

Gabriele Gava and Robert Stern (eds), *Pragmatism, Kant, and Transcendental Philosophy*. New York and London: Routledge, 2016. 298 pp. ISBN: 978-1-138-79191-6. £110.00. HB.

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For the most part, orthodoxy within the analytic tradition over the last hundred years has gravitated to a type of naturalistic metaphysics, many, however, reacting with disquiet to the limitations of a philosophy conceived in this way. Among the dissenters looking for alternatives some have advocated a return to Kant or to the German idealism that succeeded him, some, an engagement with the distinctive anti-metaphysical tenor of pragmatism to combat the scientific tendencies of analysis, and others, some combination of the two. This volume, which has its provenance in a conference in 2014, is devoted to this third option.

Emerging with the work of Charles Sanders Peirce in the latter parts of the Nineteenth Century, pragmatism had distinctly idealist roots but generally combined these with some form of scientific naturalism. Indeed the incorporation of a pragmatist anti-metaphysical dimension to idealism has often been seen as offering a way around its unwanted metaphysics, while preserving certain valuable truths about human existence taken from it—truths that seem to disappear in straightforwardly naturalistic accounts of the human subject. One influential recent form of pragmatism has read Kant and, increasingly, Hegel, from the perspective of Wilfrid Sellars's innovative thought. The contributors to this volume, however, for the most part have maintained a focus on the more "classical" forms of pragmatism that developed before the spread of the analytic movement, exploring in detail the relation between pragmatism in its original forms and Kant's transcendental idealism.

Given the relation to Kant's transcendental idealism at the heart of this volume, it is not surprising that the pragmatist most often engaged with here is the one most influenced by Kant: Charles Sanders Peirce. That Peirce came to regard the approach of William James as a distortion of his own indicates the tensions within the original program, tensions that extended to their views of the relevance of Kant. Unlike Peirce, James thought that Kant was a thinker to be bypassed, and this same tension exists within the more recent Sellarsian version of pragmatism. Sellars had considered himself as a kind of Kantian, but Richard Rorty, who promoted this form of pragmatism, was, like James, dismissive of Kant. By choosing the topic of pragmatism's relation to Kant, and especially to Kant's transcendental method, the editors have provided the opportunity for a detailed exploration of these tensions. This has resulted in a valuable collection of essays of consistently high quality that intersect at different points and that maintain a good balance of agreement and contestation around these points. Not all have approached the subject from a form of pragmatism centred on Peirce, however, and some have addressed James's relation to Kant.

James did not hide his antipathy to Kant, regarding pragmatism as developing from the empiricist tradition. Two of the papers here, however, look to the other side of the Kant–James relation, pointing to distinctly Kantian features in the work of James himself. First, in "Round Kant or Through Him? Arguments for Freedom, and Their Relation to Kant",

Robert Stern compares the attitudes of Kant and James to the question of belief in freedom of the will, finding clear parallels. In relation to religion in particular, James had famously advocated a non-epistemic justification for belief, sometimes crudely interpreted as amounting to the claim that we are justified in believing something if so believing makes us happy. Stern, however, argues that more sophisticated interpretations of James's "non-evidentialist" position are possible. Pursuing these elements in James brings him closer to Kant. Kant had justified belief in God as well as belief in personal freedom within the framework of his account of *practical* rather than theoretical reason. From the viewpoint of theoretical reason alone, we might just as well be mechanisms in a Godless universe. Stern argues for an evidentialist understanding of Kant's attitude nonetheless, but then works through a series of refinements of the ideas of both thinkers in order to bring out features shared.

Similar territory, with more focus on Peirce than James, is covered in Marcus Willaschek's "Kant and Peirce on Belief", which also takes up the question of whether Kant can be said to hold "evidentialist" or "non-evidentialist" positions on the justification of belief. Peirce had acknowledged Kant's account of pragmatic belief in the "Canon of Pure Reason" in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. By examining the consequences of Kant's approach to the practical determination of the content of belief, Willaschek finds Kant advocating an approach that is possibly even more "pragmatist" than that of Peirce.

One other contributor to focus primarily on the relation of James to Kant is Graham Bird, who has long been a critic of what he takes to be a common misunderstanding of Kant's theoretical philosophy in which the phenomenal–noumenal distinction is erroneously taken as holding between two realms of objects. Here, in "Consciousness in Kant and William James", he warns of a particular application of this misunderstanding in the context of Kant's philosophical psychology. Bird presents James as *for the most part* basing his criticism of Kant's transcendental psychology on the wrong interpretation of Kant, giving James an erroneous construal of the "transcendental" to which he opposed his own empiricist views. While not wanting to play down the real differences between Kant and James in their attitudes to consciousness, Bird nevertheless makes a compelling case for the possibility that these overtly opposed views might in the end be compatible and complementary.

The theme of Kant's transcendental attitude to subjectivity is also taken up by Sami Philström, in "Subjectivity as Negativity and As a Limit: On the Metaphysics and Ethics of the Transcendental Self, Pragmatically Naturalized". Philström explores the possibility of a broadly "naturalized" transcendental approach to subjectivity that might provide tools to bypass problems that arise for other non-reductivist naturalistic approaches. Typically what such *non*-transcendental approaches lack is an acknowledgement of the degree to which the self is involved in cognitively *constituting* the world in which it exists. Moreover, both transcendental and pragmatist orientations are in their own ways critical of the type of metaphysically realist assumptions of orthodox naturalism which puzzle about how to fit conscious thinking subjects *into* a world that has been already conceived "naturalistically" in the sense of being described in terms meant to be entirely independent of any subjective determination. Philström finds promise in Wittgenstein's tractarian theme of the subject as "limit" of the world, rather than (simply) thing *in* the world, when added to Wittgenstein's own later approach to the mind as embodied and embedded in the normative practices of

social life. This sense of the self as limit and “no thing” in turn recalls the way that James had denied thinghood to the mind as presented by Bird.

One prominent theme running through several papers concerns Peirce’s similar turn away from subjectivistic “Cartesian” assumptions about the mind, assumptions that still seem to dominate the Transcendental Analytic of the Kant’s first *Critique*. In contrast, Peirce, more like Hegel, focussed predominantly on the inferential processes of *reasoning* rather than individual acts of judging, and conceived of these as grounded in social practices. This turn to a primarily “inferentialist” attitude to belief had become central to the “neopragmatist” revival sparked by Sellars, and in his illuminating essay, “Concepts of Objects as Prescribing Laws: A Kantian and Pragmatist Line of Thought”, James O’Shea traces the Kant-pragmatism relation from Kant to Sellars and, most recently, Robert Brandom, via the intermediary of C. I. Lewis. O’Shea attends in particular to the complex *modal* issues linking concepts of objects to laws in Sellars’s approach and developed in Brandom’s “modal expressivism”. Given that the transcendental method is typically concerned with the “necessary *conditions of possibility* of ... actualities” (as the editors put it (p. 14), packing three classical modalities into a single phrase), *modality* surely seems a relevant issue here. Indeed, this is underlined when one reflects on the fact that *qua* logician, Lewis was the person to revive *modal logic* having been indirectly influenced by Peirce via the intermediary of the American “absolute idealist”, Josiah Royce. It was the trajectory of pragmatism from Sellars to Brandom that had prompted Rorty to argue for a move from a Kantian framework to an Hegelian one, but while supportive of Brandom’s project, O’Shea clearly does not see this issue as so easily settled, and wants to preserve more of the Kantian moment in this tradition than did Rorty.

Whether or not this Peircean tendency to *socialize* the more individualistic and subjective dimension of Kant is ultimately compatible with Kant’s “transcendental” approach is taken up by a number of other contributors. The implications of the shift from a transcendental approach centered on individual judgments to Peirce’s inference-centred one are systematically explored by Jean-Marie Chevalier in “Forms of Reasoning as Conditions of Possibility”. While Chevalier is on the side of those who see Peirce as broadly *within* the transcendental tradition, as he points out at the end of the article, even Peirce himself seems to have abandoned a central dimension of it in later life for a more robust cosmological theory that he (and Chevalier) associates more with Hegel. A related contribution, but with a focus on a different dimension of Peirce’s socialization of Kant’s transcendentalism, is David Macarthur’s “A Kant-Inspired Vision of Pragmatism as Democratic Experimentalism”. While Chevalier’s treatment of inference structures stays reasonably close to the concerns of formal logic, Macarthur appeals to the *pragmatics* of Peirce’s approach to the “fixation of belief” in a free democratic society. It is to such a normative conception of community that philosophy should look for any grounds to knowledge claims—a move designed to break the grip of the foundationalist epistemology that had dominated modern philosophy. But if this sounds like Rorty’s conception of the “conversation of mankind”, Macarthur presents his case as a criticism of Rorty, who, he implies, had abandoned epistemology rather than, like Peirce, reforming it.

A picture of Peirce’s work as embodying a similar broadly pragmatic (in the sense of the “pragmatics” of language use) transformation of Kantian transcendentalism is found in

the work of Karl-Otto Apel, which is taken up by a number of contributors. While Daniel Herbert, in “Pierce and the Final Opinion: Against Apel’s Transcendental Interpretation of the Categories” is critical of Apel’s project, Wolfgang Kuhlmann, in “A Pleas for Transcendental Philosophy”, defends it. However, each qualifies his position such that the two papers engage in productive ways. An approach that runs along generally similar lines is to be found in Boris Rähme’s “Transcendental Arguments, Epistemically Constrained Truth, and Moral Discourse”, in which Rähme pursues the issue of transcendental reasoning in the sphere of *practical* rather than theoretical reason. As practical reason is an area where fewer people have realist intuitions, Rähme sees this as a realm in which the *anti-realist* dimension of transcendental arguments might be more easily accommodated.

The challenge to Kant’s transcendentalism posed by the *fallibilism* of Peirce’s pragmatism is a further major theme running through the volume. Cheryl Misak addresses it directly in “Peirce, Kant, and What We Must Assume” as does Gabrielle Gava in “The Fallibilism of Kant’s Architectonic”. Kant’s assumptions that we have a priori access to *necessary* “possible conditions of experience” were bound up with his assumptions about the unchallengeable status of Euclidean geometry, assumptions which would in the later nineteenth century collapse. It had been such changes in first-order scientific knowledge that had led C. I. Lewis to reconceive Kant’s *a priori* as necessarily *historical*. Such an historicization of the *a priori* could be assimilated by Peirce, given his claim of the fallibility of *any* particular belief, but with such a generalized fallibilism the idea of establishing definitive a priori *knowledge*, even when about conditions for the *possibility* of knowledge rather than the world itself, is surely threatened. Misak nevertheless finds continuity between Kant and Peirce in relation to Kant’s idea of “regulative” principles for knowledge—principles that for Kant we *must* apply, but which we must disavow as “constitutive” any form of knowledge. With Peirce, that these are no longer establishable in a transcendental way means that they must only have the status of a “hope” that the world is such that it is somehow conducive to our knowing it.

Gabriele Gava approaches the fallibilism issue from the opposite direction, by asking whether the fallibilism that is a feature of both Peirce and more recent philosophy may not still be compatible with aspects of Kant’s own *a priori* approach. In this way, Gava’s method is like that of Stern and Willaschek in that he uses the comparison to Peirce as an occasion to investigate possibilities for the understanding of *Kant* that have hitherto been largely ignored. It is clear that in parts of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, especially in the “Transcendental Analytic”, Kant is explicit about what is known *a priori* and with *necessity* is known with *certainty*—that is, is infallible. And yet sections from the “Transcendental Doctrine of Method” seem to provide evidence that Kant had a place for beliefs that could be considered as both a priori and necessary, yet nevertheless *fallible*. Gava stresses the “modesty” of Kant’s picture of reason in these sections: reason is not transparent to itself and it relies on the type of intersubjective validation that is discussed by Macarthur.

The collection itself starts with the paper that I come to last. In “German Idealism, Classical Pragmatism, and Kant’s Third *Critique*”, Sebastian Gardner similarly starts from the relevance for pragmatism of Kant’s *regulative* principles as distinct from *constitutive* ones. Contrary to the tendency of analytic readings of Kant, which focus predominantly on the “Transcendental Analytic” of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Gardner, like many of the

contributors, is more interested in the relatively ignored later sections of the first *Critique*, where Kant discusses the *regulative* concepts of reason. Gardner picks up on these issues as developed and radicalized in Kant's third *Critique*, the *Critique of Judgment*, where Kant relocates the earlier "regulative" principles within a new conception of *judgment*, the "reflective" judgments found in the aesthetic and organic realms. Gardner regards this as the route to these later idealist transformations of Kant's project, but it is also relevant to the development of pragmatism.

Gardner's mapping of the terrain here is lucid and extremely helpful. Kant had given those "reflective" judgments about, say, the purposefulness displayed by organisms, a strictly "as if" status, but Schelling, for example, fascinated by the emergence of scientific biology, had come to view such judgments as equally *constitutive* as those of physics, contributing to a *realism* concerning teleology found in the world. And if the world is itself generally conceived as *organic*, we can understand ourselves and our conceptual capacities in worldly terms. Following this trajectory through Kant's third *Critique* can lead to the view that while pragmatism "drops the constitutive or subordinates it to the regulative", idealism "holds fast to the constitutive, massively enlarging its scope and absorbing into it" all regulative structure (p. 22). But Gardner argues that things are not so straightforward. Like Misak, he points to the way Kant's regulative principle continues to function for Peirce as a "hope" that nature will conform to the beliefs we form about it. Moreover, neither does German idealism simply confer on Kant's regulative principles a constitutive status. Gardner ultimately opposes pragmatism to idealism in terms of the pragmatists' refusal of *a priori* grounds of knowledge, but he effectively leaves open the question of the success of the idealists' move beyond *epistemological* considerations to *ontological* ones—the move seen in Schelling's assimilation of the mind's functioning to the teleological processes found objectively in the world.

There are many riches to be found in this collection, not simply for those with particular interests in Kant and pragmatism, but for anyone with interests in the question of the place of philosophy in a culture that has broadly come to accept empirical science as having exclusive cognitive authority about the world and ourselves. Does it give us good reasons for thinking that pragmatism has the tools to refurbish a version of Kant's transcendentalism? Or does the fallibilism and anti-cartesianism of pragmatism leave Kant's philosophy simply an interesting historical monument?

In his engagement with more recent forms of pragmatism O'Shea raises the issue of the temptation to a phenomenalist reading of Kant, to which he sees C. I. Lewis as having been prone (p. 203). One may wonder, however, about the possibility of *avoiding* the phenomenalist trap from within an approach that conceives of experience as constrained by a set of conditions meant to be knowable *a priori* and that define the very *possibility* of actual experience. The idea of the actual world known in experience as one of a variety of possible worlds goes back to Leibniz, and while Kant denied that this Leibnizian, logically driven consideration of possibilities could furnish metaphysical knowledge of the world "in itself", he seemed nevertheless to preserve Leibniz's "possibilist" starting point. But when the "conditions of experience" are conceived in *this way*, it is hard to see how escape from the phenomenalist temptation is possible, as experience is conceived merely as a type of "filling in" of the gaps in an empty structure entirely determined by the mind itself. But

another, at least not directly epistemological, way of thinking of “givenness” might be found in Kant’s own treatment of empirical intuition in the “Postulates of Empirical Thought” where he links the content of empirical intuition to the modality of *actuality*. While modal issues come to the fore in Brandom, they do so at the expense of “experience”. I suspect, however, that Hegel’s reaction to Kant contains an element in which the modality of that which is determined in perception becomes uncoupled from the “phenomenalist temptation” to treat intuition as a *foundation* for empirical knowledge. Such a treatment of perception in *modal* rather than epistemological terms might perhaps provide a way beyond the pair of “modal possibilism” and “epistemological foundationalism” haunting Kant.

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