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## **Does the Pragmatist Reflection on Ethical AND Aesthetic Values Need the Kantian Axiology for its (Pragmatist) Future Developments?**

### **Abstract**

The philosophy of values, or axiology, or value inquiry does not belong to the main fields of philosophical interest for American pragmatists. Yet the terms 'value,' 'e/valuation,' 'worth/y' and similar are important for many of them -- for N. Rescher, who equals the term *Homo sapiens* with *Homo valuens*, for H. McDonald (*Radical Axiology: A First Philosophy of Values*), and, to some extent, to J. Dewey: "all deliberate, all planned human conduct, personal and collective, seems to be influenced, if not controlled, by estimates of value or worth of ends to be attained" (*Theory of Valuation*, 2). The majority of pragmatists, however, use such terms frequently without an effort to construct a theory of value, as if to feel that these have much practical application beyond a theory: this is why I prefer taking about 'reflection on values' in the context of American pragmatism. I take a look at the term 'value' as a key-word by means of which we could see the pragmatists' efforts to meet the challenges that appear on the horizon.

What challenges? Among a great number of challenges ahead, the contemporary pragmatists need to respond to the growing role of the aesthetic and the visual culture in social life nowadays: be it images that are omnipresent in the public life (something that W. J. T. Mitchell calls "Pictorial Turn") or the aestheticization of the mass media discourses, and this includes something that R. Shusterman calls "the ethical art of fashioning one's life." I am thinking at this place especially (not exclusively though) about the pragmatist reflection on ethical values and aesthetic values at the same time as, for example, in the case of the visual *attractiveness*, narrative *clearness*, and *inspirational* contents for a moral or ethical message (if we agree that *attractiveness*, *clarity*, and *inspiration* belong predominantly to the aesthetic domain). In other words: talking about wisdom and the good life involves *evaluation* as does talking about the discourses by means of which this ethical message is to be *persuasively* transmitted to particular audiences; one of the integral parts of this discourse is its aesthetic component: imaginative, visual, narrative, impressionistic, metaphoric, and rhetoric.

I have been looking for the pragmatists that suggest affirmative answer to the question whether it would be profitable for them to get some stimulation from I. Kant and, especially, from the Kantian axiology (among other movements and schools). For example, we can find the representatives of the idea that ethical and aesthetic values are to be seen as not separated (to be true, this idea was mostly developed in phenomenology later on). *Kant's Critique of the Power of Judgment* reads: "we add to a concept a representation of the imagination that belongs to its presentation, but which by itself stimulates so much thinking that it can never be grasped in a determinate concept, hence which aesthetically enlarges the concept itself in an unbounded way...in this case the imagination is creative, and sets the faculty of intellectual ideas (reason) into motion." (Kant, *Judgment* #49). H. Putnam interprets this fragment in this way: "it is part of the *value* of art that it provokes interminable discussion." (Putnam, *Library of Living Philosophers*, 679). It is exactly about 'interminable discussion' that is generated by the more and more 'efficient' and persuasive discourses (having both ethical and aesthetic dimensions) that I want to talk here. The discussion, however, can embrace many other inspirations. For example, H. R. Lotze, a post-Kantian, one of the founding fathers of axiology and one that was well known to the pragmatists (Royce, Wm James) wrote: "Now, if these attempts of our mind to explain the world of values by the world of forms correspond to the conceptive energy of imagination seeking to create the actual anew from its own beauty as

from a working power, then *Practical Reason* stands on a line with artistic production of beauty." (*Microcosmus* 246)

The other way that the Kantian tradition can, if not has already been helpful with a better formulation of the pragmatist reflection on values is giving service to a more definite setting. Thanks to it, the pragmatists more clearly reject some views and fortify some others. For example, one of the representatives of the Baden neo-Kantian school, H. Münsterberg, in his book written in English and dedicated to his pragmatist colleague and friend J. Royce, *The Eternal Values* (1909), presented tersely the dilemma that has faced a major part of the Kantian axiology. Namely, "we have a world with over-personal unconditional values or we have no real world at all, but merely a worthless chance dream, in which to strive for truth and morality can have no meaning whatsoever" (EV 46). Such an articulation of the division into unconditional values on the one hand, and, on the other, the contextualized inter-subjective and instrumental values seems solid for the pragmatist reflection on values (and not only on values). For instance, Rorty's "Solidarity or Objectivity," written one hundred years later, and not dedicated directly to values, is somewhat applicable to the reflection on values by having a somehow similar recognition of the dilemma, as if responding to the Kantian divide. He juxtaposed those who "describe themselves as standing in immediate relation to a non-human reality" vs. those "telling the story of their contribution to a community" (ORT 21).

Next, Kantian axiology can set a challenge as to the question whether *value* should be related or linked with *norm*. It was W. Windelband who understood values as objective norms that should be realized, and the Baden School of Neo-Kantianism followed him (as much of phenomenology later on: M. Scheler, N. Hartmann, R. Ingarden). With or without any reference to his ideas, at least some pragmatists wrestled with the problem whether a valuable state of affairs should be seen as a standard or a norm that ought to be materialized if/when possible. For example, Margolis says: "**norms** are exemplary values in a hierarchy of values, or principles or rules or regulative procedures for "grading" and "ranking" things—preeminently, choices, judgments, commitments, actions—pertinent to realizing such values. (Margolis "Values, Norms, and Agents," 265). It is a major challenge, it seems to me, to think of the value-norm relationship in the context of the growing role of the 'pictorial news' and 'visualized messages' in the public life (the media in the first instance).

Finally; can these two philosophical traditions be fruitfully discussed given their different solutions to the problem 'what should be done?' Whereas some of the Kantians referred to the non-human realm of values - "We are not forced to act in accordance with a value, but we ought to act according to it. The value is thus an obligation" (EV 51), and some others referred more directly to Kant's deontology - the pragmatists proposed, among other things, meliorism as a way of the improvement of the quality of social life, of the cooperation of the members of the public and of the self-creation of these members. Here, and this is the third answer to the question by *via negativa*, the Kantians can be helpful and inspirational in a negative way, as a sort of warning for the pragmatists not to ignore the social dimension of talking about values, norms, and obligations or, to use R. Shusterman's words "the social and class-hierarchical foundation of aesthetic judgment." ("Of the Scandal of Taste," 211) The pragmatists should be aware of the different social, political, cultural, and economic statuses of the audiences so that they be prepared to contextualize their message and be able to persuasively talk to many audiences, not just the academic one, as is usually the case.

