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Philosophical Constraints on Normativity

Abstract:

This essay is an exploratory reflection on a theme drawn from the work of Pierre Hadot and Juliusz Domański regarding “philosophy as a way of life.” I approach the matter from the naturalistic outlook of classic pragmatism and its own limitations. This approach stresses the possible improvement of the analysis of normativity by way of some neglected contributions regarding the nature of history and the evolution of *Homo sapiens* applied to the formation of the human self or person. I take Hadot’s proposal seriously, therefore, as contributing to a mature conception of philosophy. But I deliberately restrict my own conjectures to naturalistic constraints, which begins to suggest an enlargement of pragmatism itself and an assessment of Hadot’s Greco-Roman and Christian themes.

Keywords:

pragmatism, historicism, Hadot, Peirce, artifactuality, self, abduction, normativity

I am a pragmatist persuaded that we can and must go beyond the formulations of the classic figures: Peirce, Dewey, Mead at the very least, and possibly also James, though I am not at all certain that I understand James (or understand him as a pragmatist). I am a “modern” modern pagan naturalist, by which I mean – as the classic figures do as well, though obscurely, if I may say so, with due respect – that to acknowledge pragmatism gains in force and clarity a truer sense of its subversive and recuperative understanding of its own doctrines by recasting its philosophical commitments in terms of existential considerations of historicity and post-Darwinian evolutionism, compellingly introduced only as recently as the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

I have in mind a number of still-neglected features of history and human evolution that, in my opinion, explain the sense in which pragmatism’s new-found themes lead us to see its deepest contribution more in terms

of metaphilosophical force affecting the entire span of competing philosophies than merely as a strengthened single variant of a respectable, full-service philosophical system among a plurality of such systems. Nevertheless, I read these innovations as *lebensformlich* (more or less in Wittgenstein's sense) rather than as universalist as in the fashionably Kantian-like manner – inaccurately, as I surmise – favored (at least occasionally) by such figures as Newton Garver and Wilfrid Sellars.¹

I am, therefore, a pragmatist open to what may well be the indissoluble composite of “philosophy as a way of life,” ranging over the whole of philosophy and life such that, though it continues to reserve a space for divine (but apparently humanly accessible or humanly receptive) forms of some discernible or revealed *summum bonum*, seems to me to be distinctly prepared to yield in the direction of what I have dubbed the *lebensformlich* (as opposed to the universalist or apodictic). I am thus also inclined to insist on the metaphilosophical over any relatively successful or influential discrete specimen philosophies – Greco-Roman or Christian, say – before the modern age. This is the upshot of my very slim understanding of the composite thesis drawn from Pierre Hadot's reliance on Juliusz Domański's *La Philosophie, théorie ou manière de vivre?*, which Hadot plausibly and hospitably extends to accommodate, say, such unexpected but revealing remarks as the last thoughts of Hilary Putnam's on divinity read in the Judeo-Christian sense.²

It is my conjecture that, roughly, from the Enlightenment and the French Revolution on, philosophy goes naturalistic, along the lines of the natural and human sciences and mundane practical life. Divinity proves to be a mythic option; strict universality applied to nature, no more than a mongrel liberty, arguably beyond human cognitive powers, if read literally: apodicticity, rational certitude, transcendental truth, utterly fictive or conjectural posits that are nowhere required or confirmed. I am, therefore, a pagan thinker, open to the “practicist” option Hadot and Domański favor, but only as a supplementary, internally settled consensus that yields a measure of closure for any deeply felt cultural habitude that cannot be independently confirmed in naturalistic terms. I am persuaded that there are knock-down arguments that confirm the reasonableness of abandoning any would-be rationalist or revelationalist variants of literal claims about divine values.

In short, pragmatism, as I understand it, is persuaded that our cognitive and conceptual powers are more limited than the philosophical tradition has characteristically conceded. But it is also continually altered or enlarged, from time to time, with unexpectedly fresh options – in ways that inevitably challenge prematurely invariant and would-be apodictic truths of large pretension. This itself is a modest admission of the meaning of the historied nature of human existence, which, as a result of the invention and mastery of true language, instantly (and ineliminably) marks human cognition and agency as uniquely propositional and subject (evidentially) to a benign form of skepticism that makes every form of human cognitive conviction insuperably provisional and imperfectly grounded. This is the sense in which the human being – more accurately, the human self or person (viewed in a sense yet to be explained) – cannot be expected to exceed the conjectural, provisional, historied or historicized *lebensformlich* regularities of mankind's intelligible world.³

1) See Newton Garver, “Naturalism and Transcendentality: The Case of ‘Form of Life,’” in *Wittgenstein and Contemporary Philosophy*, ed. Souren Tegharian (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1994); Garver, *This Complicated Form of Life: Essays on Wittgenstein* (Chicago: Open Court, 1994).

2) See the following: Pierre Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?*, trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); Michael Chase, “Introduction,” in *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Ancient and Modern—Essays in Honor of Pierre Hadot*, eds. Michael Chase, Stephen R.I. Clark, and Michael McGhee (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013). <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118609187>; Juliusz Domański, *La Philosophie, théorie ou manière de vivre?* (Fribourg, Switzerland: Cerf Presse Universitaires, 1996); and Matthew Sharpe's review of the Domański volume (in manuscript), for the conference.

3) See my “Pragmatism and Historicity,” forthcoming (2019), in the *Journal of the Philosophy of History*.

This begins to yield the strengthened sense in which the contemporary pragmatist adheres to Charles Peirce's famous "pragmatic maxim" (tendered in Peirce's familiar essay, "How to Make Our Ideas Clear"), which deposes and exceeds Descartes's treatment of clear and distinct ideas. The maxim must be historicized, I say, though Peirce himself was much too casual about the matter. He says, "Consider what effects, which might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object." However, Peirce also says (in the same early paper), "The opinion that is fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate, is what we mean by the truth, and the object represented in this opinion is the real. That is how I would explain reality."⁴

But either the second remark precludes the first's proposal, or it precludes the historicity of human truth-claims. Truth-claims signify a decision for a time and a purpose that cannot fail to be overridden in some evidentiary future – never a direct discovery, and an infinite inquiry makes no pragmatist sense at all. Peirce himself glimpsed (close to the end of his life, very possibly prompted by an observation by Josiah Royce) the need to replace his infinitist fallibilism with the risky guesses of what Peirce began to regard as expressions of the sort of "learned ignorance" he came to call "abduction" – the incompletely articulated phases of our sciences on which we must ultimately rely. There is no escape from the conjectural, and there is no telic trajectory that assuredly leads to truth in the fallibilistic long run. Peirce spied the error of fallibilism close to the end of his life, but he was too ill to complete the revision required. So I surmise. The abductive guess, in any event, *is* pragmatism's most daring glimpse of its own radical metaphilosophical possibilities – which I wish to bring to bear on Hadot's and Domański's more moderate proposal. (Abductive guesses are the suggestive spontaneous guesses of experienced inquirers who have a good record of fruitful hunches that regularly contribute to empirical discovery without legible or demonstrable connection.⁵)

My point is that the innovation cannot exert its proper force if human inquiry is not seen to be inherently "historied" or "historicized." I mark the improvement in a conceptual way, as an artifactual consequence of the mastery of language itself and of the transformational (or ontological) upshot of that same process applied uniquely to the evolutionary endowment of *Homo sapiens*. You begin to see the significance of pragmatism in a new light merely by noting the curious fact that the study of the transformative power of language, history, and the evolution of the human being itself can hardly be discerned prior to the inquiries (and events) of the late eighteenth century and the innovative discoveries of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. That is to say, the meaning of Peirce's "maxim," which Peirce himself only haltingly grasped, would have been effectively inaccessible to the speculative minds of the first two millennia of Western philosophy. Imagine! I mark all this by construing the characterization of the human creature (as a self or person) as the "existential" import of the full evolution of the human being, which Darwin unaccountably fails to address. My own conjecture holds that the self or person is a natural but artifactual – provisionally final – phase of the evolution of *Homo sapiens*, which requires a complete revision of our theory of the human person and the complex structure of evolution itself. Darwin neglects both features of evolution. And so indeed does standard philosophy. It is in this sense that I assign these innovative possibilities to a receptive pragmatism.

If the human self or person is existentially "historied" as (at the very least) a consequence of acquiring language – that is, as being subject to the evolving forms of historical innovation (as with the continually advanced discoveries of new-born technologies) – then the evolution of new species (beyond the human) may (as with the human creature itself) be subject to some sort of hybridized evolution of its own (the entwining of

4) Charles Sanders Peirce, "How to Make Our Ideas Clear," in *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, eds. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962 [1934]), 5.462, 5.407.

5) Peirce, *Collected Papers*, vol. 5, Bk. I, Lecture 7.

the biological and the cultural, say, or of some sort of biological engineering). Truth becomes a historied and provisional posit. The would-be rational or transcendental invariances of past philosophy fall away. How could they resist? Thus, Hans Reichenbach obliges us to consider that quantum physics confirms (at least provisionally) that the concept of causal determinacy must be restricted to the macroscopic world: apparently, it has no place in the quantum vision.⁶ Tell that to Kant and Aristotle, if you will. Historicity is itself a temporally phased form of relative blindness and insight applied to whatever data we agree to examine cognitively.

But, then, cognition itself cannot be autonomous, free-standing, self-confirming, or completely reliable; it is rather, as I say, existentially encumbered by its own perceived past and conjectured future and its endless need for guesswork. Read this way, it cannot fail to apply to the entire range of competing philosophies – that is, metaphilosophically. Pragmatism thus begins to eclipse its own beginnings; it escapes its original parochialism and becomes an ingredient of every responsible philosophical system. But, of course, that, too, is a conjecture, not a settled, self-evident dictum. I regard this as approaching a favorite pronouncement of the Buddhist sage, Nagarjuna, in his instruction regarding the mystery of *Śūnyatta* (the Void): namely, that “all distinctions arise together and that that is not a doctrine.”⁷ Here, in attaching historicity to the expression of propositional claims, I mean to domesticate the ancient worry – never independently resolved – that grasping truth and understanding the meaning of what we say has (and can have) no foundational assurance at all. We live in one or another societal space, consensually, together with others, who, much like ourselves, are formed (enlanguaged) by similar forms of local *Bildung*, which we confirm (if I may say so) chiefly by our inability to explain our usual disputes and agreements by any means that fail to engage the *sittlich* (collective) habitudes of our original *Bildung*. And this, of course, generates a *petitio* or infinite regress or the like. Now, then, it is my conviction that the notion of philosophy as a “way of life” cannot escape such deficiencies and limitations. Would Hadot or Domański demur?

If you grant the point, then there is little reason to center the conception of philosophy viewed as a “way of life” chiefly or entirely on normative or practicist concerns, for these are inevitably embedded in theoretical posits and those are themselves transient in the historied sense. Furthermore, they cannot fail to be abductive, full of both guesswork and conceptual gambling. But that, so far as I can see, is an essential part of philosophy’s glory – and its existential instruction. Comic as the discovery may be, the only really absorbing puzzle that humans have ever pursued is, precisely, how to understand themselves in every conceivable way possible. There seems to be no end to the question, and every answer proves to be fragmentary and provisional. Philosophy is a sort of ensorcelled reflection, apparently incapable of ending its own search – hence it remains far more attractive and satisfying than any finished ideology or doctrine. And it appears implicit in every life.

The verdict is severe, I will not deny that. But if the abductive clue is unavoidable, metaphilosophically, then what we call knowledge, science, objective truth is – reasonably enough – existentially inseparable from what we take to be the conditions of our evolved resources and cognitive powers. The entire affair is a circular reflection that we cannot gainsay. With the advent of evolutionism, we cannot regard ourselves as having altogether eclipsed the achievement of instinctual creatures; *they* must be programmed for their span of life. Species survival is the touchstone of epistemology and ontology, which, then, are captive and perspectived disciplines, ultimately artifactual in the same sense in which we ourselves are natural artifacts, the surprising outcome (selves or persons) of our own transformative invention of language. Therein lies the single most compelling conceptual innovation of the last two centuries that I have any confidence in, viewed from the pragmatist’s vantage.

6) Hans Reichenbach, *The Rise of Scientific Philosophy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 307.

7) I draw this, from memory, from the *Karika*, but I have lost the reference.

Doubtless, we are not what we are, solely as a result of having invented and mastered language; yet, metaphilosophically, we could not be the unique creatures that we actually are were it not for the astonishing discontinuity and power of enlanguaged thought. Philosophy is inherently an unavoidable “way of life,” because our way of life *is* so uniquely alien and so intimate to ourselves that we must be able to command it in our own terms. We must philosophize because the mastery of language has made us reflexively aware in a unique and ineliminable way. But, then, also, the achievement puzzles us profoundly, even as we come to believe what we claim to have discovered about ourselves. That is to say, to admit that philosophy is “a way of life” is to admit our characteristic questions – not to assure us of their propositionally reliable resolution! Therein lies the fatal lure of self-knowledge and the quest of the *summum bonum*.

I do not believe we could ever capture an authoritative *summum bonum* – one that we might claim to have discovered in any way that escaped the essential *petitio* of human knowledge itself. Pragmatism’s metaphilosophy is a default achievement that every viable philosophy shares, even when it denies the fact. The explanation depends on correcting Darwin’s failure to have addressed the provisionally final phase of the evolution of *Homo sapiens*. There is no adequate account of the formation of the human self or person in Darwin’s oeuvre. He does not consider the ontological novelty of the “self.” Almost no one does. I conjecture that the artifactuality of the self is the single most important (as well as baffling) innovation that may be assigned to pragmatism, which, thus conceded, explains in one fell blow the full force of its default metaphilosophy and the uncompromising honesty of its mortal charm.⁸

We may well need the assurance of approaching divinity, which cannot fail to be relativized in the *sittlich* way. But if James’s notorious reading of Peirce’s maxim is enlisted to support that understandable frailty, then so much more reason to correct the pragmatistic treatment of validity itself. I shall come to that shortly. For the moment, I wish only to emphasize the discontinuities of the continuum of philosophy from ancient times to the end of the eighteenth century and the radical significance of the innovations of “modern” modern philosophy undeniably manifested in the achievements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Those innovations are chiefly associated with the following: the artifactual possibilities of evolution; the invention of language; the unique nature of the self; the significance of discursivity, normativity, historicity and the new physics of the twentieth century; the abandonment of foundationalism, transcendentalism, apodicticity, and the like; and the conceptual plateau we name naturalism, however generously construed.

Let me, therefore, propose a modest line of speculation that depends on a larger innovation that we need not feature for the moment. This line of speculation begins to suggest the enormous transformation of what I am calling “modern” modern philosophy – if you allow that “modern” philosophy begins in the interval that spans the *floruit* of Descartes and Kant. Concede the discursivity of language: that is, concede our capacity to think in enlanguaged ways that, with respect to cognitive matters, tends to be uniquely cast in propositional form, though thought itself need not be confined to the merely propositional. Allow that much, and it is at once reasonable to claim that historicity and normativity are artifactually dependent on discursivity – the historied nature of enlanguaged thought. There is no history or historied evolution of history before the advent of language (though there is temporal change), and there are no norms governing the grading and ranking of

8) There is, for instance, no account of the issue in Stephen Jay Gould’s compendium of Darwinian evolutionism, *The Structure of Evolutionary Theory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002). For a sense of the narrow gauge of Darwin’s conception of natural selection, see, especially, pp. 133–136, regarding *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, 2 vols. (London: Murray, 1871), <https://doi.org/10.1037/12294-000>. Darwin was obviously aware of the idea of “higher levels of selection” (moral concerns, for instance), but he was unwilling to venture more than a little here. “Natural selection” was his principal concern.

values of any kind (before language), though there are values that are not normatively ordered in the discursive way – linked, say, to the behavior of creatures like the honey bee.

In a merely natural world lacking language, there cannot be any discoverable norms of any kind. Norms are themselves artifactually enabled by the standard powers of propositional thought; they arise in the resolution of the problems of societal life. Plurally, they thus yield an endless array of *sittlich* variants. They tend to be standardized, I should say, along distinctly prudential lines, which must evolve responsively to the perceived history of changing moral, political, economic, and similar foci of attention. But, in a naturalistic world, we cannot claim to find the true *telos* of our artifactual careers. We must fashion our own best guesses of what to count as the governing norms by which we choose to live. The important fact is that human norms tend to endlessly favor many different forms of security and insecurity addressed to dangers real or imagined, largely qualified by inter- and intra-societal transactions. Such concerns are never more than loosely convergent (along prudential lines) rather more reliably than morally, politically, or religiously confirmed. There is no assured telic progress here. Human life tends (in our age) to be Hobbesian – rational in prudential terms, more than in moral terms, say – at any mundane level of reflection. Human demographics suggest that, nevertheless, survival is a sufficient motive for purposive existence.

Here we must reflect in a distinctly different way. The decisive clue is history, once again (more accurately, historicity). Take the advent of the Westphalian Peace, for instance, forged in 1648, that marks the indisputable transition to the “politics of peoples” – incipient republicanism in effect, incipiently secularized: at once aggregative and collective, whether by monarchy or parliament, whether Protestant or Catholic or the like (as illiterate, globally, as myself). That then leads inexorably to the French Revolution and what may be called the “imaginary” realism of the modern state. We may, in fact, be exiting from *that* entire interval *now*, in the early decades of the twenty-first century, though it is still too early to say. Democracy and liberalism are certainly at mortal risk. I daresay the major political powers of our day – China, Russia, the United States – are all moving toward a populist totalitarianism, by different routes, whether fascist or socialist or both at once. (I see no paradox in that.) In Hobbesian terms, ethics or morality is being subordinated or eclipsed by prudence, and prudence is increasingly addressed to the totalized security and adequate powers of the republican state.

The security of a citizenry has gone cyber and is increasingly uncertain and invisible, dependent on autocracy. Both wealth and technology are now weaponized and committed to globally potent military inventions that will certainly ensure the destructibility of the earth. The issue is not so much the accuracy of such a conjecture: that story is already standard. The point is rather that compelling moral norms are thoroughly historied, open to drastic change, and subject to the priorities of populist states of an increasingly totalitarian cast. A self-fulfilling prophecy, I am afraid. But if that is true, then the attractive doctrines of Hadot and Domański, which are hardly wedded to historicity or the artifactuality of human norms may yet prove to be hostage to a grimmer world than they themselves envision. The nobility of Moses and Hammurabi tend to be read as local and naïve. I say moralities are historied responses increasingly politicized, increasingly determined by the prudential needs of “imaginary” states. Marx and the eclipse of Marx’s class-based ethics – certainly not the fall of capitalism – are still our most familiar clues. Kant’s rationalist cosmopolitanism is simply “stipulated” – entirely unearned – in spite of its being well worth debating.

There is the key to pragmatism’s metaphilosophical self-correction: the recovery of the meaning of the invention of language within the terms of the correction of Darwinian evolutionism. I refer here to the unavoidability of historicity within the terms of the “existential” formation of the human self itself. This is the self’s “functional” but hardly “substantial” identity in naturalistic or physical terms. Note, too, the absence of any teleological or naturalistic ground for assigning any normatively qualified “nature” to what we mean in speaking of human nature; consider the insuperable informality of speaking of “natures” altogether (as in the

evolutionary context), or of essences, universals, generals, dominant characteristics, or the like. Here, I must remind you, Kant himself is at his weakest in explicating what he understands (in the first *Critique*) as the “*Ich*” of his “*Ich denke*” (which is itself intended as, and is indeed), an important correction (by subtractive means) of Descartes’s impossible *Cogito*. If you concede the force of such a reflection, you can hardly fail to see that Kant cannot escape the metaphilosophical force of the pragmatist’s corrected conjecture regarding the evolutionary advent of the human self or person.

Kant is not a “modern” modern. He is, rather, the last great voice of the modernity of the Enlightenment, which has no compelling need, among the ancients, for any existential history. Hegel, of course, is the frontiersman of the “modern” modern. His achievement cannot be reckoned in Kantian terms. He belongs unmistakably to the decisive breakthrough of the early nineteenth century. He is a figure closer to Marx than to Descartes. You have only to ponder the following remarkable confession on Kant’s part, regarding the unfathomed mystery of the self, on which Kant risks – fatally risks – the entire first *Critique*:

one cannot [Kant concedes] even say that [the *Ich*] is a concept, but [rather] a mere consciousness that accompanies every concept ... [N]othing further is represented than a transcendental subject of thoughts = \bar{x} , which is recognized only through the thoughts that are its predicates, and about which, in abstraction, we can never have even the least concept; ... we cannot separate ourselves from this inconvenience, because the consciousness [conceded] in itself is not even a representation distinguishing a particular object, but rather a form of representation in general, insofar as it is to be called a cognition; for of it alone can I say that through it I think anything.⁹

This remarkable passage is more an expression of transcendental failure than of rationalist success. It is the master “thought” that haunts the entire first *Critique*. The apparition is the apparent (alleged) discernment of the analytic self-identity of the “*Ich*” of the “*Ich denke*” that is said to accompany (must accompany) every genuine cognitive episode (apperception) that it transcendently vouchsafes. Kant disallows the reflexive certitude of Descartes’s *Cogito*, but, in effect, “restores” it by insisting on its benefit in what it allows to be licitly affirmed. However, if you concede the pertinence of my criticism of Darwin’s failure to address the “final” phase of mankind’s evolution – the dateable emergence of the self or person as the evolving upshot of the invention and mastery of true language, by which the prelinguistic primate (infant *Homo sapiens*) spontaneously transforms itself into a “self” – you see instantly the vacuity of Kant’s proposal. It is the integral, non-apperceptive intelligence of prelinguistic animals and of the human infant that threatens Kant’s purely verbal treatment of the apperceptive issue. In learning language, we learn to nominalize the artifactually functional (but not bodily discernible) unity and holism of the self – I should say, “mongrelly,” not demonstrably ascribed. So we can never be entirely certain of what we regard as objective knowledge. Knowledge, therefore, is an existentially dependent posit, subject to a benign skepticism, that we learn to trust instrumentally – according to our lights. We deem it to be pragmatically sufficient for all our needs and interests, contingently, not apodictically. (Here, Kant approaches pragmatism.)

It is certainly not too much to say that Kant “has” no theory of history because he has no theory of the self and, in lacking a theory of the self, he cannot advance the thesis of the first *Critique* coherently. He is a transcendentalist, to be sure, even about history – hence, also, a modern ancient. But, in failing there, he is already a closet pragmatist, an existential historian before his time. Read this way, transcendentalism is itself an overly

9) Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), B404/A346, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511804649>.

ambitious empiricism that has yet to eclipse Hume. Indeed, Peirce says that Kant is only a “confused pragmatist.”¹⁰ May I say, then, with the greatest respect, that Hadot and Domański believe that to treat philosophy as “a way of life” is to include us safely within the confines of the modern ancients. I honestly take that to be a decidedly unwise assumption. Think rather of the alert Westphalians. They were already centuries ahead of Kant in the practicist mode and arguably, then, ahead of Hadot and Domański as well. They grasped the reasons of history instantly. In fact, I venture the prophecy of a considerable Muslim conversion of a substantial part of Europe – another modern ancient episode – before the “modern” modern forms of totalitarianism are finally spent. At any rate, history is likely to require a stubborn, simmering war if it is to find a viable peace.

This already signals what I mean by treating normativity existentially in both historied and linguistically artifactualized terms. We cannot fail to follow the thread of our careers. Our choices lie before us, no doubt, but they belong in good part to our *lebensformlich* world – not deterministically of course, but (may I say) Intentionally (in terms of collective survival), in ways that draw persuasively on the coherent thrust of our accumulating (contingent) history.

My purpose is not prophecy, however, although prophecy among political states has become strangely legible. Present-day states and their politicking could be described as territorially anxious, globally uniform, profoundly acquisitive, treacherous, suspicious of allies and enemies alike, militaristic, insecure, incapable of trust, impossible to trust, devious, deceitful, indifferent and insensitive to human pain and suffering on almost any scale, corrupt, easily corrupted, practiced in the convenient uses of corruption, and very nearly shameless. A thoroughly nasty prospect.

These are, however, the increasingly salient parameters of practical reason in our time, our operative norms, fashioned for political survival, embedded in our prevailing habitudes. The most successful states favor every gain in power guarded within their actual control. Alternative objectives tend to disappear. Nevertheless, the “state,” collectively construed, is a sort of real “imaginary” – much like the aggregation of human selves said to form and sustain it collectively. Its norms and rules, notoriously labile and corruptible in liberal democracies, seem to have become mortally, invisibly penetrable by enemy states. They seem to have outlived the forms of fidelity trusted in a simpler age.

The turn to totalitarian populism may be another form of Westphalianism. The point is, we need to understand the phenomenon as perfectly mundane and “valid,” however disconcerting. I take this to define the Hobbesian (prudential) form of the political imaginary that suits us best. Philosophy as a “way of life” needs to collect and understand all the normative possibilities of aggregative and collective life. That is as close to the human mission of the “modern” modern world as we seem capable of recovering. It is not the *summum bonum*, but it encompasses the range of normative flexibility consistent with the astonishing will to live on in an increasingly hostile and inhospitable world. I find Nietzsche, for instance, to be finally bizarre – no more than marginally relevant, intriguing, brilliant, but decidedly mad. Nevertheless, the Russians, the Americans, the Chinese, the Iranians, the Saudis, the North Koreans, the French and British and the rest are not irrelevant at all, even if they are also turning decidedly mad. We cannot rightly judge the normative validities of mere individual lives, only the validities of genuinely viable societies, and these are always the same. They favor the prudential viabilities of whatever form of life we happen to invent; hence, then, also, the viability of aggregated individuals arises against such a backdrop. The sun, we realize, will burn out in the same inexorable way, already understood, whatever (as it seems) we happen to favor. It does not (yet) affect our calculations. I am inclined to think that the endless possibilities of human technology are even more alluring than the fictions of divinity. Has Domański thought of that? Did Hadot? Did Nietzsche?

10) Peirce, *Collected Papers*, 5.525.

Evolutionism cannot now fail to be artifactual hence, potentially infinite, essentially experimental. There is no principled difference between light and dark among “modern” Manichees. The *summum bonum* is already an imaginary, which is to say, “as real as real can be.” We seem unable to deceive our *conatus*. The world, the pragmatist may plausibly say, is a flux that, closely studied, always appears to yield a preferred system, that is, one system among a potentially endless variety of feasible systems. Theoretical and practical systems are similar in this regard. There is no end to such provisional accounts, since we cannot be sure which conceptual schemes are no more than “mongrel” liberties and which are not. There is the upshot of Kant’s confession, cited a moment ago.

Kant is bold enough to claim that objective knowledge of the natural world must ultimately rest on the passive reception of unknowable sensory effects. He cannot say, though, how such effects are to be rightly ordered by the mind’s capacity to make them cognitively legible and, in some appropriate sense, even objectively valid. His own admiration of Newton’s physics leads him to an impossible posit of certainty (his transcendentalism), but he cannot escape the *petitio* of apodictic (or even mundane) knowledge. He cannot, for instance, validate his own conception of rational apperception – without which he cannot begin to advance the argument of the first *Critique*. There is the point of Kant’s implicit confession. He may as well be guessing at the divine norms of practical life. There is no principled difference between the ultimate grounding of the norms of objective science and the norms of right conduct. Both are dependent on guesswork that cannot be independently confirmed. We live in accord with what we find to be instrumentally tolerable. There is the upshot of Peirce’s abductive reading of truth-claims and pragmatism’s insuperable metaphilosophy. There is the division between modern ancients and “modern” moderns.

If the distinction is allowed, we cannot be sure where to draw the line between “mongrel” and transcendental objectivity. Think of this as another Manichee illusion. The pragmatist simply regards the issue of objectivity as existentially dependent on the seeming conditions of human survival, which are largely abductive guesswork. The viability of the human species does not seem to require any assured singular epistemology. Validity is an oblique but holist consequence of provisionally instrumental guesses involving our conjectured theories of what seems true, and scientific truth is a posit internal to inquiry itself, generously treated in some measure as externally valid. But the difference must be “mongrel” – that is, convenient as a *façon de parler*, in the face of sufficiently clever guesses. Those who must demur tend to find pragmatism awkward or demeaning. But they cannot rescue apodicticity or necessary truths regarding the natural world (they cannot reclaim apperception).

The provisionality of what we come to believe the world to be like remains much the same on either count, except for arbitrary (absolutist) impulses. I see no gain there. “Modern” modern rationalists (figures like Frege and early Carnap) had supposed that empirical science rested, methodologically, on the model of necessary foundations suited to the mathematical sciences. But they were mistaken. Deprived of that presumption, there is no compelling difference between pragmatist (or instrumental) and empirical conjecture. The rationalists are no more than impossible hybrids – possibly Cartesian or Kantian pragmatists (in Peirce’s sense), bewildered by the *Cogito*. But to say so commits us to the in-game I am attempting to escape. There are better arguments that may be drawn from the sources of correcting classic pragmatism, which, as Peirce inadvertently demonstrates, is similarly tempted by Cartesian and Kantian confidence. I think we may rely, rather, on what appear to be neglected facts. Take Darwin’s howler, for one, which should have arrested the *Cogito* before it spawned its more recent mischief. Kant would have had an answer to his theory of apperception which, after all, is little more than the revival of the *Cogito*.

You have only to read the opening lines of the first *Critique* in accord with a post-Darwinian reading of the opening lines of Wittgenstein’s *Investigations*, which reflect on the human infant’s ability to master true language. I believe the correction of pragmatism and Kantian transcendentalism may be reasonably drawn

from such sources. Admittedly, this is already very late in the game, though they inexorably feature the irresistible difference between modern “ancients” and “modern” moderns. The decisive clue could not be more succinctly formulated: “A child [Wittgenstein says] uses ... primitive forms [of language, such as Augustine suggests] when it [first] learns to talk. Here the teaching of language is not explanation [*Erklären*], but training [*Abrichten*].”¹¹ That is to say, the child is not yet a self when it begins to respond to language-training. It becomes – transforms itself into – a self, even as it succeeds. Wittgenstein also speaks (in the same context) of the possibility of “a language more primitive than ours,”¹² which is to say (as I read Darwin, Kant, Wittgenstein, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, and Husserl) that we must concede the continually evolving reinvention of language and, as a consequence, the reinvention of the self or person beyond any present conceptual horizon. Think of Husserl’s letter to Lévy-Bruhl, responding to Lévy-Bruhl’s report of a primitive people that lacked a conception of history. Husserl, of course, instantly tried to secure the would-be transcendental import of the discovery, but it defeats his entire undertaking in the *Crisis* volume. You cannot fail to grasp the bearing of Darwin’s limitation on the *petitio* of Kant’s transcendental account of apperception.

The infant’s linguistic *Bildung* begins by mimicking the sounds of language. It cannot yet grasp the meanings of words. That apparently dawns in time. The effects, I say, are ontologically and functionally transformative: astonishing, in fact. The infant begins to acquire entirely new forms of reflective intelligence: for instance, what can only be called the awareness or consciousness of the thoughts and further content of the mind – as well as the power to report such interior thinking and experience. “Consciousness of the content of the mind” is a phrasing I regard as a supremely “mongrel” formula. We hardly understand, and we need not know, the true nature of what we call the “mind.” We understand the seeming reference to be reflexive, at least by analogy with our treatment of the living body. The “mind” is known as a set of distinctive ways of functioning of the body itself. It *is* the body functioning in these new ways as a consequence (apparently) of having mastered language. Cartesian dualism is no more than a mongrel liberty that Descartes himself realized was incompatible with the unity and integrity of the living creature. Nevertheless, there is no discernible bodily locus for the mind – or self. It may be thought of as an “organ” that has no substantial boundaries like those of the liver. It is entirely functional – loosely, wherever, nominally, the body is said to be. It is the “seat” of speech and thought and purposive action, as distinguished from mere physical sound or movement as such. “Mongrelly,” the self incorporates all that belongs to the living creature that reidentifies the physical functioning of the body as the Intentional (enlanguaged, historicized, normatively qualified) workings of the limbs and other distinct parts of the body that we redescribe in terms of intelligent action and culturally purposive behavior. The “mongrel” mind (or self or person) – the enlanguaged animal – need not be fictive. Indeed, it is not a fiction. It manifests itself (we suppose) by activating a neural field, but we do not know how it works. The self or person is a very clever (hybrid) animal among the cleverest of animals, but it apparently learns more than even the cleverest of animals can learn (unless we have misread the bonobo’s [Kanzi’s] celebrated achievement). To be candid, I rather favor Kanzi at the edge of selfhood.¹³

But, of course, that leaves the analysis of the self or person (Kant’s *Ich*) still missing. I find two further factual premises sufficient for our needs. One notes that clever animals, capable of learning new, useful relations and connections in nature, perceptually or experientially, but lacking the reflexive and executive powers of full-fledged selves (human infants, for instance, as well as crows), must, to some extent, be programmed for

11) Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1953), \$5.

12) *Ibid.*, \$2.

13) See Sue Savage-Rumbaugh et al., “Language Comprehension in Ape and Child,” *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development* 58, no. 3–4 (1993), i–221, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1166068>.

relatively basic realist functions (as with eye-limb coordination), if they are to survive at all. But I cannot see how that would be true of the most advanced enlanguaged animals, viewed evolutionarily, if it were not also true of infant human primates. Yet both lack the standing of persons. I read this as disconfirming, hands down, the usual versions of the familiar claim that “thinking” is inherently, must be, enlanguaged – as with John McDowell and Kant (finally), though Kant is actually more concessive than McDowell.¹⁴ In fact, I am persuaded that infants acquire language quite rapidly, in part because a large run of perceptual and experiential concepts effectively overlap the range of discursive concepts. My second premise holds that, much as with perceptual and prelinguistic functional coherence and unity, linguistic coherence is functionally contrived, though there is no known determinably constant physical site of the self or person, which Hume should have guessed.

Cast in other terms, the self or person is the posit of a “mongrel” liberty that we cannot do without but cannot – indeed, need not – confirm ontologically. That, quintessentially, is a pragmatist gain. (For instance, it makes Descartes’s reading the *Cogito* an ontologically undefended mongrel posit.) These two premises and the artifactuality of language (hence, then, the artifactuality of historicity and normativity – and of the self itself) form the nerve of my correction of classic pragmatism and the defeat of classic rationalism and transcendentalism.

What remains, benignly, is the question of the best ways, plurally, to reread the informalities of Peirce’s maxim. But pragmatists like Nancy Cartwright and the biologist David Hull have already demonstrated the insuperable informality and approximation of methodological and conceptual distinctions in the natural (as opposed to the mathematical) sciences.¹⁵ To admit all this is to admit the metaphilosophical force of a corrected pragmatism. There, in the briefest terms, is the point of my response to Hadot and Domański. If we are obliged, post-Darwin, to treat the self or person as an artifactual construction reflexively assigned as the site of what we call thinking and agency, then apodicticity is itself a mongrel liberty – and epistemology and ontology (“first philosophy”), existentially dependent disciplines. You cannot fail to see how close Kant comes to a formulation of this kind.

Now, then, may I say that I assign Hadot and Domański, provisionally, to the modern ancients, and the pragmatists to the “modern” moderns. From our present vantage, the innovations of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are almost disjoined from the ancient world. They are not actually disjunctive, of course, but they recover fundamental conceptual possibilities that very nearly fail to make an appearance before the end of the eighteenth century. They are also so compelling that we cannot hide the fact that there must be more of the same to come. At the very least, metaphilosophy, and the philosophies it can correct, must be provisional, approximative, and subject to a benign form of skepticism existentially continuous with the historicity of cognition itself, under the condition of the ineliminable *petitio* of objective knowledge. That is one formulation of what we have been discussing. I am entirely prepared to admit that the narrative I prefer could easily accommodate any “modern” modern extension of Hadot’s speculation. But I cannot yield on the artifactuality, the sheer dateability of the historied and the normative. Effectively, that means that we begin with a *sittlich* world, which is to say, a social world always already committed to its own ideology – hence, then, very possibly, its own *summum bonum* as well. There is nothing so parochial or distressing as the enmities of what have come to be known as the Abrahamic religions grounded in the Bible and the Koran. But they are perfectly natural

14) John McDowell, “The Woodbridge Lectures,” in *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel and Sellars* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), Pt. I, 3–65.

15) See Nancy Cartwright, *The Dappled World: A Study of the Boundaries of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139167093>. David L. Hull, “On Human Nature,” PSA: Proceedings of the Biennial Meeting of the Philosophy of Science Association, Vol. 1986, Volume Two (1986), 3–13, <https://doi.org/10.1086/psaprocbienmeetp.1986.2.192787>.

in their own niches. I do not disallow the debate about higher norms, but they are obviously projected from their own *sittlich* bases.

There is no autonomous source for the *summum bonum*. Political prudence dominates our moralities, and moral norms are *sittlich* at the very least. The ancient Greco-Roman schools that Hadot fondly tenders as particularly instructive exemplars themselves answer to the prudential interests of their own age. But how could they tolerate the hard-bitten populist dictatorships that are now budding around our world? I must concede that at least a part of the new totalitarian zeal may be irresistible in our own day, given the threats of cyber insecurity, global warming and the mounting dearth of potable water, irreplaceable resources, the creep of starvation, the massing of hopeless immigrants, immense differences in wealth and power, racism, and the perfection of instruments of utter annihilation. Seen in these terms, totalitarian provisions begin to seem almost reasonable. Our options appear to us as instrumental – normative, to be sure, but judged to be compatible or incompatible with the salient and effective technologies of our age. These may exhaust themselves in time. They may lead, therefore, to more congenial choices. But the present vision is distinctly bleak and the dominant powers of the day increasingly implacable. I see no source of relief here beyond a better understanding of ourselves. But that has always been our saving mystery.

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