

## PRAGMATISM AND CLASSICAL GERMAN PHILOSOPHY

Panel organiser: Gabriele Gava (gabriele.gava@gmail.com)

The relationship between the classical figures of German philosophy and the early pragmatists is complex and difficult to address. With the exception of James, who arguably was critical of the German tradition in general, the classical pragmatists regarded their relation to classical German philosophy as one of both appropriation and opposition. For example, Peirce, on the one hand, recognizes both the merits and the flaws of the positions defended by Leibniz, Kant, Hegel, etc. Dewey, on the other hand, acknowledges his debt to Hegel, while he criticizes other figures like Kant. Focusing on how Peirce, James, and Dewey commented on central doctrines of Kant, Hegel, and other German philosophers has already thrown light on their respective views. However, an adequate assessment of the relationships between pragmatism and German philosophy cannot be limited to a consideration of the pragmatists' explicit observations. We cannot assume that the pragmatists' understanding of these figures was actually correct, as we cannot take for granted that there is no indirect influence that was not consciously recognized by the pragmatists (even for those that were more resolutely critical like James). It is by focusing on the relationships that we can detect at this deeper lever of analysis that we can gain various insights on both pragmatism and classical German philosophy.

The papers in this panel take all into consideration this complex framework in which the relationships between pragmatism and classical German philosophy need to be addressed. The first paper considers the interconnections between Peirce's account of reference and his metaphysical views on individuals, and it compares Peirce's early views with Leibniz and his later position with Kant. The second paper addresses Peirce's and Hegel's accounts of actuality in light of their respective views on experience and reason. The third paper takes into consideration James's criticisms of Hegel's metaphysics. It argues that these criticisms cannot be labelled as superficial and deserve to be taken seriously, especially in consideration of new readings of Hegel which seem to bring the two philosopher closer to one another. The last paper argues that both Hegel's and Dewey's methods in philosophy can be read as models of immanent critique. Their methods, in turn, highlight an essential feature of immanent critique that has often been neglected, that is, its self-transformative character.

### ABSTRACTS

#### **(1) Gabriele Gava (Goethe University Frankfurt): Reference and its Metaphysical Implications: Leibniz, Kant, and Peirce**

The paper investigates the correlation between different accounts of reference and different positions on the metaphysics of individuality in the philosophies of Leibniz, Kant, and Peirce. In particular, I will consider the modifications that Peirce introduced in his account of individuality after the 1880s. These modifications seems to rest on a new theory of reference based on his revised views on indexicality. A question that naturally arises in this context is the following: was his new metaphysical position actually demanded by his renewed views on reference? More generally, we might also ask if determinate accounts of reference bring with themselves particular metaphysical implications. In order to answer to these questions I will compare Peirce's early account of reference with Leibniz's and evaluate how their views were reflected in their metaphysics. We will see that, while their accounts of reference are close in many respects, they

seem to draw different metaphysical conclusions from them. I will then compare Peirce's mature position on reference to Kant's views on the topic. Even in this case we will detect various similarities between Peirce and Kant, but we will also appreciate how they considered their respective theories having quite different consequences in metaphysics.

Peirce's realism in metaphysics underwent relevant changes during the evolution of his thought. One of these major changes can be highlighted by focusing on his account of individuality. If, thus, at the end of the 1860s and during the 1870s Peirce insistently stressed that laws and general classes should be considered not as fictions based on convention, but as real elements of the world they describe, at around the same time he found the metaphysical status of individuals much more problematic. Accordingly, Peirce claims that an individual is not only something that cannot adequately be grasped in thought, but also something that cannot exist as such. What we normally consider individual things are in fact general in character (that is, they are indeterminate in some respect), even though they can be distinguished from general objects because they cannot be at different places at one time (Peirce call them singulars instead of individuals). These claims on individuals are based on a descriptive account of reference, according to which we fix the reference of both general and singular signs by identifying the characters of the objects to which these signs apply. This method of fixing reference does not allow us to detect any difference in kind between general and singular objects, insofar as they both remain indeterminate in some respect, that is to say, there is always a property for which we cannot tell if they possess it or not. In this framework, the only way to identify a difference in kind for individuals would be to be able to grasp a completely determinate object, but this is impossible according to Peirce.

Leibniz defends an account of reference that is really similar to that assumed by the early Peirce. Reference to objects is obtained by identifying the characters and properties possessed by those objects. In this picture, reference to individual substances (which constitute the ultimate components of the world according to Leibniz) is obtained through a *complete individual concept*, that is, by means of a concept that specifies the characteristics of an object in every respect. Curiously enough, Leibniz casts various doubts on our capacity to obtain concepts of this kind, but he nonetheless bases his metaphysics on an account of individuality so conceived. He seems thus to derive metaphysical conclusions very different from those of Peirce, even though they share a similar account of reference. After considering the reasons of these differences I will notice how there is in fact one aspect on which they agree: they both regard individuals as completely determinate objects. They disagree on whether we should leave room in our metaphysics for this kind of objects.

In the 1880s Peirce developed a stronger account of indexicality which produced relevant changes in his semiotic and, more specifically, in his theory of reference. After this revision, reference to objects cannot be fixed solely by description any more. Rather, it requires an indexical relationship with the object. Reference seems thus to depend on some kind of causal relationship between our sign and its object. This change in Peirce's theory of reference had consequences in his metaphysical views. Accordingly, he began to maintain that individuals exist and that they are 'something which reacts.' He thus made room for individuals in his metaphysics and he also identified a specific domain of reality for them, that is, *existence*.

In conjunction to this revision in his theory of reference Peirce also began to see some merits in Kant's account of intuitions, the latter considered as the kind of representation able to put us in a direct connection to objects. For both these authors, reference to object involves some kind of

casual connection between a representation and its object. However, Kant seems to draw very different conclusions in his metaphysics with respect to Peirce. The individual objects given to us in intuitions are of course in space and time, which for Kant are *a priori* forms. Individual objects given in intuition are thus part of Kant's metaphysics of transcendental idealism, a position that Peirce, especially in his mature philosophy, firmly rejects. We will thus appreciate how, even in this case, similar views on reference gave rise to different positions on the metaphysics of individuality. There is however an element of continuity: both Kant and the late Peirce seem to associate individuality with some kind of capacity for causal interaction.

I will conclude by noticing how even though in all the authors taken into consideration there seems to be some kind of correlation between their views on reference and their positions on the metaphysics of individuality, we cannot claim that the former actually imply the latter. Their metaphysical position is ultimately decided by the association of a particular theory of reference to other epistemological and metaphysical views.

## **(2) Vincent Colapietro (Penn State University): Actuality and Intelligibility: Hegel, Peirce, and Experience vis-à-vis Reason**

Just as Hegel interpreted and assessed his predecessors and contemporaries from the perspective of his philosophy, often thereby failing to do full justice to these alternative positions (indeed, sometimes doing great injustice or even violence to these alternatives), so too did Peirce. For example, Don Roberts has shown that Peirce was hardly fair to his castigations of Hume and, of even greater importance, Susan Haack has demonstrated that, in several noteworthy respects, Peirce was not entirely just in his critique of Descartes. More recently, Robert Stern has defended Hegel's metaphysics against Peirce's charges that his predecessor neglected actuality (or secondness). Even more recently, other interpreters (e.g., John Kaag) have explored other facets of this kinship. What most needs to be stressed is that, in supposing Hegel's failure to accord actuality its due, Peirce himself failed to discern the depth of his kinship to Hegel. While he came to philosophy *from* Kant, Peirce by the painstaking route of an immanent critique of critical philosophy arrived at a position closely akin to Hegelian philosophy. That is, he increasingly and decisively moved *toward* Hegel. Such a development could hardly have escaped Peirce's notice. Indeed, he explicitly noted it: 'My own philosophy resuscitates Hegel, thought in a strange costume.'

The role of experience in Hegel's thought has been unduly neglected (see, e.g., Brady Bowman), just as the power of Reason in Peirce's philosophy has been. What needs to be emphasized here is that experience as conceived by Hegel is very close to how Peirce understood experience and, in turn, Reason as envisioned by Peirce is very close to how Hegel understood *Vernunft*. Experience is not reducible to perception, just as the concepts by which perception and, more broadly, experience are rendered intelligible are not identifiable with those requisite for framing an experimental approach to physical objects. That is, our conceptions of both experience and concepts need to be broadened and deepened, precisely in order to do justice to the full array of our social practices (not simply the heuristic practices of the natural sciences). From the perspective of a philosophical project committed to treat human culture in a comprehensive manner, Hegel does just this; from the stance of an experimental philosophy devoted, above all else, to defending a normative account of objective inquiry, Peirce does much the same. In light of this, we are led to recast Kant's famous dictum: experience without concepts is blind; concepts without experience is empty.

Experience is an actuality. It takes place, *hic et nunc*, crowding out mere possibilities and impinging upon other actualities. Though experience is related to possibility and generality, it is above all an actuality. Moreover, it is an encounter with myriad forms of other actualities. Just as the river bank acquires its defining features by the layers of earth beneath it and the flow of the river itself, so experience acquires its constitution by an ongoing series of actual encounters with countervailing forces. In brief experience is both in itself an actuality and an encounter with actualities other than itself. Indeed, it could only *be* an actuality by virtue of its entanglement with other actualities. In the concrete circumstances in which the brute actuality (the sheer secondness) of human experience characteristically exerts its *majeure force*, however, actuality is tied to intelligibility or (in terms of Peirce's categories) secondness to thirdness. The fluency of habit (an instance of thirdness) is arrested by the *experience* of doubt, an experience bound up with an expectation woven into the very fabric of belief and perhaps more generally into that of habit. Actual doubts are cases of agential disorientation: as a result of them, agents are at a loss of what to do.

Doubt in its qualitative immediacy erupts against a background of habits, beliefs, and thus expectations. Such habits, beliefs, and expectations are, however, embodied, so deeply as to be partly constitutive of whatever genuine agency is attributable to finite beings. In other words, doubt has the feel it does only because of the expectations and anticipations contravened by its presence. In the language of Peirce's categories, the firstness of secondness is, in the case of doubt, a phenomenon implicitly linked to the secondness of thirdness. The secondness of thirdness here signifies the fact that generals (or Thirds) are actually embodied in habits. Reason in some sense is actually operative, not least of all when it struggles against doubt and, indeed, when it proves itself, once again, simply to be susceptible to doubt, to be inextricably intertwined with encounters with actuality wherein its limitations so arrestingly demand its acknowledgment. Experience defines the limits and distortions of reason as much as anything by defying the pretensions and presumptions of reason. Reason as a self-corrective capacity owes not only its origin but also its growth to the harsh reprisals of brute actuality, as such actuality asserts itself in experience. But this means that brute actuality is, for rational agents, never simply brute actuality. What is irreducibly other than rationality is, nonetheless, partly constitutive of it. Reason is, in a sense, the offspring of experience (cf. Hegel's *Lesser Logic*). In turn, experience is typically more than simply that which frustrates our expectations. It is that which allows – indeed, that which requires – us to frame a rationally more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of what we have actually encountered in experience and, on this basis, what we can reasonably anticipate in the ongoing course of these dramatic entanglements. The dynamic conjunction of experience in its irreducible secondness and reason in its incessant growth is itself an arresting phenomenon to which Hegel and Peirce attended with painstaking care. Despite his criticisms of Hegel, in particular, his charge that his predecessor overlooked secondness, Peirce's attempt to do justice to the phenomenon of this conjunction is arguably as close to Hegel's as his attempt to do justice to the form of realism demanded by science is as close to another predecessor (Duns Scotus). In the one case as in the other, only a hair breadth separates his position from one of his forerunners. While this might turn out to be a difference that truly makes a difference, this subtle difference might itself disclose the deepest kinship imaginable, one insufficiently recognized by Peirce himself (cf. Stern). This is at any rate what I hope to render plausible in this paper.

### (3) Robert Stern and Neil W. Williams (University of Sheffield): James on Hegel

This paper will focus on William James's engagement with G. W. F. Hegel, focusing particularly on the critique James offers of Hegel's metaphysics. James takes absolutism in general, and Hegel in particular, to be his primary opponent throughout his career, and in many ways understood the Hegelian approach to philosophy to be antithetical to his own. Hegel is presented as rationalistic, absolutist, monist and intellectualistic, in contrast to James's empiricist, fallibilist, pluralistic pragmatism. The presentation of these dichotomies can make James's criticism sound rhetorical, ill-judged, or even superficial, especially to the ear of modern Hegel scholarship. However, we argue that this opposition actually stems from a similarity in projects. Both Hegel and James fundamentally think that philosophy should enable us to feel 'at home in the world' to some extent. Once this commonality is recognised, we can understand James's critique in the way in which it was intended, and it becomes more nuanced. James emerges as offering what is in effect an internal critique of Hegel's position: given Hegel's objectives, he needs to abandon his absolute idealism and become a pluralistic empiricist instead, for this is the only way that stable satisfaction can be found.

Throughout his career James offers various systems for understanding the human need to feel at home in the world. For instance in 'Reflex Action and Theism,' James suggests that a philosophy must balance its explanation between perception, theorisation, and action, and if a philosophy lacks any of these aspects it will not fulfil our needs of rationality. Here Hegel is presented as someone who reduces all philosophy to the aspect of theory. In 'Sentiment of Rationality' James suggests that for a philosophy to meet this need it must satisfy all the requirements of human rationality, which are diverse: we not only need to meet the intellectual requirement of human rationality, but also the moral and the practical requirements. Here, Hegel is presented as someone who privileges the intellectual over and above the other needs of rationality. In each of these cases the aim of a fully rational philosophy is presented as a *balance between competing needs*, and Hegel's vice is of *privileging only one need*. Later, in *A Pluralistic Universe*, James refines this critique, adding aesthetic needs to the list of rational requirements, and suggesting that Hegel's vice is having an *insufficiently balanced account*. Absolute Idealism is presented as meeting the intellectual and the aesthetic requirements, but not the moral or the practical. It does not meet the practical needs, because it cannot tell us what to do, or can even rob us of our motive to act altogether; and it does not meet the moral requirement, because it comes with the problem of evil, and the problem of motivation (why should we act at all, if the absolute is all-knowing and all-powerful?).

Thus James offers a broad argument of the deficiencies of Hegel's account of metaphysics, insofar as it's aim is to allow us to feel at home in the world. James also offers particular critiques of Hegel's starting points, which can be understood as James attempting to show that the hypothesis of the absolute is not as intellectually self-evident as it appears. In 'On Some Hegelisms' James suggests that Hegel's system only gets off the ground by abusing the notion of identity and the principle of totality. In *A Pluralistic Universe*, James suggests that Absolute Idealism only gets off the ground by assuming the insufficiency of our actual experience, and so must replace the experientiable world with a conceptual world, and the absolute unity it seeks. These arguments are not attempts to refute Hegel's system, but only attempts to refute its self-evidence, or the *a priori* truth with which it was often presented in James's time, and his aim is to render the Hegelian system open to the broader criticism explained above.

There is a third form of criticism which can be found in James's work, though less developed than these other two. This is that the Hegelian system does not understand the role that the *irrational* or the *a-rational* plays in human needs. In essays such as 'The Sentiment of Rationality' and 'What Makes Life Significant,' James suggests that in order to feel genuinely motivated to action, we must hold that the world is only *partially* rational, that is, that it requires our actions to make it more rational. In 'The Dilemma of Determinism,' James suggests that in order to have the conception of *real possibility*, required for moral living, we must be indeterminists, and to be indeterminists we must reject Absolute Idealism. This line of criticism suggests that Hegel is wrong to conflate 'being at home in the world' with 'finding the world a (completely) rational place.' This explains James's replacement in *A Pluralistic Universe* of 'rationality' with the notion of 'intimacy' as the standard of assessing the success of metaphysical hypotheses.

James thus offers a twofold criticism of Hegel: that Hegel does not properly account for the diversity of ways in which we find the world 'rational'; and that Hegel does not recognise that finding the world rational is not sufficient for being 'at home' in the world. In order to assess the cogency of James's critique of Hegel, then, we will focus on the following questions: (1) Does Hegel privilege one type of rationality (the intellectual), over all others?; (2) Does Hegel's system rest on flawed assumptions, such as the abuse of the principle of totality, or the rejection of the continuity of our experience?; (3) Can Hegel provide an account which balances James's requirements of intellectual, moral, aesthetic and practical needs, in such a way that he is not creating the problem of evil or the problem of motivation?; (4) Can Hegel account for the role of contingency, indeterminism or novelty in the world which James requires?; and (5) If he were faced with James's position of pluralistic empiricism, what might have Hegel said in response?

Perhaps because James's critique of Hegel has seemed overly polemical there has been little discussion of this important debate between pragmatism and idealism; but our treatment will show that James's objections deserve serious consideration, and may be ranked alongside more well-known Hegel critiques such as those offered by Schelling, Kierkegaard, and Marx, which they somewhat resemble. At the same time, contemporary Hegelian scholarship now has a much more nuanced and sophisticated understanding of Hegel on these questions, so that James's position provides an interesting and important test for these 'new' readings of Hegel, in ways which we will explore.

#### **(4) Arvi Särkelä (Goethe University Frankfurt/University of Lucerne): Immanent Critique as Self-Transformative Praxis: On Hegel's Phenomenological Method and Dewey's Criticism of Criticisms**

G.W.F. Hegel's conception of phenomenological inquiry as a 'science of the experience of consciousness' and John Dewey's conception of philosophical inquiry as a 'criticism of criticisms' both present classical examples of the praxis of immanent critique. They also both embody an insight long forgotten among the practitioners of immanent critique: They namely conceive of immanent critique as an essentially *self-transformative praxis*.

In the contemporary debate (see for example Stahl 2014; Jaeggi & Wesche 2009) immanent critique is often taken to be transformative. Critique is then seen as a moment of a conflictual process of problem resolution, aiding a form of life or a social praxis in its transition from an indeterminate situation to a determinate one. For Hegel and Dewey, however, the role of the critic is essentially transformative too: Not only does immanent critique effect a transformation of the objective praxis and its standard, but also of the critic's conception of self.

In this paper I argue that in practicing self-transformative immanent critique, Hegel and Dewey share two basic commitments at odds with the contemporary debate. The first I call *strong corrigibilism*, which denotes the trust that experience is potentially a self-correcting process. A strong corrigibilist then mistrusts the idea of a necessity of constructing models of critique prior the praxis of critique. For that idea is itself based on mistrust about critique itself, which first would need to justify itself. Instead the strong corrigibilist finds no reason, at the outset, to doubt that whatever appears as a problem within critical inquiry can be dealt with in the course of further inquiry. The second commitment at odds with the contemporary models of immanent critique is Hegel's and Dewey's *radical fallibilism*, which means openness to self-transformation. Not only the outcomes of the critical inquiry can be put in jeopardy at any time, but also the conception of inquiry effective is essentially at stake in the process of immanent critique. Meeting the objective commitment of strong corrigibilism and the subjective commitment of radical fallibilism constitutes the process of a *thoroughgoing skepticism* (sich vollbringender Skeptizismus) practiced by Hegel in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* and by Dewey, most famously, in *The Quest for Certainty* and *Experience and Nature*. The validity of immanent critique is thus not based on a 'model' or a 'norm' of good critique. Immanent critique places before others the map of 'the path of despair' (Hegel) traveled by a thoroughgoing skepticism; other inquirers may then accordingly traverse a similar course, so as to find out how their report about the landscape of critique corresponds with one's own. This renders immanent critique a truly *social* praxis of self-transformation.