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“Kant and Pragmatists:  
On the Supremacy of Practice over Theory”

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# Kant and Pragmatists: On the Supremacy of Practice over Theory

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## 1. Introduction

The perspective from which I would like to explore the Kant-and-pragmatism issue is a perspective which emphasizes the importance of the relation between theory and practice, awareness of this relation, and the deliberate influence on its subject.<sup>1</sup> In my opinion, this is a genuine and crucial feature of the pragmatist movement, which changes from Peirce through James and Dewey to the neopragmatists, and this change is not chaotic—this is a tendency to increase the supremacy of practice over theory. Thus, this is a perspective from which I shall attempt to look at Kant’s vision of philosophy, morals, and science; I shall examine the thesis of Kant being a precursor of some ideas crucial to the pragmatist movement (e. g., Peirce 1998 [1905], 332–3; Putnam 1988, 42–2) and his ideological proximity to pragmatism. The purpose of this paper is as follows: Firstly, I shall analyse and compare Kant’s, Peirce’s, Dewey’s, and Rorty’s reasons for claiming the primacy of practice. I have chosen Peirce’s, Dewey’s, and Rorty’s positions among all pragmatist thinkers as they are the most explicitly expressed and they remain in interesting relation to each other (e. g., Peirce’s and Dewey’s discussion on Dewey’s *Studies in Logical Theory* (1903) which in fact concerns the role of practice in human cognition

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<sup>1</sup> This is a revised and enlarged version of a paper presented in July 2017 at the Pragmatist Kant Conference, in Berlin. I want to thank the following organizers of the Conference: Sami Pihlström, Krzysztof Piotr Skowroński, and Maja Niestrój, for their kind invitation and all participants for insightful, stimulating, and friendly discussions and in particular for comments on my paper.

processes or Rorty's critical comments on Peirce as "the most Kantian of thinkers" (Rorty 1982, 161). Kantian roots in Peirce's philosophy are also significant.

Secondly, I shall attempt to answer the questions: on Kant's pragmatism: "How pragmatic is his postulate concerning the supremacy of practice over theory?" and on Kantian pragmatism: "How much of Kant's legacy concerning theory-practice relation is present in the pragmatist thought?" I shall consider also whether and how Kant's view on the capacities of the mind and their relation to each other could enrich the pragmatist view, or whether maybe, in spite of his (outwardly) pragmatist claim of the primacy of practice, Kant's doctrine remains isolated from the pragmatist spirit.

Finally, I shall explore the consequences of the pragmatist approach to the theory-practice distinction and rejection of Kant's stance to this subject-matter. I shall analyse what differences of visions of human intellectual activity Kant's and pragmatists' doctrines provide us with and what their strengths and weaknesses are.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. Immanuel Kant

When followed through the history of philosophy, traces of the thesis concerning the supremacy of practice over theory lead to the passages of Kant's second Critique on "the primacy of pure practical reason and its connection with the speculative" (Kant 2015 [1788], 97–8). Moreover, traces of the term "pragmatism" also lead to Kant—this is at least how Peirce justifies his decision of choosing this term for his doctrine (Peirce 1998 [1905], 332–3).

Let us now consider in what sense and why Kant introduces the terms "practical" and "pragmatic".

Kant was a philosopher who had much to say about the distinction between theoretical and practical philosophy and between the practical and speculative reason, as this distinction was his way to face the problem "how to preserve the unlimited rights of modern science, its mathematical method, and the ensuing Cartesian spirit without surrendering genuine ethics" (Lobkowitz 1967, 123). His idea was to establish two entirely dif-

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<sup>2</sup> At this point, I can only mention the problem of the pragmatists' approach to the theory-practice distinction. In fact, I treat it more like a tool to compare Kant's and the pragmatists' stances than like a subject-matter itself. An attempt to address the question of theory-practice distinction in the pragmatists' thought is made in my latest book (Hensoldt 2018).

ferent domains of competence: of modern mathematical physics and of ethics. As the domain of the modern physics is the phenomenal world, the noumenal world is exclusively the domain of ethics.

However, Kant had to face a long history of the use of terms such as “philosophy of morals”, “practical philosophy”, and “ethics” in a significantly wider sense than referring to only supersensible realities. This is the reason why Kant introduced a distinction between “practical” and “pragmatic”. To my knowledge, the first time Kant mentioned this distinction was in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, where he distinguished between the practical and the pragmatic (Kant 1998 [1781], 674). In *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, he developed this distinction, by identifying three types of principles (imperatives): the technical principle, the pragmatic principle, and the moral principle. In each of these cases, the mode of the will’s necessitation is different: “either *rules* of skills, or *counsels* of prudence, or *commands (laws)* of morality” (Kant 2012 [1785], 30). The pragmatic imperative relates to counsels of prudence. Kant mentions two meanings of prudence: “worldly prudence” and “private prudence”. Both of them are skills to reach given aims: “to have influence on others in order to use them for his aims” or “to unite all these aims to his own enduring advantage” (Kant 2012 [1785], 29). In fact, Kant approves only of the latter use of prudence, whereas the first one he calls “slyness”. More important to me now is the fact that pragmatic imperatives are always formed in order to reach an empirical aim. This is the reason why Kant differentiates between pragmatic imperatives and moral imperatives, the latter being directed towards supersensible aims. The distinction helps Kant to exclude from practical philosophy disciplines such as political economy, dietetics, or eudaemonistic ethics (“universal doctrine of happiness”)—the disciplines of which domains belong to the sensible world.

One could expect Kant to limit the domain of normative ethical judgements to the same domain which is determined by the categorical imperative. This was not, however, Kant’s strategy. In *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, Kant introduces the “pragmatic knowledge of man” whose subject-matter is human free actions of self-creation: “what *man* as a free agent makes, or can and should make, of himself” (Kant 1974 [1798], 3). Yet, what has to be emphasized is this: pragmatic knowledge considers “man as a *citizen of the [phenomenal] world*” and these aspects of human existence are also subject to ethical judgements, including categories of right and wrong, sin, and moral value (not only of advantage and disadvantage or usefulness). Moreover, Kant seems to be convinced

that pragmatic and moral accounts are (quite often) consistent with one another.

Having made a sharp distinction between two capacities of the mind, the practical and the speculative one, Kant declined the view that they can remain isolated. In his view, such an isolation would result in a conflict of reason with itself. Otherwise, when the supremacy of practical reason over the speculative is postulated, not only the agreement of the reason with itself is preserved, but also there is no damage inflicted on one of the most important tasks of the speculative reason, which is to “constrain speculative frivolity”. In Kant’s view, this primacy of practical reason is possible and even desirable, because the reason in question is pure and insensitive to empirical determination of any sort (which is, according to Kant, always self-love or personal happiness); thus, the exclusion of pragmatic issues from the domain of practical philosophy makes this primacy possible.

### 3. Charles Sanders Peirce

In 1905, Peirce justifies his choice of the term “pragmatism” in the following words:

for one who had learned philosophy out of Kant, as the writer [. . .], and who still thought in Kantian terms most readily, *praktisch* and *pragmatisch* were as far apart as the two poles, the former belonging in a region of thought where no mind of the experimentalist type can ever make sure of solid ground under his feet, the later expressing relation to some definite human purpose. Now quite the most striking feature of the new theory was its recognition of an inseparable connection between rational cognition and rational purpose; and that consideration it was which determined the preference for the name pragmatism.

Peirce 1998 [1905], 332–3

Let us notice that, in this passage, Peirce in fact does not maintain that he is a follower of Kant’s doctrines of the capacities of the mind. On the contrary, he personally finds no use in Kant’s distinction between the practical and the pragmatic, as he is not going to study (or even to refer to) the domain of practical philosophy (in Kant’s perception). However, he admits considering and using Kant’s terminology, which, naturally, cannot be perceived as unimportant. There is also one more very Kantian feature in this passage—this is Peirce’s attachment to rationality. Peirce,

like Kant, is convinced that it is the human rationality which is the source of a connection between the theoretical and the practical.

Yet, Peirce recognizes the nature of this connection differently. According to Kant, this connection is in fact the supremacy of practical reason and is indispensable as it guarantees the agreement of the reason with itself, but, at the same time, it neither expands the cognitive insights nor provides new cognitively justified propositions (Kant 2012 [1788], 154). From Peirce's standpoint, reasons for a connection between the theoretical and the practical are completely different and have no relation with a *a priori* perspective. I would classify them within three groups which are connected with each other, yet refer to various arguments.

The most important argument is the pragmatic maxim itself. It was Peirce who first formulated the maxim of pragmatism and introduced it in "How to Make Our Ideas Clear". This is the maxim which is the original expression of the pragmatist view that there is a close connection between the theoretical (thoughts, sentences, words, signs, etc.) and the practical (experience and conduct). The general message conveyed by the maxim is that, if one asks about meanings of words, signs, theories, etc., one has to look for their practical consequences, for rules of conduct they oblige us to follow. As Peirce, whilst formulating the maxim of pragmatism, had in mind scientific concepts, hypotheses, and theories, the practical consequences and rules of conduct required for "making clear" meanings of these concepts, hypotheses, and theories must be of a general nature. I would call this first argument "the semantic argument", though one can obviously argue that it can be referred to as "logical" or even "linguistic". In fact, all three groups of Peirce's arguments for theory-practice connection hold many common features with logic, as they refer to normative rules of human reasoning.

The close relation between theory and practice is also a consequence of Peirce's rational agent argument (formulated in "The Doctrine of Chances" and "The Fixation of Belief"). Having argued that human cognition (including scientific hypotheses) is essentially probabilistic, Peirce considers its influence on human conduct, and he admits:

Although probability will probably manifests its effect in, say, thousand risks, by a certain proportion between the numbers of successes and failures, yet this, as we have seen, is only to say that it certainly will, at length, do so. Now the number of risks, the number of probable inferences, which a man draws in his whole life, is a finite one, he

cannot be absolutely *certain* that the mean result will accord with the probabilities at all. Peirce 1992 [1878], 148

[...] death makes the number of our risks, of our inferences, finite, and so makes their mean result uncertain. Peirce 1992 [1878], 149

On this view there is, in fact, no guarantee that a single decision (made in an actual life situation) based on logical and/or scientific assumptions would be the best one for life interests of the decision maker. However, this is not the most important issue—as Peirce argues. If one is to be consistent in her/his thinking, decision-making, and conduct, if one is to be rational, one has to follow rules of rational conduct in practice (in everyday life), although they are only of a probabilistic nature.

Rejection of the theory-practice dichotomy also results from a philosophical standpoint called synechism. Peirce explicitly names his approach synechistic in his paper “Immortality in the Light of Synechism” (Peirce 1998 [1893], 1–3). At the beginning of the paper, he refers to the maxim of pragmatism as a formulation of his philosophical synechism. As the core claim of this approach, Peirce introduces a belief that “continuity governs the whole domain of experience in every element of it” (Peirce 1998 [1893], 1). This view certainly remains in conflict with all possible forms of dualism, including the theory-practice dualism. According to Peirce, dualism is “the philosophy which performs its analyses with an axe, leaving as the ultimate elements, unrelated chunks of being” (Peirce 1998 [1893], 2). Hence, the synechistic argument for the close connection between theory and practice claims that a sharp cutting between these two kinds of human activities leads to serious misunderstanding of human cognition and reasoning processes.

What I have to mention here, though very briefly, is that in some of his papers Peirce seems to be inclined to accept the theory-practice dichotomy, although in other papers (most of them), his standpoint is opposite. Particularly nonstandard and ambiguous in this aspect are his *Cambridge Conferences Lectures* (1898). In the first lecture entitled “Philosophy and the Conduct of Life”, Peirce objects to “the Hellenic tendency to mingle philosophy and practice” (Peirce 1992 [1898], 107) and argues that true scientific investigation (including philosophical investigation) must not be conducted with the requirement of utility and with regard to vitality. These ambiguities in Peirce’s stance might be—and in fact have been—a subject-

matter of separate books (e. g., Atkins 2016, Massecar 2016) which we cannot address here.<sup>3</sup>

At the end of this section, I would like to highlight Kantian features of Peirce's approach to the theory-practice distinction. Although his understanding of the practical side of this distinction is different than Kant's, he is attached to the belief that a theory-practice connection is based on a strictly rational ground. This is most visible in his insistence that practical consequences which are to be included in the meanings of concepts, hypotheses, theories, etc., have to be of a general validity and commonly understandable. The manifestation of Peirce's Kantianism is also present in his balancing between synechism and dichotomy—it can be interpreted as a kind of fear of, and at the same time escape from domination of everyday life, which is too strong, from not always rational or even subjective motives in our cognition.

#### 4. John Dewey

Dewey's views on the relation between the theoretical and the practical can be found in most of his works—if they are not formulated explicitly, they can be quite easily deduced. However, in at least three of his papers, the theory-practice distinction is the subject of explicit analyses: "What Pragmatism Means by 'Practical'", "The Development of American Pragmatism", and "The Logic of Judgements of Practice". Let us examine the

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<sup>3</sup> The aim of this paper excludes developing this motif further. However, it has to be mentioned that Peirce's position on theory-practice distinction, including his famous *Cambridge Conferences Lectures* (1898), has been researched by prominent scholars. According to Christopher Hookway, Peirce's notes on theory and practice in the 1870s and 1890s are inconsistent as they suffer from the lack of proper vocabulary that would grasp the distinction (2002, 21–43). Cheryl Misak holds that there is no serious tension in Peirce's work considering theory and practice and that Peirce's distinction of scientific inquiry and inquiry into vital matters is not fundamental (Misak 2004). Vincent Colapietro has argued that Peirce is not really imposing a strict partition of theory and practice; rather, theory should be conceived as one kind of practice (Colapietro 2006). Mats Bergman highlights the connection between Peirce's advocating theory-practice dichotomy and his intention to keep philosophy free from the external demands (Bergman 2010). Aaron Massecar perceives Peirce's approach to theory-practice distinction as evolutionary; he associates this evolution with the development of Peirce's account of ethics and concludes that in his late papers (in the 1900s), although Peirce still held a distinction between theory and practice, his approach was more perfected and coherent (Massecar 2013 and 2016). Peirce's *Cambridge Conferences Lectures* (1898) (particularly the rules of "sentimental conservatism" introduced in the first lecture) are also a subject-matter of Richard K. Atkins's research presented in his latest book (Atkins 2016).



third paper. This is one of the chapters (14<sup>th</sup>) of a book *Essays in Experimental Logic* (1916), in which Dewey objects to the theory-practice antithesis, holding that theory is a mode of practice. He does not prove it in a strict logical sense of the word; however, he discusses it on a variety of grounds: i. a., presenting science as a very specialized kind of practice with origins and aims in everyday life. Science is not only the most emancipated mode of practice, but it is also that mode of practice which emancipates experience (Dewey 1916, 439). Dewey was the first to explicitly deny the theory-practice dualism. Neither Peirce nor James had done this. Conceiving science as a future and practice oriented intellectual activity, Dewey also had to conceive philosophy in this way.

Dewey's strong antidualistic position in respect to the theory-practice dichotomy has its roots in his early paper in logic: "Thought and Its Subject-Matter", where Dewey rejects the conception of pure logic and introduces "applied logic" (Dewey 1903, 6). Dewey argues that, although universally valid laws of reasoning are laws of pure logic, in practice (i.e., in cases when a subject-matter of reasoning is the object of human experience and inquiry) it is not pure logic but applied logic ("the epistemological type of logic") which we need. This logic deals with:

thinking as a specific procedure relative to a specific antecedent occasion and to a subsequent specific fulfilment [. . .]. From its [applied logic's] point of view, an attempt to discuss the antecedents, data, forms, and objective of thought, apart from reference to particular position occupied, and particular part played in the growth of experience is to reach results which are not so much either true or false as they are radically meaningless—because they are considered apart from limits. Its results are not only abstractions (for all theorizing ends in abstractions), but abstractions without possible reference or bearing. From this point of view, the taking of something, whether that something be thinking activity, its empirical condition, or its objective goal, apart from the limits of a historic or developing situation, is the essence of *metaphysical* procedure—in the sense of metaphysics which makes a gulf between it and science. Dewey 1903, 8–9

Dewey's position expressed in the foregoing passage is in some aspects close to Peirce's. They share the belief that laws of logic have no value solely in themselves, but only if they are useful in science, in particular in empirical sciences. Dewey, similarly to Peirce, holds that roots of laws of logic lay in attempts to solve actual problems (mostly empirical) which emerge from more and more complicated scientific challenges.

However, Peirce saw Dewey's conception of logic as completely different from his own. He wrote a critical review of *Studies in Logical Theory* (Peirce 1958 [1904], 188–90) and also a letter to Dewey, expressing doubts about Dewey's approach to logic (Peirce 1958 [1904–5], 239–44). Peirce objects to Dewey's rejection of pure logic. According to Peirce, logic in a strict sense ought to deal with the validity and the strength of arguments; it is not—as Dewey holds—a theoretical study of the norms that should guide us when we inquire. And only pure logic is open to new applications and might be useful in completely new situations. On the contrary, the laws of logic expressed by Dewey will depend on biological and historical views (Hookway 2012, 102–9).

## 5. Richard Rorty

In his critique of the theory-practice dualism, Richard Rorty goes even further than Dewey. What is characteristic of this critique or rather denial is that Rorty's argumentation always involves critique of the Platonic and Kantian model of developing philosophy. As Kant's philosophical system is built on two pillars, epistemology and philosophy of morals, Rorty's considers and censures both of them.

Inspired by Dewey's idea of experience being a mutual reaction between an organism and its environment, Rorty criticizes all attempts to model knowing on seeing (Rorty 1979, 139–48) and to consider all results of cognition processes as corresponding somehow with reality. He claims that these attempts are useless and misleading. There is no sense in using the metaphor of correspondence with reality, regardless of whether it refers to sentences which should correspond with reality to be true, or notions of things which should correspond with reality. Neither does it matter, to Rorty, what is meant by "reality" ("Platonists" and "positivists" do not refer to the same concept when discussing what may become an object of necessary and indubitable cognition)—the idea of correspondence is always based on the metaphor of cognition meaning to look at something (Rorty 1979, 39). This metaphor is so deeply entrenched in the European culture that it is a source of various intuitions, and this is why it is so difficult to dispose of it (Rorty 1979, 127; Rorty 1982, xxx); however—Rorty claims—it is like a very dangerous illness; it infects not only our vision of cognitive and communicative activities, but also more general and more basic visions of human position in the world and in the society.

According to Rorty, we are in disposition of much more comfortable and efficient ways of estimating the quality of our beliefs. One of the best of them is to answer a question whether and to what extent they can help us reach our goals. This is undertaking a pragmatist point of view and leads to acceptance of the pragmatist maxim (or one of its versions), which claims that only those beliefs, statements, conceptions, and hypotheses are meaningful of which acknowledgment results in practical consequences. Rorty's reading of the pragmatist maxim is much more relativistic (Rorty would say "historicistic") than Peirce's. He admits that there is nothing such as a common ground, which allows for determination of which practical consequences are worth considering, or to validate cognitive claims. Rorty puts it very clearly in the following passage:

When we say that our ancestors believed, falsely, that the sun went round the earth and that we believe, truly, that the earth goes round the sun, we are saying that we have a better tool than our ancestors did. Our ancestors might rejoin that their tool enabled them to believe in the literal truth of the Christian Scriptures, whereas ours does not. Our replay has to be, I think, that the benefits of modern astronomy and of space travel outweigh the advantage of Christian fundamentalism. The argument between us and our medieval ancestors should not be about which of us has gotten the universe right. It should be about the point of holding views about the motion of heavenly bodies, the ends to be achieved by the use of certain tools. Confirming the truth of the Christian Scriptures is one of such ends, and space travel—the other.

Rorty 1996, 40

Referring to this famous example of revising the model of our Solar system, Rorty encourages us to look at it in a new way—he argues that the categories of truth and falsity are not the optimal ones for description and understanding of this turn in the history of science. Rorty states that modelling knowing on seeing is now completely useless: "the intellectual tradition to which they belong has not paid off, is more trouble than it is worth, has become an incubus" (Rorty 1982, xxxvii). Attempts to define what being an adequate representation of reality means—whether in case of ideas, beliefs, theories, or judgements—result in "wasting philosophical energy". There is not much chance for them to be successful, and, even if they are, they will not become a tool of choosing beliefs whose approval would help us in reaching our goals. As Rorty argues against the correspondence idea of truth, the only criterion left for estimating values of theories is their (subjective) usefulness in making our lives easier, our

beliefs more coherent, our societies more just, or in justifying our other beliefs:

He [the pragmatist] shares with the positivist the Baconian and Hobbesian notion that knowledge is power, a tool for coping with reality. But he carries this Baconian point through to its extreme, as the positivist does not. He drops the notion of truth as correspondence with reality altogether, and says that modern science does not enable us to cope because it corresponds, it just plain enable us to cope.

Rorty 1982, xvii

Thus, this critique of the correspondence theory of truth and the introduction of pragmatist tools for validating conceptions and theories results in rejecting the theory-practice distinction conceived as division into two domains: of cognition and of conduct with independent criteria of success for each of the domains. In Rorty's view, no specifically theoretical criteria are left, as "it is the vocabulary of practice rather than of theory, of action rather than of contemplation, in which one can say something useful about truth" (Rorty 1982, 162). In consequence, the concept of theory is deprived of its characteristics as a result of a specific cognition. Hence, when we cannot speak of so-called conceived theories, which were achieved by theoretical cognition, the notion of theory becomes purposeless. This occurs because sense of distinguishing this type of cognition lied in the fact that it provided us with results in a specific form, that is, the form of theory.

Rorty examines some of Kant's views on philosophy of morals in his book *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, especially in the chapter "The contingency of selfhood". He reads Kant's philosophy of morals in such a way that the moral law is a result of completely theoretical *a priori* cognition and that all human actions—if they are to be morally validated—have to be viewed from the perspective of this purely theoretical moral law: "The Platonic and Kantian idea of rationality centers around the idea that we need to bring particular actions under general principles if we are to be moral" (Rorty 1989, 33). If so, the domain of morality is indeed strictly theoretical in spite of the fact that Kant calls it (perhaps misleadingly) the domain of the practical reason. Hence, from Rorty's view, there is in fact no supremacy of practice over theory in Kant's doctrine because human actions are always considered from the position of the *a priori* moral law, which, in Kant's view, is the paradigm of theoretical cognition.

## 6. Conclusion in the matter of use and meaning of concepts “theory” and “practice”

When Kant postulates the connection between the practical and the speculative reason, he considers this connection possible solely because he distinguishes clearly between the practical and the pragmatic, and this connection is established between the practical (not the pragmatic) reason and the speculative one. On the other hand, when Peirce chooses the name for his doctrine, he is absolutely certain he does not want the term “practicism” or “practicalism”, as his doctrine does not consider the practical in Kant’s sense. Thus, Peirce—in spite of calling himself Kant’s pupil who “still thinks in Kantian terms most readily”—is not interested in (if not neglects) the practical in Kant’s terms.

Does this difference in terminology—Kantian “practical” *versus* Peircean “pragmatic”—reflect a difference in interpreting Kant’s postulate of supremacy of practice over theory? Is it thus justified to use Kant’s term “supremacy of practice over theory” for the pragmatist conception? This is the term which describes Dewey’s approach to the theory-practice relation quite well. Rorty’s view was more radical—in fact, in his view there is no sense in using the term “theory”. However—he would probably say—if we are, for some reasons, to distinguish between theory and practice, it is practice which reigns supreme. Nonetheless, it has to be emphasized that, even if Dewey and Rorty had accepted this Kantian formulation, they would have interpreted it from the pragmatist point of view and in consequence the meaning of it would have been clearly different to them than to Kant. Now, Peirce’s case is much less ambiguous. Peirce, nonetheless one of the founders of pragmatism, is at times dubious about supremacy of practice as a threat to the “real scientific spirit”. Thus, he probably would not have accepted Kant’s postulate of supremacy of practice at all.

Moreover, one more aspect should be taken into consideration. Kant’s supremacy thesis is built on the supposition of a clear separation between theory and practice, and without this supposition it could not be formulated. However, fading of a theory-practice distinction can be observed from Peirce to Dewey and Dewey to Rorty. I would even risk claiming that this is a process of (traditionally conceived) theory dissolving in practice. In consequence, domination of practical perspective specific to the pragmatist standpoint means that traditionally theoretical domains are deprived of their homogeneously theoretic character and acquire some of the attributes originally assigned to the practical domain, unlike in Kant,

where the homogeneity of two domains is preserved and the speculative reason is only forced to accept some of the practical postulates but does not accept them as acts of cognition; hence, it remains supreme in its cognitive competence. Thus, the pragmatist thesis on domination of practice over theory is not exactly Kant's thesis.

## 7. Concerns . . .

The process of fading of the theory-practice distinction has its further non-trivial consequences. If all laws and norms of reasoning are culturally and historically dependent, we lose an opportunity of estimating them and choosing better ones, as there is, in fact, no justified criterion for such an estimation. When Putnam discusses this conviction, he uses the term "naturalized reason" and does not agree that reason is completely immanent: "Reason is, in this sense, both immanent (not to be found outside of concrete language games and institutions), and transcendent (a regulative idea that we use to criticize the conduct of all activities and institutions)" (Putnam 1985, 234).

Putnam's belief that reason is partly transcendent is very Kantian, and indeed he does not deny his esteem for Kant. Yet, Kant's approach to human rationality is not easily adopted on the pragmatist ground. The reasons for this—as I can see them—are two. Firstly, Kant would have never accepted the meaning which pragmatists linked to the phrase "supremacy of practice over theory" and, as this implies, he would have never accepted the pragmatist thesis concerning this supremacy. Secondly, in spite of differences among various thinkers of the pragmatist movement, all of them accepted (in such or other form or in such or other interpretation) the "supremacy of practice over theory" thesis. The implication of this position is—as I have attempted to show—a (gradual) reduction of the universal and the rational traditionally conceived and replacing them with the historical, the biological, and the emotional.

Putnam made an attempt of such an adoption, arguing that all normative judgements need to fulfil some universally necessary conditions to be valid, and that we need such normative judgements in order to argue for such important values as democracy and open society. Rorty, commenting on the foregoing issues, holds that the previous belief cannot be in agreement with pragmatist stance, and the latter requirement is impossible to satisfy (Rorty 1993). Even if Rorty is right (I am inclined to think he is), Kantian-style devotion to reason might have its advantages, espe-

cially in the current political situation: in times of the rise of nationalism and irrationalism in many countries of the world. That is why I find the following questions troubling. What can be done in order to save (or to restore) the ability of arguing conclusively for values in general, and in particular for democracy and open society? Is it possible to do it in a non-dogmatic way?

These questions express—in my opinion—longing for rationality. However, this is not longing for rationality in exactly Kant's sense but rather for a somewhat imprecise new idea of rationality. There is no come-back, no chance to enter once again into the same river. I would say that what we need is a new idea of rationality. Though I do not mean here anything in a Wittgensteinian sense—this is rationality limited to a concrete language-game, as such a conception of rationality does not provide us with opportunity of arguing for values independently of the culture, tradition, or religion we belong to. We need an idea which would be a fusion of Kant's and Wittgenstein's or Rorty's ideas.

## 8. . . . and hopes

The pragmatist approach to the theory-practice distinction and, thus, to the concept of rationality provides us with new tools and new promising perspectives. We become more aware of our interests, positions, prejudices, aims, historical and biological limits which strongly influence human cognition. Dewey and Rorty would say also that thanks to this process we stop believing in possibility of objective cognition, a belief which is one of the most dangerous reasons for human mistakes and violence. As I have tried to show, Peirce made attempts to save the objectivity of cognition, but he was not fully successful as he had to marry antagonistic values: objective—or at least intersubjective—cognition on the one hand, and synechism on the other hand. The conviction of being in disposition of an objective absolute truth has often been a motif, a reason, or a justification for forcing this truth—by various ways—on others. By contrast, the lack of this conviction makes us more inclined to listen, to understand, and even to accept other points of view.

Rorty introduces the figure of an ironist to demonstrate connections between one's conviction of one's unmistakability and one's solidarity with others. An ironist is a person who "has radical and continuing doubts" about vocabulary she uses, and also radical conviction that utterances she formulates are not closer to reality than utterances using different vocabu-

laries and formulated by others (Rorty 1989, 73). The ironist's standpoint might seem to have an influence only on her life as she seems to be concentrated first of all on herself: on her convictions and her desires, on a vocabulary she employs, changes, plays with, and which is a tool of her self-creation. However, this awareness of contingency of one's point of view, one's vocabulary, one's aims and values strongly improves one's moral sensibility. Rorty argues that the feeling of solidarity with other human beings does not concern *a priori* all people all over the world, but depends on our understanding of the concept of "we"; this depends on which similarities and which differences between people we find—often prior to reflection—crucial. And this depends, to a large extent, on the vocabulary one employs. The ironist, aware of contingency of her final vocabulary, is more inclined (than a "metaphysician" who takes his vocabulary as the only correct and true) to conceive acknowledged similarities and differences between people as contingent, relative, and possibly changeable, since they are expressed in concepts which are also contingent. This results in her inclination to extrapolate the concept of "we" over other people who previously have been classified as "they". Rorty argues that the process of neglecting an increasing number of originally considered as important differences (of tribe, religion, customs, race, *etc.*) is a sign of moral progress and greater human solidarity. However, this solidarity is not the effect of "recognition of a core self, the human essence, in all human beings", but of ability to rebuild one's vocabulary and to re-define such concepts as "we", "one of us", "our sort of people" (Rorty 1989, 192). Every time the feeling of solidarity is extended over marginalized people, who have been instinctively perceived as "they" rather than "us", some people lose some reasons to be cruel; some social spaces of cruelty disappear or at least decrease.

In the pragmatist movement from Peirce through James and Dewey to Rorty, the theory-practice distinction can be observed to gradually disappear. One of the signs of this process is questioning the sense and possibility of a pure theory. All this has two kinds of consequences. The modern concept of universal rationality loses its significance and influence, which results in the vanishing of tools of objective estimation and universally valid argumentation. At the same time, however, pragmatism becomes a philosophical movement more and more aware of and concentrated on the practical, in which the supremacy of practice over theory manifests itself in a greater social engagement and philosophy expects itself to be socially responsible. This expectation is fulfilled in two main



forms. On one hand, there is growing interest in different aspects of social exclusion and in that which philosophy could do to counteract them. On the other hand, there are attempts to practice philosophy—in all its disciplines—in such a way as to not create intellectual space inviting the exclusion of others. In Rorty’s view, the whole epistemology, regardless of doctrine, is an example of creating such a detrimental invitation. Thus, in his opinion, socially responsible philosophy means philosophy without epistemology. The other good example of this line of thought is Richard Shusterman’s conception of pragmatist aesthetics, the aim of which is, among others, to prevent exclusion of various social minorities because they contribute neither in creation nor in perception of so-called high art. According to Shusterman, “even in its most liberational moments, high art seems an oppressive obstacle to socio-cultural emancipation” (Shusterman 2000 [1992], 145), and only rejection of a distinction into high art and popular art has a potential to initiate a process of this emancipation.

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