Between Pragmatism and Rationalism (corrected copy)

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I read Richard Rorty's Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature as an elaborate and rather impressive ruse—either that or as a crazy failure. I mean, I'm paraphrasing what Rorty says of his own undertaking:

> The aim of the book [he says] is to undermine the reader's confidence in "the mind" as something about which one should have a "philosophical" view, in "knowledge" as something about which there ought to be a "theory" and which has "foundations," and in "philosophy" as it has been conceived since Kant. Thus the reader in search of a new theory on any of the subjects discussed will be disappointed.[1]

Just read—if you can—what Rorty says about "abandoning" philosophy altogether (epistemology and the rest of the canon) as not exceeding the quieter advice to abandon "the notion of philosophy as a tribunal of pure reason," of "the search for knowledge . . . within a

1 Richard Rorty, Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 7.

framework which can be isolated prior to the conclusion of inquiry—a set of presuppositions discoverable a priori—which links contemporary philosophy to the Descartes-Locke-Kant tradition."[2] Rorty could hardly be more explicit.

Construe this, if you can, as Rorty's barely suppressed advice: Continue as before (examining epistemology and metaphysics) but now without Kant's transcendental complication. You will have reversed Kant's Copernican revolution of course, possibly in a novel way—remotely, say, by way of a Darwinian revolution, discerning a heterodox variant of the unity of the sensuous and the conceptual, initially or at least within the resources of an unlanguaged animal world that humans transform by means of the invention of true language. Transcendentalism will then be seen to be, at best, no more than a redundant reminder of familiar facts carved at different joints of the encountered world: a conjecture drawn from, and continuous with, ordinary experience, mistakenly projected as a priori resources—heuristically useful of course, piecemeal, even casually collected, but not demonstrably the work of an autonomous or competent cognitive faculty of reason, however applied to the world.

I have a cognate suggestion to make, as to how, otherwise, we might proceed: a suggestion that seems capable of supporting a variety of promising options, that ultimately opposes Kant's Critical assumptions and (in effect) Rorty's postmodern joke as well—in a single stroke. Suddenly we're back in the company of Rorty's "three most important philosophers of [the twentieth] century—Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Dewey"—who, on Rorty's reading, count as the principal "pragmatists" of his own conviction and our best philosophical prospects.[3] I'm suggesting that Rorty is instructing us to drop the transcendental altogether and turn to the leaner,

2 Rorty, Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature, pp. 4, 8-9.

3 Rorty, Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature, p. 5.

more congenial possibilities of his pragmatist trio. What remains of course is what always remains unresolved in these matters: what, precisely, to make of the a priori in cognitive terms. That much secures no more than Peter Strawson's well-known dissatisfaction with Kant, again without a sustained recuperative argument.

I find a quick, largely unperceived advantage in Rorty's excessive theatre: we begin again, then, as we should, pre-Kant, with the paradoxes of First Philosophy, with the naïve search for the "foundations" of epistemology and ontology, with the inchoate inspiration that leads directly to the extreme temptation of Kant's transcendental "method," to the fictive salvation of a mere tautology that "deduces" an entirely novel, autonomous, de jure science of second-order, synthetic, strictly necessary and universal possibilities fitted to our de facto, historied, all-too-familiar uncertainties and poor guesses about our own nature and would-be knowledge of the world. The irony is that both Kant and the classic pragmatists (chiefly Peirce and Dewey) draw our attention—in very different (I should say, distinctly opposed) ways—to the need to achieve a measure of conceptual systematicity by way of legitimating our confidence in cognition itself (analytically inseparable from inquiries regarding existence and reality—especially the provenance of cognizing selves or persons).

Kant, I say, fails us here, since his initial "Ich denke" is no more than a slack obiter dictum carpentered to secure (without labor) the nearly empty admission of transcendental reasoning. The classic pragmatists refuse Kant's maneuver: they have a somewhat inchoate alternative intuition about how to address the paradoxes of epistemology, without falling back to Cartesian or Kantian indubitability, but they do not (in my opinion) actually articulate an entirely satisfactory proposal. I mean to provide a sketch here of a more robust pragmatist rejoinder shorn of transcendental pretensions, true to the anti-foundational and anti-privileging commitment of

pragmatism, hospitable as well to fresh options made possible by Darwinian and post-Darwinian paleoanthropology and evolutionary theory at least. I mean to define the main lines of a viable answer to Kant, at once recognizably pragmatist in conviction and unconditionally opposed to transcendentalism. I'm not persuaded, I should add, that synthetically necessary transcendental truths (in Kant's sense) rightly admit of degrees of approximation: they can't be more than a desperate plunge.

How could a would-be first premise affirming our possession of a rational power of cognition—capable of yielding apodictically necessary and universal truths, said to vouchsafe the actual possibility of achieving a true, empirically qualified knowledge of the world (a true science, in effect: Newton's physics, say)—be entirely and demonstrably free of any dependence on empirical evidence or grounds (drawn from our experience of the world)? If I understand Kant's prefaces to the first and second editions of the first Critique correctly, then his argument is designed to show that we are justified in supposing that

> mathematics and physics are [indeed] the two theoretical cognitions of reason that are supposed to determine their objects a priori, the former entirely purely, the latter at least in part purely but also following the standards of sources of cognition other than reason.[4]

In our day, Kant's question takes a more accusatory form: How is it possible to confirm or legitimate Kant's premise, if Kant himself can be shown to be profoundly mistaken (innocently enough) about both mathematics and physics? Read that way, most would-be champions of the Critical method tend to abandon Kant's original posit and ask themselves what might be convincingly offered in its place that could be shown to yield a reasonable "transcendental

4 Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Bx.

method" but not a "transcendental a priori" principle of the sort originally claimed. My own response is that Kant without the transcendental a priori is not the true Kant. Otherwise, that the usual (logically weaker) substitutions need only show failure to "approximate" Kant's original proposal satisfactorily: the a posteriori can never simply approach the transcendental a priori. Furthermore, no pragmatist committed to Peirce's "pragmatic maxim" (or any maxim close to it) can be expected to accept the approximative maneuver.

The parallel between Kant and the pragmatists is profoundly misleading: it may be no more than the characteristic distortion of "modern" modern philosophy when viewed from the Kantian vantage; alternatively: it may be due to our failure to discern the asymmetric contest between Kant's Critical vision and that of classic pragmatism. Peirce, who was more than an ordinarily ardent Kantian in his youth—roughly, from about sixteen to his early twenties—was committed to the "primal truths" of a Kantian-like "metaphysics," convinced as well, it seems, that the ultimate premises behind the sciences (the conjecture behind Kant's system as well) might be treated as true a priori, though only on faith, never as a rational demonstration. This already appears in a fragment from 1859, when Peirce was twenty.[5] In an uncanny way, it presages the transformative continuum of Peirce's fallibilism based on (what I call) his "infinitist Hope" and the doctrine of abduction (abductive guesses or abductive Hope) that begins to discover its own executive force toward the last decades of Peirce's life, prompted (I'm inclined to believe) by Peirce's reading of Josiah Royce's criticism of his infinitist epistemology)—too late to have permitted Peirce to reformulate his entire eclipse of the Kantian transcendental.

The passage in question—marvelously prophetic (though unreliable)—runs as follows:

5 The telltale passage (in Peirce's earlier papers) is briefly analyzed in Murray G. Murphey, The Development of Peirce's Philosophy (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993 [1961]), p. 21, from an unpublished piece titled "A Treatise of the Major Premisses of Natural Science" (1859). Murphey mentions and cites another piece (from 1859), titled "That There Is No Need of Transcendentalism" (p. 39).

> Every judgment consists in referring a predicate to a subject. The predicate is thought, and the subject is only thought-of. The elements of the predicate are experiences or representations of experience. The subject [that is, the object] is never experienced but only assumed. Every judgment, therefore, being a reference of the experience or known to the assumed or unknown, is an explanation of a phenomenon by a hypothesis, and is in fact an inference. Hence, there is a major premiss behind every judgment, and the first principles are logically antecedent to all science, which I call a priori.

Murray Murphey, who cites the passage (from an untitled and unpublished paper), explains very plausibly how it was that, although he adhered to Kant's form of reasoning as best he could, the young Peirce acknowledged that the "objects" of his ultimate premises (so-called "primal truths")—which could not be proved syllogistically—were indeed synthetic truths, and so must rely (contrary to Kant) entirely on faith.[6] The argument also yields in the direction of Peirce's doctrine of "infinitist Hope" (fallibilism)—not anything like an infinitist formulation of realism (save Putnam)—which Peirce was, dawningly, only very slowly, set to replace with the leaner, completely un-Kantian notion of "abductive" guesses. Miraculously, however mistakenly, Peirce had already, as a boy, moved to sever the a priori from the transcendental—which is to say, he anticipates something of C.I. Lewis's "pragmatic a priori" and, may I add, something bearing on the implicit defeat of the rationalist program of quasi-mathematical proof that Kant never quite abandons (though Kant withdraws the transcendental mode of argument from the "analytic" treatment of the Prolegomena, all the while assuring us, of course, that transcendental

6 Murphey, The Development of Peirce's Philosophy, Ch. 2; the citation appears at p. 21.

"cognitions from pure reason are actual,"[7] before he restores it in the second edition of the first Critique): there you glimpse the prescience of the young Peirce confronting Kant; the courage of a priori faith refusing to pretend to be an expression of apodictic reason—itself an insistent feature of classic pragmatism.

Dewey's pragmatic inspiration (in the Logic)—which qualifies his incompletely developed doctrine of the "two logics" and the replacement of an indemonstrable "primal" metaphysics by a contingent instrumentalism—is, I venture to say, all but explicitly acknowledged to be Peircean in origin. This, then, begins to lay a proper ground for affirming the ultimate irreconcilability of Kant's and pragmatism's philosophical visions (and the palpable convergence of Peirce and Dewey from different vantages). I read the contest chiefly in terms of an open, deeply informal, never completely explicit, commonsense conception that abandons any (Kantian) presumption of provable (or self-evident) first principles (the result, perhaps, on Kant's part, of confusing or conflating mathematical and transcendental proofs, apodicticity, strictly necessary and universalist truths of any kind, foundationalism, determinate conceptual closure regarding the "possibility" of knowledge—of that undoubtedly brilliant but ultimately hopeless sort of runaway transcendentalism that marks Kant's "Critical Decade." You have only to recall the import of Einstein's posit of four-dimensional spacetime in place of Kant's transcendental treatment of Newton's space and time, Einstein's treatment of simultaneity, and the bearing of gravitation on the characterization of space itself.[8] (How could Newton possibly have been right, a priori?) Kant needed to abandon necessary truths of the Newtonian sort when he abandoned

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7 Immanuel Kant, Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics That Will Be Able to Come Forward as Science, trans. rev. and ed. Gary Hatfield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004 [1997]), §5; the phrasing cited appears at p. 30.

8 See, for instance, Michael Friedman's summary remarks, in his Kant and the Exact Sciences (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 340-341.

dogmatic rationalism; but if he had done so, he would have realized that his own rationalist conjectures could never have been more than piecemeal abductive guesses—"a priori," if you wish. That would explain what remains stubbornly unsuccessful in any reading (pragmatist or not) that regards Kant's Critical method as committed to any "approximative" necessity or exceptionless universality.

"Approximation" to strict necessity (which has been a sort of place holder for pragmatists attracted to "a" Kant viewed as a congenial companion (Sami Pihlström, for instance), risks sacrificing systematicity—threatens to make all of Kant's most important "transcendental" conjectures piecemeal and more or less heuristic. But what Kant clearly insists on is the unique and singular, absolutely totalized systematicity of necessary synthetic a priori truths. I don't deny that Kant contributes to his own defeat thereby—as (as we shall see) in retreating from "constitutive"—effectively, then, from "regulative"—principles, notably in his account of the transcendental "unity of apperception."[9] For the moment, however, let me simply say that any retreat from Kant's strict notion of the transcendental a priori risks, as Pihlström is well aware: (i) the threat of being unable to distinguish in any operative way between transcendental and empirical (or transcendentally necessary and empirically necessary) claims; and (ii) the threat that what is empirically necessary may be converted (vacuously or doubtfully) into what is alleged to be transcendentally necessary, merely by insisting on certain suitably matched verbal formulations. For example, is the following passage from Kant ultimately tautological (or saved by empty fiat or circularity):

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9 The most sustained effort to "naturalize" the transcendental (along approximative lines), that I know of, intended to salvage its distinct philosophical contribution against the fixities of Kant's own treatment in the first Critique (congenially, for pragmatists), appears in Sami Pihlström, Naturalizing the Transcendental: A Pragmatic View (Amherst: Humanity Books, 2003). I shall touch briefly on Pihlström's view a little further on.

> Only pure intuitions or concepts alone are possible a priori, empirical ones only a posteriori.
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> If we will call the receptivity of our mind to receive representations insofar as it is affected in some way by sensibility, then on the contrary the faculty for bringing forth representation itself, or the spontaneity of cognition, is the understanding. It comes along with our nature that intuition can never be other than sensible, i.e., that it contains only the way in which we are affected by objects. The faculty for thinking of objects of sensible intuition, on the contrary, is the understanding. Neither of these properties is to be preferred to the other. Without sensibility no object would be given to us, and without understanding none would be thought. Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind.[10]

Now, I'm persuaded that this explicit formulation on Kant's part is doubtfully supported by pre-Kantian empiricisms and rationalisms, by Kant's commitment to disjunctive faculties that (somehow) contribute to unified cognitions, and by not having considered carefully enough—dialectically—the actual facts about animal and human infants' powers of perceptual cognition (in spite of lacking language). That's to say, I take it to be nearer the truth to concede that intelligent animals and infants (infants learning natural languages, mind you)—when normally perceiving—spontaneously employ their perceptions as (or as entailing) perceptual concepts that can be (and in the infants' case, probably must be) incorporated into the discursive concepts they come to learn, as apt speakers of some natural language. If this is reasonably close to the truth, then most of the argumentative energy of Kant's account of the role of the "Ich denke" is

10 Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, B75/A51.

squandered on misinformation and misleading tautology; for, on any reasonable view of the matter, neither languageless animals nor pre-linguistic infants are (function as) selves or "I's" in any operative way; and yet they are sufficiently intelligent to justify attributions of perceptual judgment, recognition, inference, and factually informed behavior. Insofar as truth-claims are concerned, random examples from Kant's transcendental repertory do seem to be false or empirically falsifiable, wherever Kant insists that they must be necessarily (synthetically) true. Kant cannot rightly distinguish between conceptual totalizing grounded in the terms of some philosophical "ideology" too "natural" to be challenged and the barest glimpse of the departure implied. In principle, we may begin to see, here, the important difference between two sorts of "a priori necessity" fitted to Kant's own undertaking.

The most stunning counter-example to Kant's decision to present his theory of empirical apperception in terms of uniting the separable "sensuous content" and "discursive concepts" (assigned disjunctively conceived faculties) lies with the human infant's remarkable feat: learning a complex language from an initial condition of possessing none. (Kant nowhere addresses the profound significance of the infant's achievement and its inseparability from the formation of the reflective self.) I offer two relatively indefeasible factual findings here: one, that it's all but impossible to suppose that human infants could master a natural language if there were no close functional congruity (to draw on) involving a significant run of "perceptual concepts" that could be caught up quite easily into the "discursive concepts" employed in the thought and speech of the adults who train and educate them; the other, that it's all but impossible to suppose that unlanguaged animals of high intelligence, whose survival clearly depends on a run of learned behavior, could have survived as a species if they had been deprived of the effective mastery of perceptual concepts (animal analogues of judgment and inference).

Both findings signify that animal perception must be already suitably "unified" with respect to the perception of encountered objects and the unity of assorted objects within a common perceptual space. But if that's true, then the unity of apperception must be reconceived: it cannot be counted on to work straightforwardly in Kant's way among human infants—or among languageless animals. The puzzle's inescapable: we learn language by hearing a language, that makes bilingualism possible at the same time it begins the formation of the artifactual self (or person).[11]

There are indeed tantalizing incipiences of reflexivity and self-reference among highly intelligent animals; but the "emergence" of true self-reference (as in sharing the details of a harrowing experience with another person) more than suggests that the "Ich denke" cannot possibly account for apperceptive unity among animals and human infants—and probably not for mature human perception below the level of conscious awareness. But, here, we are questioning the very nerve of Kant's theory at the level of mere matters of fact. I find it all but impossible to believe that an answer could be contrived that seemed closer to being necessarily true sans phrase than merely empirically possible; and I cannot imagine that anyone would be satisfied with Kant's apperceptive formula.

To adopt the general argument of the Darwinian continuum is to disavow any universalized reading of Kant's treatment of the apperceptive unity of perceptual judgment and to challenge the meaning of "pure" thought along facultative lines: functional distinctions need hardly be disjunctive in the facultative sense. Animal perception, I suggest, must function (normally) as the spontaneous "application" of perceptual concepts wherever we find ourselves compelled to acknowledge animal judgment—inasmuch as animals lack discursive concepts. But

11 See my Toward a Metaphysics of Culture (London: Routledge, 2016).

then, what is to prevent us from treating perceptual concepts, among animals and infants, as functioning very much like discursive concepts, relative to their distinctive level of intelligence? There seems to be no compelling ground on which to insist on a faculty of pure reason, except to ensure the validity of an otherwise completely unsecured transcendental premise. And yet, Kant straightforwardly affirms (in the B Introduction to the first Critique: "We are in possession of certain a priori cognitions, and even the common understanding is never without them."[12] I find a vast, potentially circular argument here—which is to say, everywhere in Kant—which cannot be relieved by the pragmatists' "approximative" generosity. The difference between the transcendental and the empirical or commonsensical threatens to dwindle to zero here, especially when we deny Kant the right to any argumentative reliance on the substantive use of this or that cognitive faculty: it's the principal conduit for transcendental circularity. Concepts, of course, are hardly more than heuristically specified capacities meant to match particular forms of intelligent thought and speech and perception and behavior. Consistent with bilingualism, even the universalism of discursive (rational) concepts may be culturally restricted in ways we cannot yet fathom.

II

Wherever pragmatists (who standardly reject synthetic a priori truths) hold that Kant's Critical program may be viably construed in naturalistic terms (which would require rejecting Kant's strict form of transcendental apriority), the very distinction between transcendental and empirical concepts, objects, propositions, truths, and cognitive faculties will be placed at mortal risk, in the way I've sketched; for, it would abandon the very option of transcendentally ascribed

12 Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, B3.

—necessary—synthetic a priori truths. It's my textual conjecture that the ultimate distinction between the empirical and the transcendental, in Kant, is, or entails, the strict necessity of synthetic a priori truths. Hence, any departure from that rule ineluctably entails a departure from, or distortion of, the transcendentally construed "conditions of possibility" of whatever may be rightly submitted to transcendental inspection. Such options are instructively reviewed by Barry Stroud and Peter Strawson, for instance, to whom I shall again turn briefly, later.

Sami Pihlström, who is one of the most thorough and persuasive advocates of a straightforward reconciliation between Kant's transcendentalism and pragmatist realism (possibly, then, also, pragmatist instrumentalism, though that seems to be contested), risks (and admits he risks) the would-be distinction mentioned. I have nothing against new uses of the term "transcendental," except that it's been massively coopted (in a problematic but extraordinarily influential way) in Kant's first Critique. It is also now used in a distinctive way in Husserl's phenomenology, which Pihlström is also drawn to. Here, then, are some telltale lines from Pihlström's account that seem to fail to ensure the contrast needed in Kant's setting:

> We are [n.b.] in a way acquainted [Pihlström advises] with ourselves qua transcendental selves already in our pre-philosophical, everyday life: experience itself requires us to be conscious of ourselves as transcendental subjects. Thus, transcendental phenomenology, just like pragmatism, is "forever poised on the line between the natural and the transcendental standpoints." This is very much like transcendental inquiry naturalized. The roots of what is transcendental are firmly rooted in what is empirical, in what human life naturally is.[13]

13 Pihlström, Naturalizing the Transcendental, pp. 26-27; see, also, p. 173.

Here—and in the service of his larger strategy—Pihlström advances the following (effectively incontestable) claims, according to his lights: (i) that the bare attribution of a reflexive self (or person) answers to the unique experiential duality of the human species (however explained), namely, in the sense (a) that we are at once objects of our own cognition, as well as (b) reflexively aware of that fact and competence, extended to whatever we may judge belongs to the same world that includes us; (ii) that (b) already confirms that the human self is, at once, experientially, constrained in naturalistic ways and transcendentally autonomous; (iii) that, therefore, the distinction between the empirical and the transcendental cannot rightly be cast in terms of any essential difference in logical power between empirical and transcendental judgments or propositions, but only in terms of one or another functional (nominal) division of (cultural) labor; and (iv) that (i)-(iii) are conceptually viable options, where Kant's original disjunctive alternative is not and where Pihlström's option permits us to interpret pragmatism, Husserlian phenomenology, and Wittgenstein's Investigations (at least) as transcendentally engaged in the same way Kant's first Critique usually is (short of apodicticity).

You realize that we've abandoned Kant's Critical program here—relativizing necessity.

I have no principled objection to Pihlström's experimenting with what he christens afresh as "transcendental"—arguments that explicitly eliminate the strict a priori difference between the transcendental and the empirical (or the encultured empirical or the instrumental)—in interpreting Kant's first Critique in the spirit of Pihlström's new provisions; but he (or we) should flag more carefully the fact that he's departing in a serious way from Kant's intended usage. The passage I've just cited couldn't possibly be apt in any literal way, when read in accord with Kant's own strategy and claims. The transcendental and the empirical are always meant, in Kant, to form a mutually exclusionary pair of options. The point at stake is hardly that Pihlström

is careless: he's not careless in the least. The point is, rather, that Kant's original claim is, logically and conceptually, the boldest possible reading of the transcendental a priori that we have: if it could be suitably validated, it would establish the bona fides of an extremely powerful and ubiquitous form of rationalism that many philosophers long for, though none has ever been convincingly established. But short of transcendental necessity, Pihlström's pragmatized formula cannot rightly accommodate the claims of the Transcendental Dialectic in the first Critique or the Opus Postumum.

Pihlström clearly believes that Kant's undertaking is impossible: I heartily agree. But he wishes to salvage that undertaking by way of a "soft" a priori adjustment that erases the disjunction and thereby reconciles, in a single stroke, pragmatism, Husserlian phenomenology, and Wittgenstein's arguments in the Investigations with a laxer (and very different) reading of what Kant calls "conditions of possibility" in the first Critique. The trouble is we should then have lost what is perhaps the single most important challenge in the entire history of philosophical rationalism that can be named. Not only that, but Pihlström's "transcendentalism," meant to replace it, might have almost no strenuous demands of its own, since the lion's share of pertinent "natural" or "empirical" conditions of possibility would be given or implicated in acknowledging the bare phenomena to be examined. You spy this at once in the following lines from the same passage (from Pihlström) already cited:

> we should not [Pihlström advises] oppose the concepts "transcendental" and "naturalistic" to each other. It is the natural phenomena themselves that can acquire a transcendental status when they are appealed to in an argument employed as a part of a more comprehensive transcendental strategy. There is no prior, a priori drawable distinction between the transcendental and the empirical; such distinctions must be

> drawn, reflexively, within some particular context of transcendental investigation of the conditions that make our empirical world possible for us. Yet, within any such context, the transcendental and the empirical should be kept separate.[14]

Even here, the distinction seems almost trivial: causal conditions might seem to be transcendentally eligible if they could be counted among a given phenomenon's empirical "conditions of possibility": the difference between levels of philosophical analysis seems to have disappeared.

I find it reasonable to suppose that what we regard as the functional self or person (with its emergent competences resulting from the mastery of language) begins as a "grammatical fiction" (with the use of the pronoun "I"), which infants learn to "use" correctly (but cannot initially understand), which then evolves (with massively iterated use) as an increasingly palpable, artifactual, experiential (but not sensorily perceived) presence, that maturing experience itself confirms.[15] Kant's notion of the transcendental unity of apperception thereupon seems to be inaccurate, inadequate, and (at best) trivially redundant (when elevated from the experiential to the transcendental). I doubt Kant can succeed if he fails here: the indeterminacies that arise, arise experientially; they signify that we need not, and may not be able to, decide the matter transcendentally.

I cannot see how we can fail to rely on the primacy of maturing and mature experience, if the functional self or person is indeed an emergent artifact (as the paleoanthropological evidence and the rearing of children seem to confirm). I don't deny that an enlanguaged self can conceive

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14 Pihlström, Naturalizing the Transcendental, p. 27. In the Introduction and Chs. 1-2, Pihlström has gone to considerable labor in bolstering his generous thesis; but I'm obliged to say its gain seems (to me) to be largely verbal.

15 See Toward a Metaphysics of Culture, Chs. 1-2.

of itself as an experiential object (and even as present in—as the singular agentive site of—all its thoughts and perceptions; after all, the different possibilities of apperceptive unity are already conceptually available in experience, though some variants may be more reasonable than others. But against the drift of McDowell's Woodbridge Lectures, I see no transcendental reason that makes it necessary (or "approximatively" necessary) that the self be consciously aware of its presence among all its perceptions (or appearances) or that, over a lifetime, its assured singularity must be unconditionally required.

In fact, I doubt that it is, invariably, consciously present among all its perceptions and appearances. On the contrary, if the key to the self is functional rather than substantival, then there probably cannot be a compelling reason to insist on the singularity claim—number does not seem to be an executive factor here. If apparent lapses of memory or the occurrence of perceptions that we are (at least initially) unaware of bear on the issue, then Kant's theory of apperceptive unity must be mistaken, on empirical grounds—a fortiori, on transcendental grounds. These matters appear to be quite insistent for Kant, since they reappear in the Opus postumum—in the section Eckart Förster identifies as the Selbstsetzungslehre. But I see no transcendental breakthrough here. Here, too, Kant gratuitously provides a telltale specimen of a transcendental (that is, an ampliative rather than an analytic) proposition:

> Now synthetic a priori judgments do exist [Kant says], for example, those of mathematics: e.g. space contains three dimensions.[16]

A notably problematic case! Further, with regard to Kant's "transcendental unity of apperception," let me add that I'm quite prepared to argue that the unity of the "transcendental

16 See Immanuel Kant, Opus postumum, ed. Eckart Förster, trans. Eckart Förster and Michael Rosen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), particularly pp. 171-172, 188-189. The line cited appears at p. 172.

Ich" cannot be more than presumptive (episodically considered). It can't be shown to be strictly necessary (or necessary in any strictly singularist sense). It's not always needed in accommodating the acknowledged facts of perceptual experience, the retrieval of memory, lapses of attention and awareness, the actual machinery of the mental, even the provenance of the Ich itself (in evolutionary terms) and the seeming adequacy of overlapping, provisionally plural, sequential, episodically holist manifestations of self-consciousness.

Kant's own account of the Ich is noticeably thin—unusually abstract and decidedly spare. In fact, Kant provides no compelling ground for insisting that his table of basic categories is (must be) necessary, universal, changeless, and complete. Certainly, empirical concepts (notably, in the physical sciences) are subject to noticeably daring shifts of theory that cannot fail to challenge the very idea of transcendental validity and closure. It's difficult to see what would be lost regarding the rigor of the sciences, if we abandoned Kant's line of reasoning regarding apperceptive unity; or, regarding the dependence of the sciences on the ability of ordinary discourse and perception to bear the weight of scientific innovations. I concede that Kant's entire venture cannot but fail: transcendental inquiry, read as a logically distinctive venture (that issues in strict synthetic a priori discoveries), must simply collapse. Complete conceptual closure of the rationalist kind is bound to be exposed as effectively impossible. But, surely, that is already the gist of Ernst Cassirer's deft confession in The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms. Cassirer abandons all strict "constitutive" formulations of what a "physical object" must be (as does Kant himself, which is instructive); but then Cassirer says, reviewing the history of current physics, that "the relatively necessary takes the place of the relatively accidental and the relatively invariable that of the relatively variable"—which sounds a little like Pihlström. But Pihlström wishes to identify the meaning of "necessity" in the novel transcendental sense he (Pihlström) recommends to the

pragmatists, whereas Cassirer continually concedes the failure of Kant's inflexible transcendentalism by the most unobtrusive concession he's able to contrive.[17] (Cassirer's "symbolic forms" are historied classificatory schemata changeably projected from the assessment of the strongest empirical achievements of the natural and cultural sciences; they replace Kant's would-be ultimate transcendental categories.) Here, I suggest—against the "structural realist" thesis (Steven French's version, for instance) and in accord with classic pragmatism—that even radical suppositions (the "unreality" of ordinary macroscopic and micro-theoretical "objects" fitted, say, to quantum physics) entails an empirical or epistemic or analytic reference to a perceiving subject (or something of the sort). The matter need not be treated as transcendental in Kant's sense, but it must be adequately secured.

To be sure, the objection to Kant's account of apperceptive unity (and the role Kant assigns the transcendental Ich) also calls into empirically insuperable doubt John McDowell's attempt to demonstrate (in effect, against Rorty's and Donald Davidson's alleged pragmatisms and in accord with his own intuitions) the ineliminability of the Kantian role of reason (or of the effective presence of the categories and concepts of reason) in all episodes of "sensibility" itself! Kant's facultative reading of perceptual judgment obliges Kant to separate the "spontaneity" of thought and the "receptivity" of sensuous intuition; so that he obliges us to address the separate question of just how the two contributions are united, as in perceptual experience. Notoriously, McDowell answers, originally in Mind and World (which he later modifies in ways that remain decidedly problematic), the question of how the human mind must work:

17 See Ernst Cassirer, The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, vol. 3, trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), the closing pages for instance (say, pp. 465-479). The line cited appears at p. 476. See, also, Ernst Cassirer, "The Concept of Group and the Theory of Perception," Philosophy and Phenomenological Research 5 (1944), pp. 1-36, trans. Aron Gurwitsch; also the extreme speculation of Steven French, The Structure of the World: Metaphysics and Representation (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). I'm not persuaded that French's proposal is actually defensible; he claims to have been influenced by Cassirer's essay (the one just mentioned). But even if French's proposal fails, it confirms how unlikely it is that Kant's transcendental program could possibly work.

> I have [McDowell says] been urging that we must conceive experiences as states or occurrences in which capacities that belong to spontaneity are in play in actualizations of receptivity. Experiences have their content by virtue of the fact that conceptual capacities are operative in them, and that means capacities that genuinely belong to understanding: it is essential to their being the capacities they are that they can be exploited in active and potentially self-critical thinking. But when these capacities come into play in experience, the experiencing subject is passive, acted on by independent reality. When experience makes conceptual content available to one, that is itself one's sensibility in operation, not understanding putting a construction on some pre-conceptual deliverances of sensibility.[18]

My own view is that we are not clear at all (certainly not as clear as McDowell supposes) about how the mind works; accordingly, we're simply adrift when we pretend to pursue the transcendental a priori. We can only make empirically contingent conjectures here—as indeed Kant and Sellars and McDowell do. That's good enough, I say; but, then, to suppose that we're approaching (absolute) transcendental necessity "approximatively" seems hardly more than self-deception: what is the gain in replacing empirical conjecture with some "naturalized" or "pragmatized" transcendental, if we cannot claim a rationalist faculty to vie with Kant's account (which, of course, fails in its own endeavor)? I don't think we can take the rationalist out of Kant or "put it" into McDowell convincingly, and I don't see the point of construing the empirically-

18 John McDowell, Mind and World (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996 [1994]), pp. 66-67. (The remark is approvingly cited by Pihlström, Naturalizing the Transcendental, p.203 (with a caveat about McDowell's remarks on realism). The thesis reappears, quite firmly, in McDowell's Woodbridge Lectures (which appears as Part I of McDowell's Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009). There are some further adjustments in several papers in the same volume, but these do not address, empirically, the actual machinery of the mind or the relevance of animal perception or the perception of human infants.

minded pragmatists as liberated rationalists (Kantians, perhaps) who happen to have guessed correctly that there are no transcendental synthetic truths to be had. One must bear in mind that the notion of "degrees" of necessity (or "soft" necessity) is self-contradictory when read in terms of the first Critique.

I can, however, provide at least three very strong conjectures about epistemological/metaphysical questions of the sort Kant entertains that, if conceded, count very heavily against any Kantian-like venture that preserves the strict necessity of the first Critique—without offending anyone's sensibility regarding Kant's immense contribution. Try these specimen claims:

1. All questions of what we can confirm we know and understand about the actual world and our own cognitive powers are insuperably question-begging, in the sense that any reasonable answer must already assume, in a prior way, that we have the requisite ability, as a consequence of a suitable form of Bildung.
2. On Earth, only human selves or persons can raise and answer questions of the sort addressed in my first dictum, as a consequence of having invented and mastered language, which effectively entails the artifactual transformation of the infant members of the species into functionally apt selves or persons; in that case, even if the self begins as a "grammatical fiction," its iterated activity and recognition within societies of apt speakers, gradually transform mere primate infants into substantive, self-referentially apt, cognitive and agentive presences in the actual world.
3. Inquiries and questions of an epistemological and metaphysical sort cannot be autonomous or primal or philosophically primary, since, in accord with my first dictum, they could not overcome the inherent petitio of any evidentiary consideration; accordingly, such questions must be subaltern matters, dependent on non-epistemological

> or ("second-best") enabling legitimation—which I call "existential," in the sense that, on (say) Darwinian and post-Darwinian grounds, their resolution remains thoroughly congruent with my second dictum; intelligent but unlanguaged animal species survive, seemingly capable of learning by perceptual and related means; similarly, it seems unlikely that human infants could possibly learn the artifactually invented natural languages they learn as quickly and as fluently as they do, unless an adequate run of the discursive concepts they learn are functionally similar to the perceptual concepts they may be deemed to apply in performing their characteristic feat.

These are meant to be no more than rough-and-ready formulations. No doubt there are corrections needed for each. But I would say that anyone who theorized in this way was doing philosophical work, though not of any known Kantian or transcendental kind. What such work yields are "constructions," analogues (let us say) of certain changing paradigmatic specimens of conjectural reasoning that—in being pragmatistically inclined, as they obviously are—remain distinctly modest, spare, informal, contingent, pluralistically tolerant, historied, contested, centered on the perennial questions of First Philosophy, though without pretensions of final closure or strict necessity or universality.