rylean terms).  That is, believing *that* things are thus-and-so is to be understood in terms of practical abilities to *do* something.  Dewey, in particular, saw the whole philosophical tradition down to his time as permeated by a kind of platonism or intellectualism that saw a rule or principle, something that is or could be made conceptually or propositionally explicit, behind every bit of skillful practice.  He

contrasted that approach with the contrary pragmatist approach, which emphasizes the implicit context of practices and practical abilities that forms the necessary background against which alone states and performances are intelligible as explicitly contentful believings and judgings. In this reversal of the traditional order of explanation, Dewey is joined by the Heidegger of *Being and Time*, with his project of understanding Vorhandenheit as a precipitate of the more 'primordial' Zuhandenheit, and by the later Wittgenstein. All three thinkers are downstream from Kant's fundamental insight about the normative character of cognition and agency, and share a commitment to the explanatory priority of norms implicit as proprieties of practice to norms explicit as rules or principles.

I mean the rubric "fundamental pragmatism" to be a relatively loose and elastic description, whose parameters can be adjusted or interpreted so as to fit the methodology of many thinkers, who might differ in many other ways. It is supposed, for instance, to include both the order of explanation that lead Quine to criticize "myth of the museum" in thinking about meaning and that Sellars employs in criticizing the "myth of the given" in thinking about sensory experience. It depends on a contrast, which may be filled-in in different ways, between something on the implicit, know-how, skill, practical ability, practice side and something on the explicit, conceptual, rule, principle, representation side. So we might distinguish between two grades of intentionality: practical and discursive. Practical intentionality is the kind of attunement to their environment that intelligent nonlinguistic animals display—the way they can practically take or treat things as prey or predator, food, sexual partner or rival and cope with them accordingly.

Discursive intentionality is using concepts in judgment and intentional action, being able

explicitly to take things to be thus-and-so, to entertain and evaluate propositions,

formulate rules and principles. The fundamental pragmatist aspiration is to be able to

exhibit discursive intentionality as a distinctive kind of practical intentionality. This

project can take a strong reductionist form. For instance, what I have elsewhere[3] called

the "pragmatist version of artificial intelligence" claims that there is a set of practices or

abilities that are non-discursive, in the sense that each of them can be engaged in or

exercised by nondiscursive creatures, and yet which can be algorithmically elaborated

into the discursive capacity to use concepts and speak an autonomous language. But

fundamental pragmatism need not take such a strong, reductive form. One might claim,

more modestly, that discursive activity, from everyday thought to the cogitations of the

theoretical physicist, is a species of practical intentionality (or a determination of that

determinable), and indeed, one that is intelligible as having developed out of

nondiscursive practical intentionality, while still maintaining that it is a wholly distinctive

variety.

Fundamental pragmatism in this sense gives a distinctive shape to the naturalism of the classical

American pragmatists. For that methodological commitment ensures that their naturalism is in the first

instance a naturalism concerning the *subjects* of discursive understanding and agency. When we think today

about naturalism, we tend to think of it first as a thesis about the *objects* represented by different potentially

puzzling kinds of concepts: semantic, normative, probabilistic concepts, and so on. The question is how to

see what those concepts represent as part of the natural world, as conceived by fundamental physics, or

some special sciences, or even just by unproblematic empirical descriptive concepts. By contrast to this

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3    In Chapter 3 of *Between Saying and Doing* [Oxford University Press, 2008].

object naturalism, the American pragmatists were subject naturalists.[4]  Fundamental pragmatism counsels

looking first to what discursive subjects are *doing*, to the abilities they exercise, the practices they engage

in.  If a naturalistic story can be told about *that*, it might well be that no questions remain that should trouble

the naturalist.  One of the points of the toy Sprachspeile that the later Wittgenstein constructs seems to be a

fundamental pragmatist, subject naturalist one—which the distinction between subject and object naturalism

shows to be entirely compatible with the claim he makes already in the *Tractatus* and never relinquishes,

that "philosophy is not one of the natural sciences."  Not everything we think or say need be understood as

representing the world as being some way.  And if it is, fundamental pragmatism invites us to understand

representation in terms of what discursive subjects must *do* in order to count thereby as representing, as

taking or treating some state, episode, or performance *as* a representation *of* something.   For

representational content is explicit—believing that things are thus-and-so.  And that is to made sense of in

terms of what is implicit in what the subjects do in virtue of which it is correct to say of them that they are

believing that.  Fundamental pragmatism is opposed to a *representationalist* order of explanation: one that

begins with a notion of representational content, and appeals to that to make sense of what it is knowing and

acting subjects do.  That is not to say that pragmatists in this sense can have no truck at all with the concept

of <u>representation</u>.  It is to say at most that talk of representation should come at the end of the story, not the

beginning.

Once a contrast between skillful *practice* and explicit *representation* has been put in place and the

issue raised of their relative explanatory priority in the context of different enterprises, the question of the

relation between fundamental pragmatism and cognitive science arises.  For cognitive science had as

something like its original charter distinguishing its approach from that of behaviorism by its realization of

the explanatory power precisely of appealing to *representations* to explain various practical cognitive

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4     This is Huw Price's terminology in "Naturalism without representationalism" in David Macarthur and
      Mario de Caro (eds), <u>Naturalism in Question</u> (Harvard University Press, 2004), 71—88, and (with
      David Macarthur) "Pragmatism, quasi-realism and the global challenge" In Cheryl Misak, ed., *The New
      Pragmatists* (OUP, 2007), 91—120.  The other essays in his *Naturalism Without Mirrors* [Oxford
      University Press, 2009] can also be consulted with profit in this connection.

abilities.  Thinking about the fundamental pragmatism motivating Heidegger in setting out the project of *Being and Time*, Dreyfus drew the conclusion that the methodology of cognitive science is incompatible with the insights of that pragmatism.  Is he right?

Here I think the beginning of wisdom is the realization that it makes a *big* difference whether we are talking about representations, rules, and explicitness at the *personal* level, or at the *sub*-personal level.  This is in part a matter of whether one construes the *rules* the platonist invokes to articulate proprieties of practice as being *followed by* the one whose practice is in question (which would be at the personal level).  Cognitive science, by contrast, postulates *sub*-personal representations, whose role is in *causal* explanations of various capacities.  The sense in which they *guide* the practice is *causal*, not in the first instance *normative*.  It is not at all clear that there is (or at any rate needs to be) a clash between fundamental pragmatism at the personal level and cognitive science's invocation of representations at the sub-personal level—as Dreyfus at least sometimes seems to think there is.  Here one important issue is what one means by 'explicit' when fundamental pragmatism is articulated in terms of the implicit in practice vs. explicit in principle, rule, or representation form.  Representations of rules are crucial for one to count as *following* a rule (as Sellars insists).  In that context, representation can be thought of as the form of explicitness.  But it is *not* a good idea to explicate explicitness in terms of representation if one is thinking of representation in the sense that is appropriate to the *sub*-personal level.  Here the notion of specifically *propositional representations* is key.  It is open to the pragmatist to claim (with Davidson and the author of *Making It Explicit*) that *nothing* at the sub-personal level deserves to count as *propositionally* contentful in the sense that *personal* level representations can be propositionally contentful.  Belief on such a view is not a sub-personal level concept.

In order to understand the relations between fundamental pragmatism and the representational approach of cognitive science we should distinguish three levels:

a        ) Sub-personal representations,

b        ) Practical abilities (practices) that are cognitive in some broad sense,

c        ) Personal level representations.

(c) is the *explicit* properly propositional level, at which rules and principles are formulated that can express what is *implicit* at level (b). Level (b) is *practical* intentionality, and level (c) is *discursive* intentionality. Level (a) *causally* explains level (b)—and a lot of cognitive science is concerned with how this can be done in detail. The fundamental pragmatist claim is that level (c) is to be understood, explained, or explicated in terms of level (b). Cognitive science is in the business of postulating inner sub-personal representations in order to explain various kinds of skillful practice or ability. Dreyfus seems to think that approach is incompatible with the sort of fundamental pragmatism that the early Heidegger (and the later Wittgenstein) endorse. But such a view is mistaken. What that pragmatism is incompatible with is seeking to explain (b) in terms of (c), *not* (b) in terms of (a).[5]

## IV. <u>Instrumental Pragmatism</u>

One of the variant rough formulations I offered of the methodological commitment I have called "fundamental pragmatism" is to think about norms explicitly represented in the form of rules or principles only in the context of a prior understanding of norms implicit in practice. This characterization has the advantage of placing fundamental pragmatism in the context of the Kantian normative turn, as I have claimed it should be when we think about the classical American pragmatists. The master argument for fundamental pragmatism about the normative dimension of intentionality is a regress argument familiar from the later Wittgenstein. In a nutshell, it is that the very idea of norms explicitly represented as rules or principles presupposes that of norms implicit in practices. For applying a rule is itself something that can be done correctly or incorrectly. If we can only understand that normative assessment in turn as a matter of

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5        In *Between Saying and Doing* [Oxford University Press, 2008] I explore the significance of the choice of the vocabulary used to specify the practices-or-abilities appealed to at level (b). This is, it seems to me, equally significant for the two enterprises, both the one that seeks to explain them and the one that seeks to use them to explain something else.

applying some other rule (what Wittgenstein calls an "interpretation" [Deutung]), then we are embarked on a fruitless regress.  This, too, is a point that Kant had already appreciated, as an integral part of his ground-breaking normative construal of concepts as rules (for judging):

> If understanding in general is to viewed as the faculty of rules, judgment will be the faculty of subsuming under rules; that is, of distinguishing whether something does or does not stand under a given rule (*casus datae legis*).  General logic contains and can contain no rules for judgment...If it sought to give general instructions how we are to subsume under these rules, that is, to distinguish whether something does or does not come under them, that could only be by means of another rule.  This in turn, for the very reason that it is a rule, again demands guidance from judgment.  And thus it appears that, though understanding is capable of being instructed, and of being equipped with rules, judgment is a peculiar talent which can be practised only, and cannot be taught.[6]

The normative fundamental pragmatism of the classical American pragmatists joins cognitive science in rejecting the descriptive-dispositional behaviorism of Watson, Skinner, and Ryle.  But it does so for different reasons: because of the failure of the latter group to appreciate the essentially normative character of the practical intentionality that forms the background of discursive intentionality, rather than because of their hostility to the postulation of inner representations.  Wittgenstein has been called a 'behaviorist', in part because of his antipathy towards some kinds of explanations that appeal to inner representations.  A principal danger of talking this way is that it invites overlooking his emphasis not only on the *social*, but especially on the *normative* character of the practical intentionality in the context of which he urges us to think about discursive intentionality.  In this regard, Wittgenstein belongs in a box with the classical American pragmatists, and with Kant, not with the reductive descriptive-dispositional behaviorists.

But how, exactly, do the classical American pragmatists understand the basic kind of normativity implicit in practical intentionality: the kind of skillful know-how, as a species of which we are to understand

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6        *Critique of Pure Reason*, A132/ B171.  I discuss this regress argument further in Chapter One of *Making It Explicit* [Harvard University Press, 1994], in the context of arguments against the twin dangers of regulism and regularism about discursive norms.

discursive intentionality and its distinctive kind of normativity? I think it is not so easy to extract a clear answer to this question, even from Dewey, who has the most sophisticated approach to it. It is clear that in the most general terms the response takes the form of an appeal to the selectional-adaptional structure common to learning and evolution. The norms characteristic of the kind of practical intentionality in terms of which we are to understand discursive intentionality are immanent to and elaborated within the development of courses of experience that display this structure. In our own time, we have examples of how to make an account along these lines work. A splendid instance is Ruth Millikan's sophisticated and nuanced construction of norms in the form of Proper Functions, defined by modal counterfactual claims about selectional processes shaping reproductive families of traits.[7] (Millikan, a Sellars student, self-consciously takes her inspiration from Charles Morris, to whom her book is dedicated. Morris was a student of George Herbert Meade, who was in turn a student of James and a colleague of Dewey's.) I think there is every reason to believe that all of the classical American pragmatists (as well as the successors just mentioned) would have welcomed and embraced her careful working-out of their underlying idea. But of course, that detailed account was not available to them. In its absence, they often enough fall into formulations that have, from the very beginnings of the movement, led critics to attribute to the pragmatists commitment to quite a different, though not wholly unrelated, theory and to take it as the very core of the pragmatist approach.

I have in mind what is expressed by F.C.S. Schiller's slogan "The truth is what works." This is what Dewey calls "the instrumental theory" or "instrumentalism." He endorses it in such passages as these:

What should it mean upon the instrumental theory to accept some view or idea as true upon social credit? Clearly that such an acceptance itself works.[8]

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7       *Language, Thought, and Other Biological Categories* [MIT Press, 1984]. The basic connection between selectional processes and alethic modal counterfactuals is indicated already by Elliot Sober's distinction between traits that are selected vs. traits that are selected *for* (*The Nature of Selection* [MIT, Bradford Press, 1984]). Millikan takes the thought much farther.

8       "A Reply to Professor Royce's Critique of Instrumentalism" *Middle Works* Vol. 7, p. 75.

What the experimentalist means is that the effective working of an idea and its truth are one and

the same thing—this working being neither the cause nor the evidence of truth but its nature…[9]

Naturally, the pragmatist claims his theory to be true in the pragmatic sense of truth: it works, it

clears up  difficulties, removes obscurities, puts individuals into more  experimental, less dogmatic,

and less arbitrarily sceptical  relations to life; aligns philosophic with scientific method; does away

with self-made problems of epistemology; clarifies and reorganizes logical theory, etc. He is quite

content to have the truth of his theory consist in its working in these various ways, and to leave to

the intellectualist the proud possession of a static, unanalyzable, unverifiable, unworking

property.[10]

James says such things as:

We here assume Japan to exist without ever having been there, because it WORKS to do so,

everything we know conspiring with the belief, and nothing interfering…[11]

On pragmatistic principles, if the hypothesis of God works satisfactorily in the widest sense of the

word, it is true.[12]


Semantic norms are understood in instrumental terms, in terms of utility.  Truth-evaluable

states such as beliefs are thought of on the model of tools, which can be more or less apt or useful, in

concert with others that are available in a concrete situation, relative to some desired end or purpose.

Taking my cue from Dewey's terminology, I'll call this approach "instrumental pragmatism" about

semantic norms.  There are two principal points about which it is important to be clear in thinking

about the instrumental strain in classical American pragmatism.  First, it should be understood as at

base a theory of *meaning*, not a theory of *truth*.  The pragmatists did themselves no favors by pitching

it in the latter way.  The general idea is the fundamental pragmatist one: that the contentfulness of

intentional states such as belief should be understood in terms of the contribution they make to what

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9            "The Intellectualist Criterion of Truth" *Middle Works* Vol. 4 p. 69.

10          "A Short Catechism Concerning Truth" *Middle Works* Vol 6 p. 10.

11          *Pragmatism* Lecture VI.

12          *Pragmatism* Lecture VIII.

the believers *do*.  The new element is that the doing is thought of as purposive, as aimed at some kind of end, at the satisfaction of some desire or need.  Identifying success in the doing with the *truth* of the items to be thought of as contentful in virtue of their role in that process is a further, optional move.  It threatens to overshadow the underlying account of meaning and content.

The second point is that that theory of the contentfulness of intentional states is a *functionalist* account.  Instrumental pragmatism is a comprehensive holist functionalism about the content of states such as beliefs, desires, and intentions.  It is comprehensive in that the functional systems considered comprise the organism and its whole environment.  The role in such a functional system that determines the contents of states and performances caught up in it is a role in the process by which the system develops, through cycles of perception, thought, intervention transforming the environment, and perception of the results of that transaction.  This is role in a course of *experience*, in what is very much a naturalized version of Hegel's sense of that term—a notion of experience that was in turn a already a somewhat naturalized descendant of Kant's process of synthesis (by rational amplification, criticism, and justification) of something that exhibits the structure and unity of apperception.  Processes of this sort involve felt dissatisfactions with the situation as it is at one moment, attempts to diagnose the nature of those felt dissatisfactions and to address and remove them, a process that, when all goes well, is at once the clarification of the dissatisfaction and its dissolution—the transformation of the old situation into a new one that is dissatisfying in some other way.   That Kantian ancestry is particularly evident in some formulations of instrumental pragmatism.  Here is one by James:

> A new opinion counts as 'true' just in proportion as it gratifies the individual's desire to assimilate the novel in his experience to his beliefs in stock. It must both lean on old truth and grasp new fact; and its success… in doing this, is a matter for the individual's appreciation. When old truth grows, then, by new truth's addition, it is for subjective reasons. We are in the process and obey the reasons. That new idea is truest which performs most felicitously its function of satisfying our double urgency. It makes itself true, gets itself classed as true, by the way it works; grafting itself

then upon the ancient body of truth, which thus grows much as a tree grows by the activity of a new layer of cambium.[13]

Friction with stubborn reality is an integral component in this sort of process. That is the objective element in James's "double urgency." Feedback-regulated practices are 'thick', in the sense of essentially involving objects, events, and worldly states of affairs. Bits of the world are *incorporated* in such practices, in the exercise of such abilities. In this regard they contrast with words and sentences, considered merely as sign-designs or items in the natural world, which are 'thin' in that they can be specified independently of a specification of the objects or states of affairs they refer to or represent. For you cannot say what, for instance, the practice of attaching two boards with a hammer and nails is without referring to the boards, nails, and hammer. Dewey thinks of the thickness of pragmatist semantics as one of its cardinal advantages over its more traditional thin rivals. If one focuses on success as the measure of truth, rather than on functionalism about meaning, and further fails to appreciate that the functional system being considered is capacious enough to include the environment being acted on and in as well as the organism transacting with it, one will misunderstand instrumental pragmatism as a radically subjectivist view, according to which all that matters for truth is subjective feelings, and objective constraint vanishes. This is what I call "vulgar" pragmatism. James complains about this flat-footed, reductive reading already in *Pragmatism*:

> Schiller says the true is that which 'works.' Thereupon he is treated as one who limits verification to the lowest material utilities. Dewey says truth is what gives 'satisfaction.' He is treated as one who believes in calling everything true which, if it were true, would be pleasant.[14]

And he spends most of *The Meaning of Truth* (a book that on my interpretation would better have been called *The Truth About Meaning*) rebutting that reading. Here is Dewey responding to this subjectivizing reading:

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13      *Pragmatism* Lecture II.
14      *Pragmatism* Lecture VI

Pupil: Objection Nine. Still the pragmatic criterion, being satisfactory working, is purely personal and subjective. Whatever works so as to please me is true. Either this is your result (in which case your reference to social relations only denotes at bottom a number of purely subjectivistic satisfactions) or else you unconsciously assume an intellectual department of our nature that has to be satisfied; and whose satisfaction is truth. Thereby you admit the intellectualistic criterion.

Teacher: Reply. We seem to have got back to our starting-point, the nature of satisfaction. The intellectualist seems to think that because the pragmatist insists upon the factor of human want, purpose, and realization in the making and testing of judgments, the impersonal factor is therefore denied. But what the pragmatist does is to insist that the human factor must work itself out in cooperation with the environmental factor, and that their coadaptation is both "correspondence" and "satisfaction." As long as the human factor is ignored and denied, or is regarded as merely psychological (whatever, once more, that means), this human factor will assert itself in irresponsible ways. So long as, particularly in philosophy, a flagrantly unchastened pragmatism reigns, we shall find, as at present, the most ambitious intellectualistic systems accepted simply because of the personal comfort they yield those who contrive and accept them. Once recognize the human factor, and pragmatism is at hand to insist that the believer must accept the full consequences of his beliefs, and that his beliefs must be tried out, through acting upon them, to discover what is their meaning or consequence.[15]

The possible misunderstanding is, I think, actual in the reference to "our needs" as a criterion of the correctness of truth of an idea or plan. According to the essays, it is the needs of a situation which are determinative. They evoke thought and the need of knowing, and it is only within the situation that the identification of the needs with a self occurs; and it is only by reflection upon the place of the agent in the encompassing situation that the nature of his needs can be determined. In fact, the actual occurrence of a disturbed, incomplete, and needy situation indicates that my present need is precisely to investigate, to explore, to hunt, to pull apart things now tied together,

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15      "A Short Catechism Concerning Truth" *Middle Works* Vol. 6 p. 11.

to project, to plan, to invent, and then to test the outcome by seeing how it works as a method of

dealing with hard facts. One source of the demand, in short, for reference to experience as the

encompassing universe of discourse is to keep us from taking such terms as "self," "my," "need,"

"satisfaction," etc., as terms whose meanings can be accepted and proved either by themselves or

by even the most extensive dialectic reference to other terms.[16]

Here Dewey emphasizes not only the importance of the functionalism being comprehensive in considering a

developing functional system that encompasses environment as well as the striving knower-agent, but also

the holism about content that such a functionalism entails.  There is no antecedently specifiable determinate

content that a belief has, apart from its fellows and in advance of participating in a cycle of experience,

which can then be judged *true* by pragmatist standards should the cycle conclude successfully.  Rather, the

belief is intelligible as having the content it does only insofar as it acquires that content by playing the role

it does, along with its concomitant states, in the transactions between the believer and her world.


What goes for beliefs goes also for desires.  Ends and purposes themselves are to be understood as

having their content as a matter of their role in this overall system and its developmental processes.  What

might start out as a vague dissatisfaction itself can be clarified during the course of experience in which

finding out how things are and finding out what one wants are two aspects of one process.  The satisfaction

of needs and wants, the achievement of goals and purposes, is the source of normativity on the instrumental

construal; doing that is "working".  But what they are is (like the contents of the beliefs we are working

with) itself part of what is to be determined in the course of inquiry—'determined' both in the sense of

being made more definite and in the sense of being discovered.  The former shows up from a prospective

perspective, and the latter from a retrospective perspective.  Dewey expended a great deal of effort in the

dual process of trying to make clear and get clear himself about how the norms and standards and what they

are norms and standards for assessing jointly develop in the course of experience.   I cannot say that it

seems to me that he succeeded very well at either task.  But I do think that there is an important thought that

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16          Introduction to *Essays in Experimental Logic*, *Middle Works* Vol. 10, p. 364.

he was after: an essentially historical perspectival structure of discursive normativity articulating a conception of determinate conceptual content that I see as also the key to understanding Hegel's conception of <u>experience</u>. I have myself expended considerable effort in the dual task of trying to make that conception clear and get clear about it myself—with what success remains to be seen. I am not going to rehearse those efforts here.[17]

Dewey's and James's instrumentalism arises as one (optional) way of elaborating what is often called "Peirce's Principle": the meaning of a claim is the difference that adopting it would make to what one does. In fact, as I argue in Chapter Eight of *Making It Explicit*, one can get a lot more from this principle if one bifurcates it by keeping separate sets of books on the difference it makes to what one *tries* to do and difference it makes to what one *succeeds* in doing. The first of these gives one a practical difference *de dicto*. The second gives on a practical difference *de re*. Further articulating Peirce's Principle to as to take account of the intimate *social* perspectival relations between these two sorts of practical consequence—the sense in which they are two sides of one coin—allows a much more fine-grained account of conceptual content than the classical American pragmatists managed to formulate. But that, too, is a story for another occasion. The combination of the distinction of *historical* points of view between prospective (determining as clarifying) and retrospective (determining as discovering) perspectives, and *social* points of view between attributing (*de dicto*) and acknowledging (*de re*) commitments is one of my principal suggestions for how to move forward with the ideas of the classical pragmatists.

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17    I talk about this structure in Chapter Three of *Reason in Philosophy* [Harvard University Press, 2009], and in Chapter Seven of *Tales of the Mighty Dead* [Harvard University Press, 2002]. It is the principal topic of my big work-in-progress on Hegel, *A Spirit of Trust*.

## V.     <u>**The Linguistic Turn**</u>

When classical American pragmatism is looked back upon from the perspective of the analytic movement that dominated Anglophone philosophy for at least the last half of the twentieth century, it can easily appear that a decisive wrong turn was taken after Peirce. The pragmatist founder-member was principally concerned to advance the philosophical understanding of modern logic, symbolic and natural languages, and the natural sciences—a constellation of topics that remained at the center of the analytic tradition.  In his logic of relations Peirce independently achieved the explosion of expressive power that Russell saw in Frege's logic.  But what did his successor pragmatists make of that achievement?  Particularly in contrast to what Russell made of Frege, it would seem from a later vantage point that an opportunity was missed.  James had little interest in logic and wrote almost nothing about it—in striking contrast to his Hegelian colleague Josiah Royce, who saw in the algebraic constructions of Alfred Bray Kempe (whom he had learned about from Peirce) a tool with which he hoped to solve the riddle of how to elaborate spatio-temporal relations from a purely conceptual basis.[18]  The logic Dewey wrote his late, important book about was unrecognizable as such to those of his readers in 1938 whose paradigm of logic was to be found in the works of Frege, Russell, and Carnap.  The only pragmatist whose concern with logic matched and

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18      See Bruce Kuklick's discussion of this fascinating late project in his *Josiah Royce: An Intellectual Biography* [Hackett, 1985].

was recognizable as continuing that tradition was the homegrown neo-Kantian C. I.

Lewis, the founder of twentieth century modal logic, who saw his own work as an attempt

to synthesize the approaches of his teachers James and Royce, and in turn passed on

pragmatist ideas to his students, Quine and Goodman.

Again, although James was surely the by far the best writer among the classical

triumvirate, his philosophical interests focused on experience, rather than language.

Dewey did write a lot about language—what he called the "tool of tools."[19]  He has many

good things to say about the relations between meaning and use (particularly in Chapter 5 of

*Experience and Nature*).  But he, too, would not be recognizable to later philosophers of

language as one of their number.  As for science, it is not the case that James and Dewey did not care

about science and the philosophy of science.  But where Peirce focused on the natural sciences, James's

contributions lay on the side of psychology, and Dewey's main interests were in the social sciences.

By "the linguistic turn" here I mean putting language at the center of philosophical

concerns, and understanding philosophical problems to begin with in terms of the

language one uses in formulating them.  But there is a more specific significance one can

take language to have.  By 'lingualism'—admittedly an unlovely term (but meant to

belong in a family with 'rationalism')—I shall mean commitment to understanding

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19        *Experience and Nature*, *Later Works* Vol. 1, p. 134.

*conceptual* capacities (discursiveness in general) in terms of *linguistic* capacities.

Dummett epitomizes a strong version of this order of explanation:

> We have opposed throughout the view of assertion as the expression of an
> interior act of judgment; judgment, rather, is the interiorization of the external
> act of assertion.[20]

A weaker version of lingualism claims only that language is a *necessary* condition of discursiveness, not that it is a sufficient condition that can at least in principle be made intelligible independently of talk about discursive commitments.

It would be a mistake to conclude that the pragmatists after Peirce missed the linguistic turn. In fact, Dewey at least is clearly a (weak) lingualist about the discursive. What the pragmatists did was develop these thoughts within the context of a different approach to understanding the crucial phenomenon of language—one that was complementary to that of the analytic tradition. The Frege-Russell-Carnap approach to language takes as its paradigm artificial, formal, logistical languages articulated by explicit rules. The American pragmatists, like their fellow fundamental pragmatists the Heidegger of *Being and Time* and the Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Investigations*, address natural languages, which they think of anthropologically, as aspects of the natural history of a certain kind of being. Their focus to begin with is not on *meaning*, but on *use*: on discursive practices, skills, and abilities, on what one must be able to *do* in order to count as saying or thinking *that* things are thus-and-so.

We can think of these two approaches as distinguished by their preferred order of explanation. The question is: which comes first, semantics (the theory of meaning) or pragmatics (the theory of use)? The logistical tradition begins with semantics: stipulating the association of some kind of semantic interpretants (paradigmatically, extensions) with basic expressions and deriving associations for more complex ones, or stipulating basic rules of derivation and then seeing what consequence relation they jointly determine. The question of how it is appropriate to *use* expressions governed by those rules is then deferred to a subsequent pragmatic theory, to which this current of thought has not traditionally devoted a great deal of attention. By contrast, the pragmatist tradition begins with pragmatics: an account precisely of how it is appropriate to use expressions. It is true that the pragmatists, also have not traditionally given a lot of attention to the specifics of the semantics that goes with such a pragmatics.

But I think we can see two principles that govern fundamental pragmatists' understanding of the relation between pragmatics and semantics. They express complementary aspects of the sense of the pragmatism in the philosophy of language that consists in insisting that semantics must answer to pragmatics. First is what I shall call "methodological pragmatism." This is the principle that the *point* of associating meanings, extensions, contents, or other semantic interpretants with linguistic expressions is to codify (express explicitly) proprieties of *use*. I think we can discern commitment to this methodological principle even in a semantic nihilist such as the later Wittgenstein. For one thing he means by saying that language is a motley is that so many and so various

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20    *Frege's Philosophy of Language* [ref.] p. 361.

are the uses of any expression that there are no realistic prospects of systematizing them by associating some underlying meaning, on the basis of which one hopes then uniformly to derive the various uses (say, by one rule for declarative uses, and another for imperative ones, another for hypothetical, and so on). If the variety of uses is open-ended and unsurveyable, then there is no prospect for semantic theorizing in philosophy, precisely because the only point of such theorizing would be systematizing those proprieties of use.

The second principle governing the pragmatists' understanding of the sense in which semantics should answer to pragmatics is what I shall call "semantic pragmatism." This is the principle that in a natural language, all there is to effect the association of meanings, contents, extensions, rules, or other semantic interpretants with linguistic expressions is the way those expressions are *used* by the linguistic practitioners themselves. *Formal* semantics for *artificial* languages can content itself with the explicit stipulation of such rules or associations of meanings, by the semantic theorist working in a semantic metalanguage. *Philosophical* semantics for *natural* languages is obliged to say what it is about the practices the users of those expressions engage in or the abilities they exercise, in virtue of which they should be understood as *governed* by those rules, or as *conferring* those meanings. Semantic pragmatism is a kind of use-functionalism about meaning (the classical American pragmatists being *comprehensive* functionalists, in the sense I have given that qualification above). Again, given his practice, I think commitment to such a principle can be attributed even to such a semantic pessimist as the later Wittgenstein, precisely in virtue of his criticism of various traditional ways of thinking about meaning or content for

their failure to live up to this requirement. And that sort of strategy is equally evident in Dewey's criticisms of traditional intellectualist and mentalistic conceptions.

The combination of methodological and semantic pragmatism, the two senses in which semantics can be taken to answer to pragmatics, broadly construed, might be called "linguistic pragmatism." It is one natural way of applying fundamental pragmatism to systematic theorizing about language. One of the clearest and most emphatic proponents of that conjunctive doctrine among recent philosophers is Dummett—though of course he does not associate it with pragmatism.

Quine carries forward this general pragmatist tradition in the philosophy of language when he criticizes Carnap's two-stage picture of language, according to which first meanings are stipulated, and only subsequently are theories formulated to determine which of the sentences with those meanings are true. That division of labor makes sense for artificial languages. But to understand natural languages we have to understand how the *one* thing we do, *use* the language, can serve at once to settle the meanings of our expressions *and* determine which of them we take to be true. Linguistic practice is not illuminated by postulating language/theory or meaning/belief distinctions of the Carnapian kind. As Quine famously concludes an early essay on Carnap:

"The lore of our fathers is a fabric of sentences…It is a pale grey lore, black with fact and white with convention. But I have found no substantial reasons for concluding that there are any quite black threads in it, or any white ones."[21]

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21      "Carnap on Logical Truth", p. 406 [ref.]

In fact, though he did not know it, in making this pragmatist point against Carnap, Quine was recapitulating one of the important ways in which Hegel moves beyond Kant. For Kant, all our empirical activity, cognitive and practical, is discursive activity. In endorsing judgeable contents and practical maxims, knowers and agents are applying concepts. Though further concepts may be developed thereby, for instance by judgments of reflection, one must always already have concepts in order to be apperceptively *aware* of anything at all. Hegel thought Kant was uncharacteristically, but culpably, uncritical about the origins of our primordial concepts. The locus of those concepts, Hegel thought, lies in *language*, not in some kind of experience understood as prelinguistic. Language, he said, is the existence [Dasein] of Geist— that is, of the whole normatively articulated discursive realm.[22] Compare Dewey:

> Language in its widest sense—that is, including all means of communication such as, for example, monuments, rituals, and formalized arts—is the medium in which culture exists and through which it is transmitted.[23]

For Hegel, no less than for Quine and Dewey, we must understand linguistic practices as *both* instituting conceptual norms *and* applying them.[24] It is precisely by applying

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22    *Phenomenology of Spirit* [652], [666].

23  *Logic, the Theory of Inquiry, Later Works* Vol. 12, p. 28

24   Here are some characteristic passages:

It is therefore through culture that the individual acquires standing and actuality. His true *original nature* and substance is the alienation of himself as Spirit from his *natural* being. This individuality *moulds* itself by culture into what it intrinsically is. [I: 489]

What, in relation to the single individual, appears as his culture, is the essential moment of the substance itself, viz. the immediate passage of the [mere] thought-form of its universality into actuality; or, culture is the simple soul of the substance by means of which, what is implicit in the substance, acquires an acknowledged, real existence. The process in which the individuality moulds itself by culture is, therefore, at the same time the development of it as the universal, objective essence, i.e. the development of the actual world. Although this world has come into being through individuality, it is for self-consciousness immediately an alienated world which has the form of a fixed and solid reality over against it. [*PG* 490]

concepts in judging and acting that conceptual content is both made more determinate, going forward, and shows up as always already determinate (in the only sense in which conceptual contents are determinate), looking back.[25]

## VI.  **Rationalism and Pragmatism**

Pragmatists who have made the linguistic turn take it that the most important feature of the natural history of creatures like us is that we have *come into language*[26]: come to engage in distinctively linguistic practices and to exercise distinctively linguistic abilities. This is both an ontogenetic and a phylogenetic achievement.  Understanding it requires, at a minimum, addressing three large, interconnected kinds of question.   These concern the issues of *demarcation, emergence*, and *leverage*.  The demarcation question is definitional.  How are *linguistic* practices and abilities (and hence, the lingualist about discursivity claims, *discursive* ones) to be distinguished from nonlinguistic ones?  The emergence question concerns the requirement that any account of language that aspires to being naturalistic in even a very broad sense must explain the possibility of the transition from nonlinguistic to linguistic practices and abilities.  How are the abilities we can see in

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25  See footnote 16.

26    We have come to see that there are substantial, potentially controversial presuppositions involved in characterizing this in terms of language *learning*.

non- or prelinguistic creatures recruited, deployed, and transformed so as to amount to linguistic ones? The leverage question is how to characterize and explain the massive qualitative difference in capacity between linguistic and nonlinguistic creatures: the bonanza of new abilities and possibilities that language opens up for those that do make the transition.

One of the principal accomplishments of the classical American pragmatists is the attention they gave to the problem of emergence, to displaying the continuities that make it naturalistically intelligible that species and individuals should be able to cross the boundary separating the prelinguistic from the linguistic. In *Experience and Nature*, Dewey sets the emergence problem this way:

Upon the whole, professed transcendentalists have been more aware than have professed empiricists of the fact that language makes the difference between brute and man. The trouble is that they have lacked naturalistic conception of its origin and status. [27]

In his *Logic*, he expands on this thought:

Any theory that rests upon a naturalistic postulate must face the problem of the extraordinary differences that mark off the activities and achievements of human beings from those of other biological forms. It is these differences that have led to the idea that man is completely separated from other animals by properties that come from a non-natural source….The development of language (in its

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27    *Experience and Nature, Later Works* Vol. 1, p. 134.

widest sense) out of prior biological activities is, in its connection with wider

cultural forces, the key to this transformation. The problem, so viewed, is not the

problem of the transition of organic behavior into something wholly discontinuous with it—as is

the case when, for example, Reason, Intuition and the A priori are appealed to for explanation of

the difference. It is a special form of the general problem of continuity of change and the

emergence of new modes of activity—the problem of development at any level.[28]

The hallmark of an untenable intellectualism, he thinks, is an appeal to an inexplicable

saltation: the ultimately miraculous dawning of consciousness or self-consciousness, the

infusion of reason into a brute. The desire to provide a more satisfactory response to the

emergence question than that sort of cartesian approach can offer binds Dewey together

with the later Wittgenstein in a common enterprise. The point of many of the toy

Sprachspiele the latter describes is to show us how features of discourse that might seem

mysterious in a sense that calls for the invocation of a cartesian discontinuity can be

exhibited already in practices we can see that intelligent nonlinguistic hominids could

master.

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28    *Logic, the Theory of Inquiry, Later Works* Vol. 12, p. 50. This emphasis on continuity does not lead
      Dewey to ignore the differences that language makes:
      The evidence usually adduced in support of the proposition that lower animals, animals without
      language, think, turns out, when examined, to be evidence that when men, organisms with power of
      social discourse, think, they do so with the organs of adaptation used by lower animals, and thus largely
      repeat in imagination schemes of overt animal action. But to argue from this fact to the conclusion that
      animals think is like concluding that because every tool, say a plow, originated from some pre-existing
      natural production, say a crooked root or forked branch, the latter was inherently and antecedently
      engaged in plowing. The connection is there, but it is the other way around.
       *Experience and Nature, Later Works* Vol. 1, p. 215.

When we turn to the demarcation question, however, I think the pragmatists disappoint. What is distinctive of linguistic (or discursive) practices? What sets them apart from prelinguistic or nondiscursive practices? It is one's answer to this question that ties together the emergence question with the leverage question. For the criteria of adequacy for answers to those questions turn on its being the *same* kind of practices and abilities that one has told a story about the nonmiraculous emergence of, in answering the first question, that one then must show can intelligibly account for the huge differences in capabilities, cognitive and practical, that come with the advent of language, in answering the second question. We need not assume that the emergence of language is an all-or-none thing. One might, with Wittgenstein, want to deny that there is or need be a bright line separating the discursive from the nondiscursive, in favor of a family-resemblances sort of view. A pluralist-incrementalist response to the demarcation question makes the emergence question easier to answer, but makes the leverage question correspondingly more difficult. I don't think Dewey's metainstrumentalist "tool of tools" line can be made to work to bring the emergence and leverage issues into harmony—but I've argued that elsewhere and won't rehearse my complaints here.[29] Apart from that, he seems to offer only vague remarks about language as a making enhanced the possibilities of co-operation and rising above the individual standpoint.[30]

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29    *Experience and Nature, Later Works,* Vol. 1, p. 134. I discuss this approach in Chapters One and Two.

30    I have in mind passages such as this one:

The importance of language as the necessary, and, in the end, sufficient condition of the existence and transmission of non- purely organic activities and their consequences lies in the fact that, on one side, it is a strictly biological mode of behavior, emerging in natural continuity from earlier organic activities, while, on the other hand, it compels one individual to take the standpoint of other individuals and to see and inquire from a standpoint that is not strictly personal but is common to them as participants or "parties" in a conjoint undertaking. It may be directed by and towards some physical

I cannot here address the all-important leverage question.[31] But the demarcation question is prior. After all, if one is going to say how Geist precipitates out of nature, and how it transforms sentient organisms into sapient ones, one should try to say what it is. The challenge is to offer satisfactory responses to *both* the emergence question *and* the leverage question. Focusing on just one of them makes it too easy. In the passage above, Dewey says in effect that the neo-cartesian intellectualists make the leverage question too easy to respond to, by ignoring (or making it impossible to address) the question of emergence. I have just accused him of making the complementary mistake. In any case, it is clear that the hinge that connects the issues of emergence and leverage is the question of demarcation. For the challenge is to show that the *same* phenomenon that one has accounted for the emergence of can leverage sentience into sapience. So demarcating the realm of linguistic or discursive practices and abilities is an absolutely essential element of the philosophical project I have been describing: the development of pragmatism after the linguistic turn, a lingualist fundamental pragmatism. .

I want to close with a suggestion as to one way fundamental pragmatists, those committed to understanding discursive intentionality as a kind of practical intentionality, who are weak lingualists about discursiveness, that is, who take engaging in linguistic practices as a necessary condition of deploying concepts (a class I take to include at least

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existence. But it first has reference to some other person or persons with whom it institutes communication--the making of something common. Hence, to that extent its reference becomes general and "objective." ☐ *Logic, the Theory of Inquiry, Later Works* Vol. 12, p. 52.

Peirce, Dewey, the early Heidegger, and the later Wittgenstein), might answer the

demarcation question, and so determine definite criteria of adequacy for harmonious

responses to both the emergence and the leverage questions. My idea is that pragmatism

can usefully be combined with a *rationalist* criterion of demarcation of the linguistic—

and hence of discursiveness in general. By this I mean that what distinguishes the

linguistic practice in virtue of which we are sapient and not merely sentient beings is its

core practices of giving and asking for *reasons*. A necessary and sufficient condition of

being a discursive practice is that some performances are accorded by it the pragmatic

significance of *claimings* or assertings. Semantically, claimable or assertible contents are

*propositional* contents. Syntactically, what expresses those contents is declarative

sentences. This combination of pragmatic, semantic, and syntactic features is the iron

triangle of discursiveness. The pragmatist order of explanation of course starts with the

pragmatics. The thought is that to have the *pragmatic* significance of an assertion is to be

able both to serve as a reason, and potentially to stand in need of reasons. So,

*semantically*, propositional contents are those that can play the role both of premise and

of conclusion in *inferences*. Discursive practice is accordingly understood as essentially

inferentially articulated.

In *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, the normative status with which Dewey's pragmatics begins, in

terms of which the semantics is to be articulated, is *assertibility*. I have argued on the one hand that to be

recognizable as engaging in a practice of making claims and (so) giving and asking for reasons, a

community must distinguish at least *two* normative statuses: commitment and entitlement to commitments,

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31   I do address it in *Making It Explicit* and *Between Saying and Doing*.

and further, that splitting the single status of assertibility into these two aspects pays huge benefits semantically.[32]  Specifically, one can use them to define three kinds of material inference: commitment-preserving inferences, entitlement-preserving inferences, and incompatibility entailments.  The core of my strong inferentialist version of rationalistic pragmatism lies in the claim that conceptual content consists in inferential role in a broad sense, articulated along those three dimensions.[33]   Of course the underlying rationalist criterion of demarcation of the discursive could be worked out in other ways.

Commitment to a rationalist criterion of demarcation of the discursive requires disagreeing with Wittgenstein: Language *does* have a downtown, and it is the practice of making claims and giving and asking for reasons.  Other things we can do with language are ancillary to and parasitic upon these essential core functions.  On this view, most of the toy practices Wittgenstein calls "Sprachspiele" are *vocal*, but not genuinely *verbal*, not really *language* games.  The builder's utterances in the opening 'Slab' practice, for instance, should not be understood as imperatives.  They are vocalizations that have the pragmatic significance of making certain responses on the part of the assistant appropriate.  But genuine imperatives do that by *saying* what it is that ought to be done.  In this full-blooded sense, no practice can contain the genuine imperative "Bring be a slab," unless it also contains declaratives such as "This is a slab."

Wittgenstein and Dewey are together in rejecting rationalist criteria of demarcation of the linguistic (and hence the discursive)—indeed, in resisting offering any answer at all to the demarcation question.  In Dewey's case, the idea of a rationalist

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32    See Chapter Six of my *Articulating Reasons* [Harvard University Press, 2001]

33    For the distinction between weak, strong, and hyperinferentialism, see the Introduction to *Articulating Reasons*.  Inferentialism is just one form that rationalism might take.  For there is more to reason than inference.  Making distinctions, formulating definitions, and producing constructions are all rational processes, alongside drawing conclusions.

pragmatism would probably have struck him as a *contradictio in adjecto*. But rationalism

as I have described it is not a form of the intellectualism that stands opposed to

fundamental pragmatism. It is wholly compatible with understanding discursive

intentionality as a kind of practical intentionality: specifically, as the kind that includes

practices of making claims and giving and asking for reasons. It aims to say what

structure a norm-instituting social practice must have in order properly to be understood

as such a practice: a *discursive* practice. It offers a specific proposal for how to

understand the kind of practical knowing *how* that adds up to cognitive claiming *that*: it is

practical mastery of broadly inferential relations and transitions. And answering the

demarcation question about discursive practice in a rationalist manner neither makes it

impossible in principle to answer the emergence question nor obliges one to give a

cartesian answer to it. It also, I claim—though I will not argue for that point here—

provides sufficient resources for a satisfying answer to the leverage question.[34]


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I began my story about pragmatism in an unconventional place: with Kant's

*normative* criterion of demarcation of the discursive, that is, with his idea that what is

distinctive of judgments and intentional actions is that they are things we are *responsible*

for. They are kinds of *commitments*. But that normative criterion of demarcation was

also a *rationalist* criterion of demarcation. For he understood that responsibility, that

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34  The whole of Part Two of *Making It Explicit* can be read as providing at least a substantial
    downpayment on this claim: Give me the practices of Part One, articulated by inference, substitution,

commitment, as a *rational* responsibility, as the *justificatory* responsibility to have

reasons for ones theoretical and practical commitments, the *ampliative* responsibility to

acknowledge their inferential consequences, and the *critical* responsibility to revise

commitments that are incompatible, that is, that serve as reasons against one another.

Kant's pragmatism consists in his strategy of understanding semantic content in terms of

what apperceiving subjects must *do* to fulfill those responsibilities. Judgeable contents

have to stand to one another in relations of material consequence and incompatibility: the

inferential relations that constrain the process of synthesizing a constellation of

commitments and entitlements exhibiting the distinctive unity of apperception.

Wittgenstein's example teaches that we should follow Hegel's steps toward naturalizing

Kant's notion of norms by understanding norms as implicit in social practices.  Normative

statuses of responsibility and commitment are *social* statuses: creatures of our practical

attitudes of taking or treating each other *as* responsible and committed.


The move beyond Dewey and Wittgenstein to a rationalist, more specifically

inferentialist pragmatism that I am recommending is accordingly also a return to

pragmatism's roots in German idealism.  As Kant synthesized empiricism and

rationalism, and the pragmatists synthesized naturalism and empiricism, I'm suggesting

that a way forward is to synthesize pragmatism and rationalism—in the form of the

rationalist response to the demarcation question.

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and anaphora, and I will give you the (discursive) world.

End