

SKOWROŃSKI Krzysztof Piotr & Sami PIHLSTRÖM (eds),
*Pragmatist Kant: Pragmatism, Kant, and Kantianism in
the Twenty-first Century*

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- ¹ *Pragmatist Kant: Pragmatism, Kant, and Kantianism in the Twenty-first Century* is a collected volume featuring chapters from seventeen different authors. As the title indicates, the goal of the volume is to explore the relationship between the Kantian and pragmatist philosophical traditions – in both their historical and contemporary configurations. The editors note that “The papers collected in this volume were originally presented at the international conference, *Pragmatist Kant*, organized by Chris Skowroński and his Berlin Practical Philosophy International Forum e. V. (in collaboration with the Nordic Pragmatism Network as well as the Philosophical Society of Finland) at the Finnland-Institut in Berlin, Germany on July 10–13, 2017” (p. iii). The versions of the papers found in this volume were extended, revised, and peer-reviewed from their original conference forms.
- ² The volume is published online and open access by the Nordic Pragmatism Network; it can be downloaded for free from their website,¹ and it is the fourth volume in their “*Nordic Studies in Pragmatism*” series. Providing a collected volume of philosophical thought in such an open and accessible way is commendable in any circumstances, but

happily this volume retains the professional formatting and editing that one would expect from a printed volume. The decision to publish open access can therefore be understood as an ethical and pedagogical commitment rather than an attempt to skirt professional rigour.

- 3 The editors introduce the content of the volume by noting that pragmatists (who they describe as committed to naturalism and empiricism) might seem to naturally reject Kantian transcendental philosophy (as overly rationalistic and fixed: and therefore not conducive to pragmatist experimentalism and fallibilism). Nevertheless, they note that “several pragmatist thinkers, early and late – from Charles S. Peirce to Hilary Putnam and beyond – have taken very seriously the deeply ‘Kantian’ features of their pragmatism” (v). Thus, the volume aims to evaluate this relational tension, with several contributors aiming to, for example, “offer a pragmatically reinterpreted version of transcendental idealism as a kind of practice-embedded constructivism” (vi).
- 4 Thus, pragmatists can be understood as “Kantian” in the sense of inheriting and reinterpreting Kantian themes, without being forced to agree with any specific Kantian argument. However, the aim of the volume is not to argue this point dogmatically, as “many of the contributors to this volume are also highly critical of such suggestions and argue that pragmatism ought to remain fundamentally non – or even anti – Kantian” (vi). Thus, the volume aims not to pass judgment on the issue, but rather to engage in a dialogue that the editors believe illustrates the spirit of both the Kantian critical project and pragmatic fallibilism.
- 5 Given that this volume represents contributions from seventeen different figures on as many different topics, I believe the most important service I can contribute with this review is to provide a brief description of each chapter so that the reader can judge whether they are interested in the material contained. I will follow this overview of the contents of the volume with a few brief remarks concerning the themes of the volume and the overall quality of the chapters.
- 6 Part One of the volume is entitled “Cognition and Science” and contains the first four contributions. Interestingly, the editors clarify and describe this section as organized around issues of “theoretical philosophy.” In Chapter One, Joseph Margolis’ (Temple University) “Between Pragmatism and Rationalism” provides critical remarks toward the idea of pragmatism as a kind of transcendental philosophy. Along the way he makes to provocative claim that “Kant is the most advanced regressive figure that we know: superannuated almost from the start of the Critical undertaking, but never obsolete” (3). Margolis served as the keynote speaker for the conference, and therefore his essay here appropriately serves to inaugurate the discussion. In Chapter Two, Henrik Rydenfelt’s (University of Oulu) paper “Kant and Peirce on Pragmatic Maxims” discusses whether Peirce’s formulation of the pragmatic maxim should be understood as indebted to Kant. Specifically, he argues that “Kant clearly prefigured Peirce’s pragmatism in his claim that there is a connection between theoretical judgments and practical imperatives (or principles of conduct)” (27).
- 7 Chapter Three continues the discussion of Peirce, as Giovanni Maddalena’s (Universita del Molise) “Anti-Kantianism as a Necessary Characteristic of Pragmatism” uses Peirce to make the case the pragmatism should (at least ideally) remain fundamentally anti-Kantian. Maddalena makes the case that “Peirce’s concept of continuity, and Kant’s alleged misconception of it, allowed Peirce to understand why in Kant’s thought there is always a ‘gap’ between knowledge and the reality to be known, between the

‘phenomenon’ and the ‘thing-in-itself.’ This gap had troubled him since his early philosophical studies” (45).

- 8 Part One is concluded with Hemmo Laiho’s (University of Turku) “Kant’s Universalism versus Pragmatism.” Laiho argues that universalism is the most important divide between Kant and the pragmatists. According to Laiho, pragmatic emphasis on contingency, experimentalism, and fallibilism preclude them from endorsing universalizability in the Kantian sense: “This is not to say that a pragmatist cannot take a universal point of view *per se*. However, I do think that the pragmatist must avoid taking such a view in the specific sense that it involves laying out a set of basic preconditions for some phenomenon independently of the factual variances and contingencies the phenomenon in question reveals within the context of our actual practices and experiences.” (61).
- 9 Part Two of the volume is titled “Methodology and Communication” and contains the next three essays. In Chapter Five, Guido Baggio (Roma Tre University) takes us back toward Peirce, this time to seek a quasi-transcendental account of sem(e)iotics in “Sense, Sign’s Sense, and Gesture: For a Quasi-Transcendental Semiotics.” Specifically, that entails the desire to “offer a new theoretical solution to the issue raised by the Kantian transcendental scheme concerning the connection between the sensible manifold and the unity of the concept. To do this, I intersect Frege’s notion of sense [Sinn] as distinct from meaning [Bedeutung], with Morris’ semiotics and his idea of the ‘sign vehicle,’ and with Maddalena’s theory of gesture.” (78).
- 10 In Chapter Six, “Kant and Pragmatists: On the Supremacy of Practice over Theory” by Agnieszka Hensoldt (University of Opole) compares Kant to Peirce, Dewey, and Rorty while exploring the relationship between philosophical practice and theory. This culminates in an inquiry as to “what differences of visions of human intellectual activity Kant’s and pragmatists’ doctrines provide us with and what their strengths and weaknesses are” (99). In the last entry in Part Two, we have Tom Rockmore’s (Peking University) “Kant, Pragmatism and Epistemic Constructivism,” which interprets the views of Kant, and certain pragmatists, as forms of epistemic constructivism. Rockmore suggests “that pragmatic constructivism goes further than Kantian constructivism, but that both fall short of what I will be calling a historical approach that remains to be worked out” (116).
- 11 Part Three, “Anthropology, Psychology and Religion” offers another four entries organized around the given themes. In Chapter Eight, Phillip McReynolds’s (UNC Charlotte) “Does Pragmatism Need a Concept of Autonomy?” explores the Kantian concept of autonomy in relation to pragmatism. McReynolds declares that “The very idea of a separate realm of autonomous reasons or actions violates the pragmatic principle of continuity in several ways” (134). The next chapter sees Matthew Crippen’s (Humboldt University Berlin & Grand Valley State University) “Pragmatic Evolutions of the Kantian *a priori*: From the Mental to the Bodily,” which makes the case that Kant’s transcendental *a priori* evolves (in pragmatism) out of a mental categorization and into a bodily one. Crippen seeks to “challenge those who neglect the relevance of Kant’s philosophy to embodied views, along with those who dismiss the Kantian *a priori* as a dead end. In the hands of pragmatists and like-minded thinkers such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the Kantian *a priori* has evolved into embodied positions that shed considerable light on human experience.” (151).

- 12 In Chapter Ten, Michela Bella (Roma Tre University) offers a comparative study of the psychological theories of William James and Kant in “James and Kant on Empirical Psychology.” Bella describes some “interesting criticisms made by James particularly about Kant’s conception of the Ego as a logical function, meant to criticize Kant’s dualistic view (phenomenon/noumenon) and to justify his substitution of the transcendental Ego by the present passing Thought of the ‘stream of consciousness’” (172).
- 13 The last entry in Part Three, “Jamesian Pragmatism, Rortyan Ironism, and Kantian Antitheodicy” by Sami Pihlström (University of Helsinki) furthers the conversation between James and Kant (with Rorty added for good measure), but this time focuses on themes in philosophy of religion – especially the problem of evil. Pihlström concludes with a description of how “what might be considered a potential slippery slope from James to Rorty arises from the Kantian background of pragmatist antitheodicism” (190).
- 14 Part Four is titled “Ethics and Aesthetics” and features three chapters. In Chapter Twelve, Sarin Marchetti’s (Sapienza Università di Roma) “Kant, James, and the Practice of Ethics” again focuses on the comparison between Kant and James, transitioning nicely out of part three by moving the topic into the realm of ethics – but an ethics still in dialogue with philosophical anthropology and psychology. Marchetti argues that Kant and James share “a conception of pragmatic anthropology and psychology which illuminates an important dimension and register of the moral life that moral philosophy should account for – that is, self-cultivation and experimentation” (214). Next, Alexander Krémer (University of Szeged) presents Richard Rorty’s criticisms of Kant’s ethics in the paper, “Rorty on Kant’s Ethics,” suggesting that pragmatism (at least of the Rortyan variety) rejects the foundationalism, universalism, and rationalism that Kantian ethics seems to require. Krémer argues that “Rorty recognized clearly the unsolvable inner contradictions of Kant’s ethics, which come from his special philosophical anthropology, and replaced it with a new pragmatist, evolutionary view of the human being” (235). In Chapter Fourteen, the last essay in this section, Krzysztof (Chris) Piotr Skowroński (University of Opole & Berlin Practical Philosophy International Forum e.V.) contributes the essay “Does the Pragmatist Reflection on the Ethical and Aesthetic Values Need the Kantian Axiology for its (Pragmatist) Future Developments?” Skowroński seeks to show that (potentially in opposition to the Rortyan arguments outlined in the previous chapter), pragmatists might require Kantian axiology in order to advance their ethical and aesthetic commitments. Skowroński is especially concerned that “the challenge for philosophers that emerges out of it [the rise of mass-media], in my view, is the need to link the message on ethical values with the aesthetic values of the narratives and within them” (254).
- 15 The last section of the volume (Part Five) is entitled “Social and Political Issues.” To begin the final part, Jacquelyn Kegley’s (CSU Bakersfield) “Kant as Public Intellectual and Political Theorist,” raises the possibility that Kant could be seen as a kind of “public intellectual,” and that his political writings bring him closer to the pragmatists than is often recognized. Kegley points out that “In these public essays, Kant argues for the public use of reason, the freedom of the pen, the principle of publicity, and the necessity to make one’s philosophical work public. He believes philosophy should initiate and promote enlightenment. He shares these beliefs with American pragmatists, such as Dewey and Royce.” (273).

- 16 Shannon Sullivan (UNC Charlotte) argues in “Kant and Pragmatist Feminism” that, at least when seen through the lens of Josiah Royce’s philosophy of loyalty, pragmatist feminists may find a use for portions of Kant’s moral philosophy. Sullivan describes how “understanding Kantian respect in terms of Roycean loyalty can achieve three things. It helps feminists (i) avoid the emphasis on rationality central to Kant’s moral philosophy, (ii) reinforce Kant’s inclusion of self-respect as an important component of respect, and (iii) reduce the exclusionary aspects of the universalization of respect.” (288).
- 17 Ending the volume, Chapter Seventeen’s “Peace, Bread and Ideas for a Cosmopolitan World: Addams’ Unknown Pragmatist Legacy Today” by Nuria Sara Miras Boronat (Universitat de Barcelona), brings Jane Addams into discussion with Kantian cosmopolitanism. Boronat writes that “Kant’s view of history as a plan of nature to reach perpetual peace between nations and its cosmopolitan ideal as the historical and moral telos has been very influential in shaping our current world in many ways. According to my reading, these ideas are very close to what I call the utopian moment within pragmatism.” (308).
- 18 As the reader can hopefully see (even with the quick overview given here), a broad selection of classical and neo-pragmatists are represented in this volume: C. S. Peirce, William James, John Dewey, and Richard Rorty are (not surprisingly) most heavily discussed, but Josiah Royce, Charles W. Morris, and C. I. Lewis also received significant attention. Mention is also made of George Herbert Mead, Robert Brandom, Hilary Putnam, Wilfrid Sellars, Nicholas Rescher, and others. The chapters address a wide variety of themes, and the editors have done an admirable job at trying to group the essays together into coherent sections – of course, as with any volume of this kind, it is hard to find common ground for some essays, resulting in thematic sections that are fairly broad. The upside of this is that the contributions to the volume are wide ranging and cover a great deal of territory, ranging from metaphysical, epistemological, ethical, aesthetic, and socio-political concerns. Very little that would be of interest to Kantian or pragmatist philosophers has been excluded.
- 19 The authors themselves also represent a (relatively) diverse group of scholars, many of whom are very well established and respected in their fields. The authors are primarily based in Europe and the U.S., which does mean that engagement with pragmatist scholars in Latin America, China, or other areas is not well represented. As one would expect from a series focusing on pragmatist thought, the basic perspective of the authors is largely pragmatist, and Kantianism is evaluated generally from that standpoint.
- 20 One aspect of the volume that I would have liked to see more engagement on is the relation between pragmatism and the ongoing development of Kantian thought (i.e. Neo-Kantianism, German idealism, phenomenology, and other inheritors of Kantianism). Despite the editors making a point to define the Kantian tradition broadly enough to include the inheritors of Kant, most of the chapters deal with the way that pragmatists relate to Kant himself, rather than the tradition that follows him. In this regard I wish to temper the readers expectations so that they do not see the title and assume that there will be significant discussion of 21st century Kantianism and its relation to 21st century pragmatism – the volume predominantly relates classical and neo-pragmatists to Kant himself, and not the Kantian tradition as a whole.

- 21 I do not consider this a significant defect of the volume – of course it makes sense to focus a lot of attention on Kant himself – but I do believe that merely juxtaposing pragmatists with Kant himself is somewhat anachronistic, and is in danger of missing the way that the pragmatists would have actually encountered Kant and Kantian ideas. Because, of course, in addition to reading Kant, the pragmatists would have encountered him (in various modified forms) in diverse strands of their contemporaries as well. I do not wish to give the impression that the articles here are historically naive, which is not the case – it is simply a matter of focus and orientation. The major exceptions to this lack of focus on post-Kantian developments are Margolis' use of Ernst Cassirer, and Skowroński's use of Windelband – both authors spent time engaging with Neo-Kantian strands of thought in addition to Kant himself. However, I believe that including more full-fledged discussions on this topic (including entire articles devoted to later Kantian developments as related to pragmatism) would have been interesting – perhaps such an issue could be explored by future projects in the series.
- 22 To summarize, I believe that any readers interested in pragmatism broadly will find something of value here; readers engaged in studying the historic roots of pragmatism should find much of interest. I think the volume would also be of value to Kantians who are interested in the way Kantian ideas were inherited and modified by American pragmatists. The authors represent a diverse array of European and U.S. pragmatists, and all of the papers are thoughtfully prepared, clearly written, and professionally presented. Considering that the volume can be read and downloaded for free online, I believe that interested readers have every reason to look into *Pragmatist Kant: Pragmatism, Kant, and Kantianism in the Twenty-first Century*. The relationship between pragmatism and Kant is an issue that has been receiving increased attention in the last several years (which I personally approve of), and I believe that this trend will continue. As pragmatism becomes an increasingly global movement that seeks to re-imagine itself for new times and cultures, it only becomes more important to understand the philosophical connections and milieu that pragmatism arose from – even if only to better understand the resources that pragmatism can bring to bear on still-emerging philosophical problems.
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NOTES

1. [nordprag.org/nordic-studies-in-pragmatism/pragmatist-kant/].

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