Nordic Studies in Pragmatism

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"Kant's Universalism versus Pragmatism"

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1. Introduction

While some forms of pragmatism, ideas of pragmatist thinkers, and even some pragmatists themselves are easily recognizable as Kantian, and while Kant's critical philosophy can obviously be applied to issues raised by pragmatists, just like his critical philosophy can be challenged and varied from a pragmatist point of view, it is not easy to precisely explicate the relationship between Kant's critical philosophy and pragmatism. As a matter of fact, given the diversity of pragmatism, such an explication would be next to impossible to provide. As recognized by many, thinkers labeled as pragmatist—or pragmaticist or neopragmatist—do not necessarily have much in common (cf. e.g., Haack 1992, 351; Pihlström 1996, 13). Bluntly put, if a common denominator between pragmatists is difficult to find, then it is all the more difficult to pinpoint the exact similarities and differences between pragmatism and Kant or Kantianism. Besides, "Kantianism" is not a clear notion either—indeed, it would be equally difficult to define.

Hence a disclaimer: Given that pragmatism denotes and connotes so many things, I simply assume here that certain tenets can be regarded as specifically pragmatist. These tenets may not hold true for every so-called pragmatist thinker, but each of them has been endorsed by thinkers known to be pragmatists, and they certainly come up in general introductions to pragmatism (cf. e.g., Hookway 2016, McDermid 2017). As far as Kantianism is concerned, I shall focus on the original Kant.

I have three intertwining, assumedly core pragmatist tenets in mind. First, pragmatism gives precedence to the practical or experiential consequences of any given theory or categorization (cf. e.g., Lewis 1923, 175–6).

Second, pragmatism prioritizes experimental problem-solving attitudes over ivory-towerish theorizing. Third, pragmatism is against apriority if by this one suggests the possibility of some sort of foreknowledge that gives us truths or principles that are not only absolutely independent of experience but infallible and eternally fixed (cf. esp. Lewis 1923). In all, pragmatism is a view according to which theory and practice go hand in hand (cf. e.g., Pihlström 1996, 11, 34). On the whole, these tenets suggest that pragmatism is largely an anti-universalist branch of philosophy. In contrast, as I explain below, Kant's critical philosophy is in many respects universalistic to the core.

In the context of this article, I understand universalism as a view according to which some points of view, attitudes, values, norms, kinds of knowledge, cognitive frameworks, and, in particular, the principles governing them, are universalizable, and as such, transcend actual human practices. Given that actual human practices, however loosely we formulate this notion, clearly evolve and change just as much as theories and the criteria they must meet in different scientific, moral, and aesthetic communities, it seems that a true pragmatist must abandon such universal principles once and for all.

This is not to say that a pragmatist cannot take a universal point of view per se. However, I do think that the pragmatist must avoid taking such a view in the specific sense that it involves laying out a set of basic preconditions for some phenomenon independently of the factual variances and contingencies the phenomenon in question reveals within the context of our actual practices and experiences. As I see it, this kind of static and ahistorical universalism rests at the core of Kant's transcendental philosophy, but is alien to the pragmatist agenda (cf. e.g., Pihlström 1996, 245).

Of course, one might simply reject such an "anti-empirical" route as unrealistic, but at least one plausible argumentative strategy follows it. It goes as follows. Let's take A for granted. Necessarily, for A to be possible, something has to be the case. To put it differently, and a little more verbosely, there must be a fixed set of fundamental principles that found, constitute, and govern A, otherwise no such thing as A is possible, which is to say that there is no such thing as A. Moreover, to be in cognitive touch with A requires (at least some kind of) a grasp of those principles. (It may also be that A is cognitively unavailable to a given person or community at t due to a total lack of acknowledgment of such principles at t. In what follows, A stands for taste, morality, and cognition, respectively.)

I begin by demonstrating that there are two kinds of universalism present in Kant's critical philosophy, and I show how these emerge in Kant's aesthetics, Kant's ethics, and Kant's theory of cognition. What I call relative universalism is limited to a human point of view. What I call absolute universalism transcends the human point of view and is supposed to extend to rationality as such. Still, both kinds of universalism share the idea that there is something necessary and fixed in our human undertakings, whether these be aesthetic, moral, or scientific. The question then is whether, or to what extent, the kind of universalistic demands or presuppositions we find in Kant's critical philosophy conflict with the apparently anti-universalist pragmatist tenets.

2. Relative universalism in Kant's aesthetics

Matters of taste are often seen as totally subjective and without objective standards. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, they say. Kant's aesthetic theory, as presented in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790), is an interesting blend of subjective and objective elements. Kant simultaneously accepts a lack of definite standards and denies that beauty is just a matter of personal taste. Indeed, Kant seems to think that if taste were merely a matter of personal pleasure, it would not even properly be called taste. Despite being a matter of pleasure, taste also indicates something common, something shared, something irreducible to our private likes or "the agreeable" (Kant 2000 b [1790], 97–8; AA 5:212–3, *passim*).[1]

As far as individual claims concerning beauty are concerned, the intersubjective character of taste requires us to judge the beauty of things in a very specific way. Briefly put, we must judge disinterestedly, without any ulterior motives towards the object in question. Equally importantly, we must not judge the object according to concepts—roughly, what we know about it and what we believe its purpose to be—but according to the way the object affects us in our judging of it. In other words, the maker of an aesthetic judgment must judge "on the basis of what he has before his sense" (Kant 2000 b [1790], 116; AA 5:231; see also 5:350). This specific kind of attitude towards the object distinguishes aesthetic judgment from cognitive judgment, where one must judge "on the basis of what he has in his thoughts" (ibid.). Still, in order for the aesthetic judgment to count as an aesthetic judgment of taste as opposed to an aesthetic judgment of mere

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[1] 'AA', followed by a volume and page number, refers to the so-called Academy edition of Kant's collected works. See References for other abbreviations.

sensation, an additional criterion must be met: namely, that we attend to the formal features of the object or our representational state (Kant 2000 b [1790], 174; AA 5:294; see also e.g., 5:190). Only in this way can one reflect "on his own judgment from a universal standpoint" (Kant 2000 b [1790], 175; AA 5:295). As Kant also puts it, when making genuine judgments of taste, we assume "universal voice" (Kant 2000 b [1790], 101; AA 5:216). That is to say that we expect that others agree with our judgment universally, making Kant's aesthetics explicitly universalistic. However, this kind of universalism is so only relatively or comparatively, because the demand on the universality of the judgments of taste is relativized to judgers who share, or are presupposed to share, the same specific cognitive basis for aesthetic estimation, including the ability to rise above private sensation. What is more, Kant explicitly states that the universal voice is "only an idea" (Kant 2000 b [1790], 101; AA 5:216).

Though Kant admits that the universal voice is just an idea or—perhaps closer to the point he wants to make—an assumption under which to proceed in matters of taste, he clearly wants to insist on something stronger. I think that Kant's key point is that such an idea is necessary in the sense that if there were no truth in such an idea, there would not be taste in the first place. In other words, to make sense of the fact—assuming that it is a fact—that there truly is taste and true beauty instead of mere agreeableness is to assume a universal foundation for it, even if that foundation is merely a principle of judging that is relative to human standpoint and "ideal"—i.e., not to be attributed to things in themselves, but to a purposive relationship among certain cognitive faculties of the judgers (cf. Kant 2000 b [1790], 224–5; AA 5:350–1).

Somewhat curiously, especially from a pragmatist point of view, it appears to be totally irrelevant to Kant's universalistic approach that we do in actuality know that there is no agreement in matters of taste, and that we may always doubt whether we actually succeed in judging in the way described above (e.g., Kant 2000 b [1790], 121–2; AA 5:237). Kant's universalistic conviction seems to come purely from so-called transcendental considerations. Accordingly, experiential data that would prove him otherwise simply do not exist.

3. Absolute universalism in Kant's ethics

Kant's ethics, as presented in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785) and *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), is universalistic in a stronger

sense than Kant's aesthetics. For starters, morality is not bound to the human point of view. The ultimate moral principle, the so-called categorical imperative—"act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law" (Kant 2005 [1785], 73; AA 4:421)—is supposed to bind every imaginable rational agent without exception (ibid., 90; AA 4:442). That which is morally good is so absolutely and universally, period.

The categorical imperative, in its suggestion of universal moral law, is no less than the ultimate criterion for morally legitimate judgments and ethical norms. At the same time, it is a kind of test. Are you doing the right thing? If your guideline for the act you are about to perform complies with the universality demand made by the categorical imperative, then yes, you may rest assured that you act in a morally good way. But if your guideline for the act you are about to perform only complies with your own needs, then you are not going to act morally at all. Alternatively put, to act morally is to act in a certain way because it is a duty to do so, not because we (necessarily) like it (cf. e.g., Kant 2005 [1788], 171–2; AA 5:38–9).

Though Kant's moral theory is highly complex and the real-world applicability of the categorical imperative can be questioned, his basic point is quite appealing. To begin with, though Kant does not want to claim that morality has nothing to do with feeling, he nevertheless wants to show how morality, or our "moral disposition" (Kant 2005 [1788], 201; AA 5:76), cannot be based on any sort of feeling. Emotions and feelings come and go, vary from one circumstance to another, and are inherently private and personal. Clearly, such thoroughly contingent factors could not provide the required communally binding force that makes morality stand to its name. Cognitively speaking, to be able to reason morally is to be able to apply a universal principle to the empirical world, and, indeed, from a point of view that transcends our limited, less-than-ideal, and complexly conditioned experiential situation. What is more, it is only then that we may also recognize that moral law could not be any other way, and, even closer to the point I would like to emphasize, that if it were, then morality itself would not be possible in the first place.

To put it differently, there must be something in our moral reasoning that does not fall prey to the contingencies of everyday feelings or other impulses and prejudices. This is why morality must be based on something extra-empirical. Morality cannot be based on our "animality", but must instead originate from "the moral law within me" (Kant 2005 [1788],

AA 5:161)—even if test cases for the categorical imperative do originate empirically and externally. In the end, as Kant would have it, the ultimate principle of moral reasoning must be embedded in rationality itself. Indeed, not only does morality transcend actual human practices, but its ultimate standard is totally independent of how we human beings actually happen to act, and furthermore, how we happen to be constituted as far as our specifically human nature is concerned (Kant 2005 [1785], 90; AA 4:442).

4. Relative and absolute universalism in Kant's theory of cognition

In Kant's theory of cognition, as presented in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/1787), we encounter both kinds of universalism. On the one hand, there is space and time as humanly necessary form(s) of sensible cognition that hold true for at least every human cognizer (Kant 2000 a [1781/1787], A 26–7/B 42–3; B 72).[2] Generally speaking, this is to say that at least as far as cognitive experience goes, we are spatiotemporally restricted beings, and given this limitation, the only legitimate object for scientific and other cognitive undertakings is the spatiotemporally confined empirical world of experienceable things, including ourselves as bodily creatures. Furthermore, unlike the actual empirical contents of our experience, the spatiotemporal form of experience is not only constant, but preconditions any actual empirical content our experience might possibly have.

On the other hand, there are the categories as necessary forms of thinking. Just as with space and time, Kant ultimately links these categories with the possibility of experience: it is only by means of the categories that we can think about objects of experience (A 93/B 126). Only this time, similarly to Kant's approach in ethics, he does not limit the categories to human beings, but seems to think that to have any kind of rationally structured experiential cognition, no matter who the cognizer or thinking being is or exactly what kind of sensory constitution it has, experience must be structured in accordance with the categories.[3]

Though Kant is not explicit on the matter and does not spend much time explaining the categories, I think he has the following in mind.

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[2] From this point on, I only use the standard A/B-references: 'A', followed by a page number, refers to the 1781 edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, 'B' refers to the 1787 edition.

[3] Divine intellect, capable of intellectual intuition, would be an exception (cf. e.g., A 256/B 311–2; AA 5:405). Within Kant's critical project, such an intellect is merely an object of speculation, but also serves as a reminder that our humanly limited cognitive constitution greatly restricts the scope of our knowledge claims.

In thinking about the spatiotemporal objects of experience, we necessarily employ certain structural features thanks to which we can refer to those objects—whatever they are—as more or less stable entities with or without such and such properties, just like those objects simply must have (or at least must be represented as having) location, spatial extension, duration, and so forth to be objects for us in the first place. In addition, thanks to the constant structure of our thinking, we may come to think of any possible objects of experience in terms of magnitude (e.g., mass) and interaction, or as a participant in events, or—crucially—we do not come to think them at all. Briefly put, the Table of Categories (A 80/B 106) is supposed to have all the possible basic ways of thinking of objects inscribed in it.

As Kant almost puts it, you either apply the categories or you do not think, just like you do not speak a language unless you speak it according to a certain set of rules, however imprecise your explicit knowledge of the grammar. Furthermore, just as actual languages differ in grammar but still have certain elements in common—which suggests the existence of some kind of universal grammar (cf. e.g., Chomsky 2002)—all meaningful determinations of spatiotemporal objects share the common categorial framework despite the possible differences and variations in the empirical concepts used in such determinations.

It is important to acknowledge that the Kantian categories are supposed to be purely formal elements of our cognition. As such, they are not informed by empirical content, but are absolutely unspecific in this regard. Indeed, the categories ground the possibility of any such experiential content in the first place, which is why it would be absurd for Kant to allow the possibility that we may categorize experience as we will (cf. e.g., Lewis 1923, 175).

5. Kant's universalism and pragmatism: In opposition or not?

How well do Kant's universalistic demands, which we find in his aesthetics, ethics, and theory of cognition, agree with pragmatist tenets? At first sight, it may seem that Kant is clearly an anti-pragmatist thinker whose theoretical commitments are quickly problematized from the pragmatist point of view. For starters, Kant thinks that *a priori* and *a posteriori* elements are neatly separable. This trend is visible in all three *Critiques*, beginning with the Transcendental Aesthetic (Kant 2000 a [1781/1787]; see also e.g., Kant 2005 [1788], 270; AA 5:163). Moreover, Kant does not seem to see any reason to question whether he has found the correct set

of *a priori* principles (cf. Hookway 1985, 63, 87). On the contrary, he thinks of them as universally binding, and even sees some of them as independent of human experience as such, even though his basic point would usually be that there must be principles governing human cognitive, ethical, and aesthetic undertakings, and that such principles are independent of the particular instances of such undertakings given in actual experience, thus providing the framework under which the actual instances become possible.

There are no signs that Kant would regard the context-sensitive practical or experiential consequences of his theoretical commitments as particularly important. It may also seem that he is quite blind to the social dimension of taste, for example (cf. Shusterman 1989). Indeed, if you ask a pragmatist-minded philosopher, they may argue that Kant, while laying out law-like principles from his ivory tower, ends up totally downplaying the role of actual experience and the complex entanglements of human practices. Then again, if we were to ask Kant himself, he would probably reply that if you take actual human practice as your starting point, you end up with contingencies. Or indeed, in a sense—as I have been hinting at above—you end up losing such things as (genuine, correctly understood) taste, morality, and cognitive experience. This is because if Kant is right, then such things are possible only because there is a certain necessitating structure underlying them, and the role of philosophy is to discover their governing principles.

Obviously, there are many difficult and problematic issues in the previous paragraphs, and many more beyond. For example, there is the cognitive question about the possibility, role, and scope of aprioristic theorizing. Relatedly, Kant's commitment to all-encompassing rationality, which culminates in his practical philosophy, would be another big issue. Of course, one could ask similar questions about the supposed inseparability of theory and practice demanded by pragmatists. One could also ask whether some particular pragmatist would agree or disagree with Kant in the end. Peirce, for example, seemed to be a firm believer in universal moral standards—or at least Peirce can be read this way (Hookway 1985, 59, 65). Similar universalistic tendencies might be found behind Peirce's notion of ideal science. In fact, Peirce may have shared Kant's conviction that not everything can be fallible. It might also be argued that just like Kant's system, Peirce's system of categories is supposed to be absolutely universal, not empirically falsifiable, and his theory of signs also seems to be a thoroughly *a priori* enterprise (Hookway 1985, 63, 81, 108, 126).

Even Lewis, with his anti-universalist conception of *a priori*, is clearly not against apriority as such, though Kant would hardly find that kind of "pragmatized" version of apriority plausible.

In any case, in the rest of the text I will cover the idea that there must be something necessary and immutable in (or "behind") our various human undertakings—a kind of fixed core. The basic idea is this: The ability to continue to track, communicate, and evaluate, say, Aristotle's ethical ideas or Newton's scientific claims, means taking part in the same reasoning processes that these thinkers did. As I see it, the critical Kant is after such reasoning processes and their purely formal elements in the domains of theoretical philosophy, moral philosophy, and aesthetics. As formal and universal, they are elements shared by every actual application, practical circumstance, or cognitive framework. (Besides, no such maximal projection could be empirically supported, not even in principle.) As already suggested, this is to say that we cannot be anti-universalist in all respects. For instance, referring to objects in terms of their properties—which I take to be an application of the category of Substance—is such a basic element of cognition that it is simply indispensable (cf. Hookway 1985, 146). No change in logic or physics or any other human practice changes that. Even if we were to find a bearer-property relation as irrelevant in a certain scientific explanatory context, we would still be indirectly referring to just that, and would continue to do so in our everyday life anyhow.

Certainly, Kant's categories can be seen as tied to the theoretical commitments of Kant's time, and to Newtonian physics in particular—just like any system of categories can be regarded as non-absolute (e.g., Westerhoff 2005, 218–9). If so, the category of Cause and Effect, for example, can be said to reflect a certain kind of conception of causality that only holds good under certain mechanistic presuppositions. So, basically, when our conception of causality changes—as it has from Aristotelian philosophy to Newtonian physics to the theory of relativity to quantum mechanics—Kant's category of Cause becomes at least partially obsolete, just as his Euclidean conception of space and time becomes obsolete after the introduction of other kinds of geometries. Accordingly, a pragmatist-minded philosopher could claim that Kant's theory of space-time is successful only insofar as it finds practical Euclidean application (cf. Lewis 1923, 177).

As the ultimate principles of cognitive experience, I think that Kant's space-time and categories should be understood in a very primitive and rudimentary way: We apply them or represent in accordance with them whenever we refer to locations, durations, properties, magnitudes, events,

interaction, existence, and so forth in whatever exact way such an ap-
plication actually takes place. Bluntly put, it is simply impossible to
do without them. So, the claim goes, whatever differences there are
between our ways of understanding causality today and back then, the
category of causality represents that which is shared by both instances.
The specifics beyond this core (or form, as Kant would call it) might just
as well evolve and change from one framework to another, but the form
itself does not. In this minimalist sense, some of the norms governing
natural sciences—or indeed all kinds of cognitive undertakings—do ap-
ply universally (cf. Pihlström 1996, 220). Otherwise there would basically
be no inquiry in the first place. Or as Kant suggests in the second *Cri-
tique* in defense of the *a priori* method, without "true universality" there
would not even be "rational inference and so not even inference from anal-
ogy" (Kant 2005 [1788], 146; AA 5:12)—just to give an example of what an
anti-universalistic strategy would mean according to Kant.

To give a rough illustration of this, let us imagine both Aristotle and
Newton dropping rocks to the ground. Both think about moving things
and make generalizations on the basis of the alterations they both witness.
In short, both explain the causal behavior of the rocks. In doing so, both
apply exactly the same categories and share exactly the same basis of spa-
tiotemporal determination of the rocks' places. No commitments specific
to Euclid have to be made, though Kant would insist that whatever they
perceive can be given a mathematical approximation in Euclidean terms.
The reason Aristotle and Newton conceptualize things differently is not
due to their different categorial frameworks (in Kant's sense), but their dif-
ferent repertoires of empirical concepts and the different genesis thereof.
Most crucially, to understand the differences in their procedures is to un-
derstand the common reasoning processes at the basis of both procedures,
however precise or imprecise our knowledge of the governing principles
of those processes may be.

Suppose we meet a space alien—like the one in *Arrival*. Sharing our
thoughts might be painfully difficult, but assuming it would be possible,
as it is in that movie, what could explain this other than a shared catego-
rial framework? In other words, the deep structure of our thinking—and
language, for that matter (again, cf. e.g., Chomsky 2002)—would have to
be the same.[4] And if this is so, then the categories could not be socially

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4 The following quotation from Frege's *Grundgesetze* is most fitting here: "But what if
beings were even found whose laws of thought flatly contradicted ours and therefore fre-
quently led to contrary results even in practice? The psychological logician could only

produced in any strict sense (*pace* e.g., Lewis 1923, 177). In a similar vein, they must be independent of actual human practices, except for in the trivial sense that the actual application of such principles is obviously embedded in actual human practices and serves different purposes in different contexts (see also Pihlström 1996, 346). In other words, there must be an element in them that grounds some such practice rather than an element that simply comes with it. In yet other words, both human and alien experience and mind would have to have—*pace* Lewis, using his own words—"a character which is universal, fixed, and absolute" (Lewis 1923, 177).[5]

Of course, as I have been suggesting, such an absolutely universal character has to be construed very minimally, and, as I have been suggesting, Kant's main intention was to do just that. This is so at least as far as his theory of cognition is concerned, but I think his approach in ethics and aesthetics is ultimately the same: go and find the ultimate governing principles of moral thought and taste.

In all, this has the consequence that a properly Kantian thing to do is to limit fallibility (cf. Gava 2016) by demanding fixed formal-universalistic restrictions on cognition about the world. (Assumedly the "matter" has its say too, of course.) Bluntly put, many things in our cognitive construction of the world might be "pragmatically malleable", but not all of them—including in particular the deep structure of the reasoning processes themselves (cf. Pihlström 1996, 220, 345; see also Lewis 1923, 177; but see also Pihlström 1996, 202).[6] Otherwise, for all I know, Kant might just as well accept the pragmatic tenets.

6. Conclusion and further remarks

In the above, I have proceeded from what I take to be Kant's point of view and sought possible tensions between Kant's way of thinking and

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acknowledge the fact and say simply: those laws hold for them, these laws hold for us. I should say: we have here a hitherto unknown type of madness" (Frege 1982 [1893], 14 [xvi]). I thank Tapio Korte for bringing this passage to my attention.

[5] If this means commitment to the "absolutely universal human nature" (Lewis 1923, 176) criticized by Lewis, then so be it. Notice, however, that the line of argumentation I am following here actually suggests more than that: namely, that certain preconditions or core features of human cognition must be preconditions of cognition and language use in general.

[6] Pihlström (1996, 202) writes: "If all criteria of rationality are abandoned, no edifying conversation can take place". I wholeheartedly agree, but would also insist on taking it one step further, as I think Kant also would: namely, either we have some absolutely fixed criteria or no conversation would come about in the first place.

pragmatism—or, more precisely, Kant's universalistic approach and tenets I presumed to be exemplarily pragmatist. I believe that I have located at least one crucial point of departure: namely, the idea that our cognitive, ethical, and aesthetic undertakings do have a universal character—a kind of fixed core. As such, it must be something independent of all kinds of practical considerations or pragmatic variations which might be related to such undertakings in their actual applications. Indeed, this fixed core must be prior to any actual human practices in the specific sense of apriority that refers to the ultimate preconditions of cognitive, ethical, and aesthetic undertakings as opposed to something that comes and evolves with the actual instances of such undertakings.

Though there are some obvious difficulties with such a transcendentalist approach, it is, to my mind at least, quite tempting. To begin with, it makes sense to think that for there to be, say, genuine morality, it must have a universal foundation—a kind of deep structure that does not change even if actual moral practices do. (Of course, this assumes that these practices cannot change thoroughly, or if they did, then they would not be moral practices anymore.) You may consider that deep structure as a kind of truth-maker if you like. Indeed, even if Kant's attempt at revealing such a truth-maker failed, the following crucial idea could and should be preserved from his ethical project: it is only because we can track something like the moral law that we can make sense of ourselves as moral agents in the first place.

Logic is another telling example. As far as I can tell, inventions of new logical systems typically do not, nor are they supposed to, alter the most basic logical laws or principles—such as those underlying the inferential structure known as *modus ponens*. In fact, a change in something so fundamental would not just mean a change in logic. Instead, it would render thinking as we know it unrecognizable.[7] Somewhat similarly, one might argue that allowing exceptions to moral law would be like allowing

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[7] On a side-note, although I think this is the way Kant sees universality in logic and its connection to thinking, I do not think Kant's *categories* should be understood as purely logical principles—as Peirce seemed to (cf. Hookway 1985, 18, 83). This is to say that even if some logical forms from Kant's Table of Judgments can be shown to be reducible to each other in some post-Aristotelian system, their counterparts in the Table of Categories do not only remain recognizably different thought acts, but continue to reflect different thought contents applicable to different kinds of particular cases (cf. Peirce 1974, 300; CP 1.560). Relatedly, the abovementioned universal character or fixed core need not make specific reference to any particular system of logic, but rather to that which makes *modus ponendo ponens* and the like valid in the first place.

exceptions to *modus ponens*, the ultimate point being that through such exceptions the whole enterprise in question would collapse.

What is more, by recognizing such core elements in various domains, we can make sense of the fact that despite their differences, our theories, values, norms, world-views, and so forth are largely comparable and cross-evaluable—somewhat like different languages might not be interchangeable but are nevertheless translatable, at least in principle. This presumes not only a shared standpoint, but a ground independent of any particular standpoint (cf. Pihlström 1996, 380). In the above, I tried to capture this with the example of Aristotle's and Newton's uniquely different yet importantly similar approaches to science. In other words, both study roughly the same thing within or with the help of the same basic sensible-conceptual structure—minimally construed according to space-time and the categories—though it must be recognized that their different repertoires of *empirical* concepts can drastically color their respective operational frameworks.

Put this way, it all comes down to commensurability. The notion of truth requires it just as much as the possibility of communicating with aliens. Indeed, there must be perfect commensurability at some level in order for us to have an "intersubjective order" (Garrath 2016). Kant's two kinds of universalism—relative and absolute universalism—can be seen as attempts at securing that order: one from the human point of view, the other from the point of view of rationality per se.

In other terms, the Kantian analysis suggests that something like "pragmatic contextualism" (cf. Thayer 1981 [1965], 352–7)—i.e., the view according to which the context determines the relevance of the categories used to interpret a given object or phenomenon—cannot go all the way down. Instead, there must be domain-specific extra-contextual limitations to our aesthetic, ethical, and cognitive undertakings.

Now, if all of this sounds like too much, or too aprioristic—or too *assured* (cf. Hookway 1985, 63)—there are ways to soften the above claims without having to reject the universalistic approach altogether. (Here I am already thinking of how to reconcile Kantianism and pragmatism, though such a detailed analysis must be reserved for another occasion.) I have two such ways in mind, both of which are pragmatist in spirit, yet familiar to Kant as well.

First, one might point out that sometimes we simply have to presuppose either relatively or absolutely universal frameworks. For example, when we evaluate Aristotle's virtue ethics, we proceed ahistorically under

the assumption that Aristotle is speaking basically about the same thing as contemporary ethicists regardless of the obvious differences between the actual normative contexts of Aristotle and ours. As a matter of fact, proceeding this way is the practically most purposeful thing to do in an ethics class, say.

Second, one might take up certain principles as granted without committing to the idea that these principles determine our aesthetic, ethical, or cognitive undertakings in any absolute sense. This is to say that the *a priori* principles should be regarded as regulative, as sorts of necessary presuppositions or background hypotheses that guide our empirical research, without ever providing—not even in principle—the last word on the subject, so to say. To borrow Peirce's term, we have "intellectual hope" (Peirce 1974, 221–2; CP 1.405–6) at best. At the same time, perhaps some such merely regulative assumptions are simply indispensable for us, and, in this sense at least, relatively universal. For example, "always seek for more and more unified ground of explanation" seems to be one such background assumption operative in scientific research (cf. e.g., A 647–50/B 675–8; see also Repo & Laiho 2009, 274). Moreover, it might just as well be the case that such an assumption—or maxim of reason as Kant may wish to call it—has the most desirable pragmatic consequences in theory building, which calls for accepting it in place of some less influential alternative.

Of course, I had no such heuristic or regulative stance in mind at all above, but wanted to insist on something stronger—something more foundational—just as Kant himself did with his so-called constitutive principles. As important as they are, confining ourselves to the kinds of "pragmatized" principles just described might have less desirable consequences as well. At worst, our philosophical investigations become free-floating, without precise reference point—a consequence both Kantians and pragmatists surely want to avoid. This, I think, should be kept firmly in mind as we ponder the future path of pragmatism.[8]

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