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The Contextuality of Scheme-(In)Dependence in Pragmatist Metaphysics

Abstract

This paper discusses a modern, especially pragmatist, variant of the Kantian issue of the mind- or scheme-dependence of ontology. It is suggested that the distinction between scheme-dependence and scheme-independence in (pragmatist) transcendental metaphysics is itself contextual, not absolute, and that this contextuality is a “transcendental fact” about our practice-embedded world-constitutive activities.

Key words

pragmatism, ontology, metaphysics, realism, conceptual schemes, transcendental idealism, contexts, contextualism

1. Introduction

In the central traditions of modern philosophy, including the pragmatist tradition, several thinkers have argued that the existence and/or identity of things (entities, facts, or whatever there is taken to be in the world) is in a way or another relative to, or dependent on, the human mind, linguistic frameworks, conceptual schemes, practices, language-games, forms of life, paradigms, points of view, or something similar. Among the historically influential defenders of key variations of this “dependence thesis” – starting already from the pre-history of pragmatism, including figures only marginally involved in pragmatism, and ending up with relatively recent neopragmatism – are, for instance, Immanuel Kant (the empirical world is constituted by the transcendental faculties of the mind, i.e., the pure forms of intuition and the pure concepts or categories of the understanding), William James (whatever we may call a ‘thing’ depends on our purposes and selective interests), F. C. S. Schiller (we “humanistically” construct the world and all truths about it within our purposive practices), John Dewey (the objects of inquiry are constructed in and through inquiry, instead of existing as “ready-made” prior to inquiry), Rudolf Carnap (ontological questions about whether there are certain kinds of entities can only be settled within linguistic frameworks, “internally”, whereas “external” questions concern the pragmatic criteria for

choosing one or another linguistic framework), W. V. O. Quine (ontology is not absolute but relative to a theory, language, or translation scheme), Ludwig Wittgenstein (the “essence” of things lies in “grammar”, thus in the language-games we engage in, instead of transcending our language-use and “form of life”), Hilary Putnam (there is no “ready-made world” but only scheme-internal objects), Nelson Goodman (we “make worlds”, or “world versions”, by employing our various symbol systems), Thomas S. Kuhn (different scientific paradigms constitute different “worlds”), Richard Rorty (our “vocabularies” constitute the ways the world is for us, and we must “ethnocentrically” start from within the vocabularies we contingently possess), possibly even Wilfrid Sellars (the best-explaining scientific theories are the “measure” of what there is and what there is not), and others – not to forget Donald Davidson’s famous critique of such forms of relativism and the implicated distinction between a conceptual scheme and its allegedly scheme-neutral content, or other noteworthy criticisms of conceptual and ontological relativism.¹

In their distinctive ways, these and many other thinkers have suggested that there is no absolute world *an sich* that we could meaningfully conceptualize or cognize; if there is such a world, as Kant held, it is a mere limit of our thought and experience, a problematic *Grenzbegriff*. What there is *for us* (*für uns*) is a world we have constructed, and are continuously constructing, relative to our schemes of categorization and inquiry. Pragmatists, however, generally follow – or at least *should* follow – Kant in embracing something like *empirical realism* (and naturalism) within a broader pragmatist position comparable to Kantian *transcendental idealism*. Even the philosophical pragmatist should not simply opt for antirealism or radical constructivism and relativism in ontology but, rather, seek a moderate pragmatic realism compatible with naturalism. The problem is how to combine the (transcendental) scheme-dependence of entities² with their pragmatic scheme-independence (at the empirical level) in pragmatist metaphysics.³ This is, essentially, the pragmatist version of the Kantian problem of maintaining both empirical realism and transcendental idealism – both the empirical independence of things and their transcendental dependence on the ways we construct them through our various schemes. For Kant, spatio-temporal objects in the empirical world are really “outside us” (*ausser uns*) and in this sense exist, empirically speaking, mind- or scheme-independently. Nevertheless, they are transcendently dependent on us, because the spatio-temporal and categorial framework making them possible as objects of experience (appearances) arises from our cognitive faculties (i.e., sensibility and understanding). Replace the latter with human cognitive and conceptualizing *practices*, and you have the pragmatist issue of ontological (in)dependence.

The fact that I am formulating this problem from the standpoint of pragmatism should not be taken to imply that this would not be a problem for non-pragmatists. On the contrary, the issue is general enough to be relevant to much of post-Kantian philosophy focusing on the realism vs. idealism problem. Note also that I am not here going to settle the interpretive question of what pragmatism is. This is not the right place to provide textual evidence for pragmatists’ commitment to the problem I have described.⁴ Different pragmatists, classical or recent, may be committed to it in different ways; yet, something like the above-described issue of scheme-(in)dependence clearly runs through the pragmatist tradition from James and Dewey to Putnam and Rorty, and beyond.

2. Contextualization

The main proposal of this paper, one I hope could be attractive to pragmatists in particular (though not only to them), is that one promising way of dealing with this issue is by *contextualizing* the distinction between scheme-dependent and scheme-independent entities.⁵ Nothing is *absolutely* scheme-

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See, e.g.: Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1781/1787), ed. Raymund Schmidt (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1990); William James, *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (1907), eds. Frederick H. Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers, and Ignas K. Skrupskelis (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1975); F.C.S. Schiller, *Pragmatism and Humanism: Selected Writings 1891–1939*, eds. John R. Shook and H. P. MacDonald (Amherst, NY: Prometheus/ Humanity Books, 2008); John Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty: A Study on the Relation between Knowledge and Action* (1929) (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1960); Rudolf Carnap, "Empiricism, Semantics, Ontology" (1950), anthologized in (e.g.) Jaegwon Kim and Ernest Sosa (eds.), *Metaphysics: An Anthology* (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 1998); W. V. O. Quine, "On What There Is" (1948), in: *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969); Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958); Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Hilary Putnam, *Realism with a Human Face*, ed. James Conant (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1990); Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1978); Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970 [1st ed. 1962]); Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979); Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Wilfrid Sellars, *Science, Perception and Reality* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963). For Davidson's seminal critique of the scheme–content distinction and the resulting conceptual relativism, see Donald Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme" (1974), in Davidson, *Inquiries into Interpretation and Truth* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984); cf. also, e.g., Ilkka Niiniluoto's vigorous attack on cognitive relativism in his *Critical Scientific Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

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I am assuming an *ontological* sense of both dependence and independence here. Roughly, an entity *a* is ontologically dependent on another entity *b*, iff *a* cannot exist unless *b* exists, that is, *b*'s existence is required for *a*'s existence.

For example, tropes (or modes) are dependent on the particulars they qualify: if there is no such entity as this particular shirt, its particular shade of red cannot exist (be real) either – unless particulars themselves are construed as bundles of tropes. The relevant notion of ontological (in)dependence must be distinguished from *causal* (in)dependence (and of course *logical* (in)dependence). A table is causally dependent on its maker's activities, but when made, it is ontologically independent of them (at least according to realist metaphysicians), because it could remain existing even if its maker disappeared from the world. For more detailed discussions of ontological dependence and independence, see E. J. Lowe, *The Possibility of Metaphysics: Substance, Identity and Time* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); and Lowe, *The Four-Category Ontology: A Metaphysical Foundation for Natural Science* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006). Here I must ignore the differences between, say, Lowe's "rigid" and "non-rigid" notions of ontological dependence. Lowe's metaphysically realist (very anti-pragmatist) ontology makes the interesting twist of regarding *persons* as a metaphysically primitive ground upon which other things are dependent. Compared to many other contemporary (largely materialist) forms of metaphysical realism, this is a relatively unorthodox position. (I am here indebted to Heikki J. Koskinen's hitherto unpublished work on this topic.)

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Yes, there *is* such a thing as pragmatist metaphysics. Cf. Sami Pihlström, *Pragmatist Metaphysics: An Essay on the Ethical Grounds of Ontology* (London: Continuum, 2009). This paper does not argue for the possibility of such metaphysics but investigates a fundamental problem *within* it, not adequately dealt with in the just mentioned book.

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For a comprehensive discussion of the realism issue in the pragmatist tradition up to mid-1990s, see Sami Pihlström, *Structuring the World: The Issue of Realism and the Nature of Ontological Problems in Classical and Contemporary Pragmatism*, Acta Philosophica Fennica 59 (Helsinki: The Philosophical Society of Finland, 1996).

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I will simply speak about *scheme-(in)dependence*, instead of, say, *mind-(in)dependence*, prac-



(in)dependent but is dependent or independent only in a given context, or from a specific perspective, rather than from an imagined God's-Eye View. Thus, pragmatists should not deny the scheme-dependence vs. scheme-independence *distinction* (understood as contextualizable) but only the corresponding *dichotomy* or dualism (understood as absolute, non-perspectival, uncontextualizable).⁶ One may, in other words, maintain the former by redescribing it through practice-relative contextualization.

However, the contexts (or perspectives) invoked here can also be regarded as “entities” that themselves need to be contextualized in order to be identifiable as contexts at all. (This follows from our extremely broad notion of an entity.) A context *C* is “real”, and contextualizes the scheme-(in)dependence of certain entities (*a*, *b*), only within a further context *C'*, and so on (*ad infinitum*). Not even the contextualization – and, hence, the contextual validation – of the distinction between scheme-dependence and scheme-independence is non-contextual or absolute (or absolutely scheme-independent). It is in and through our schemes, which describe the contexts we are able to work within in given situations, that we determine the contexts within which things can be scheme-dependent or scheme-independent. This process of contextualization is indefinitely long, as any reflexive process potentially is. The “situations” we are “in”, giving rise to certain contexts of thought and inquiry, can themselves, again, be only contextually identified as such. Moreover, “we” are whatever we are only in certain contexts we find ourselves in. I am not even assuming that we would have a context-independent identity – even though the contexts we may be in depend on us and thus on our contextually emerging identities.

The contextualization I am trying to articulate amounts to a kind of pragmatic “naturalization” of Kantian transcendental idealism.⁷ Given the kind of creatures we (context-embeddedly) are, we are fully naturally situated within context-dependent and context-creating practices (or what Wittgenstein called “forms of life”)⁸ that constitute (again contextual) transcendental conditions for the possibility of various things we assume to be actual in our lives, such as cognitive experience or meaningful language. These practices contain “relative a priori” conditions that structure our ways of experiencing reality, that is, contextualized transcendental conditions for certain given human actualities. The key observation here is that this pragmatic, naturalized view is transcendently idealistic in the sense of emphasizing the transcendental role played by our natural practices of coping with the world, that is, in the sense of acknowledging the dependence of not just social reality but the natural, worldly objects surrounding us on our specifically human, context-laden ways of representing them from standpoints lying within our practices, within contextually situated points of view embedded in those practices.

While I just said that contexts are “entities”, given a broad understanding of “entity”, it is very important to acknowledge their specific way of being. Contextuality is *generality*; contexts are, though perhaps entities, certainly not particulars. Instead, they are what enables us to ontologically postulate and individuate particulars or any other entities, for that matter (that is, to make any ontological commitments, to engage in ontological categorization at all). In Peircean terms, contexts are *real* (but do not themselves “exist” in the way particular entities do).⁹ Contexts, in the relevant sense invoked here, are comparable to standpoints or points of view enabling us to “see” the world in certain ways – making certain (kinds of) entities ontologically “visible” to us. Contexts provide frameworks within which things (entities) can exist

and/or be real, and within which they can be mind- and/or scheme-dependent or -independent. It is perhaps better to talk about contextualizing as an on-going human activity instead of postulating contexts as entities, after all; as such activities, however, they are what Peirce called “real generals”.

However, the transcendental scheme-independence that I am describing in terms of the notion of contextuality must not, as Robert Hanna points out (more explicitly in connection with Kant scholarship), be understood as dependence on human biology or dependence on social consensus, but instead as the dependence of the empirical world “on the existence of the special finite sensory, discursive, and rational cognitive architecture that defines us as minded creatures”¹⁰ – that is, on the existence of the special kind of cognitive practices we human beings naturally engage in, practices providing us with the relevant contexts for constituting whatever entities there are, or can be, in a world experienceable by us. The key Kantian-cum-pragmatic “facts” about us and our “cognitive architecture”, facts defining our finiteness and practice-embeddedness, are truly natural facts, though they at the same time play the role of transcendental facts, comparable to what may in the Kantian framework be called “transcendental facts” about the irreducible difference between intuitions and concepts, about there being exactly two forms of sensible intuition and twelve categories, about the spontaneous synthesizing power of imagination, about the original synthetic unity of apperception, about the outer affection on our sensibility of the mind-independent causal

tice-(in)dependence, language-(in)dependence, or categorization-(in)dependence, just in order to stick to a uniform terminology. Individual thinkers may use different expressions here. Also, I will speak about *entities*, intending this as an extremely broad ontological category ranging over such sub-categories as particulars (individuals), properties (whether universals or tropes), processes, or even states of affairs. Nothing serious regarding the realism issue I am examining depends on these terminological choices.

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On the distinction between a (mere) distinction and a (harmful) dichotomy, see Hilary Putnam, *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2002).

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See, for further elaboration, Sami Pihlström, *Naturalizing the Transcendental: A Pragmatic View* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus/Humanity Books, 2003); and “The Problem of Realism from a Pragmatist Point of View”, forthcoming in Roberto Frega (ed.), *Pragmatist Epistemologies* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books / Rowman & Littlefield, 2011).

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See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe and Denis Paul (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1969). The purpose of this paper is not to explore this or any other Wittgensteinian concept, though. I am

referring to the notion of a form of life only to emphasize that our contextualizing activities are perfectly *natural* for us given the kind of life we lead.

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When contextualization is examined in relation to the Peircean (and generally pragmatist) notion of habits of action, emphasizing the meta-level habit of self-critically transforming our habits, the link to Peircean realism about generality – the postulation of “real generals” that Peirce labelled “extreme scholastic realism” – is obvious. Relevant writings by Peirce on this topic range from his early (1871) Berkeley review to his late essays on pragmatism and pragmaticism (1905–1907), available in Charles S. Peirce, *The Essential Peirce*, 2 vols, The Peirce Edition Project (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992–1998). However, pragmatists should not interpret this form of realism in a metaphysically realistic manner but more constructivistically: we constitute generality (contextually, as suggested here). Yet, when subordinated to the kind of pragmatism I am proposing as a framework of any metaphysical inquiry, Peircean “real generals”, including contexts, *should* definitely be ontologically postulated – though, again, only contextually.

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Robert Hanna, *Kant and the Foundations of Analytic Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), p. 104.

source of experience, etc.¹¹ As Hanna argues, these facts about us are “*deep*”; they are constitutive and transcendental, not simply accidental or empirical, and they function as “ultimate explanatory starting points” for which no further reasons can be reasonably required.¹²

The reason I am invoking Hanna’s conception of transcendental facts here is that I want to propose a profound analogy between Kantian transcendental structures and the inevitable contextuality of any ontological postulations we are capable of. The fact that our ontologies are contextual – scheme-dependent – and the further fact that the distinctions between scheme-independence and scheme-dependence are always inevitably contextual as well are “transcendental facts” about us and our conceptual scheming. They cannot be further grounded or metaphysically explained by anything more fundamental – that is, with reference to anything non-contextual. Even *this* fact about the contextuality of the fact that the scheme-independence vs. scheme-dependence distinction is contextual is itself contextual, and so on, *ad infinitum*. In order to have any non-foundational bedrock in this threatening reflexive regress, we must be able to appeal to something like the transcendental facts Hanna emphasizes in his discussion of Kant’s transcendental idealism.

My picture of the contextuality of whatever there is, and the contextuality of drawing the distinction between what there is scheme-dependently and scheme-independently, is undeniably circular, but hardly viciously circular. Our world-constituting, contextual activity is both transcendental and empirical, both constitutive of the world and part of it. It is this circularity inherently present in any genuinely transcendental analysis of world-constitutivity that prevents my pragmatic, naturalized version of transcendental idealism from collapsing into a full-blown metaphysical idealism. The fact that there is such world-constitutive activity at all can, again, be described as a transcendental fact. Like all such facts about us, it is itself contextual, but there is nothing more fundamental than that (endless) contextuality itself that can ground this analysis of the transcendental features of our world-constitutive activities.

A critic might ask why we should employ the vocabulary of the “transcendental” here at all.¹³ Instead, the “naturalistic” requirement that our practice-embedded, contextual ways of experiencing and categorizing reality should be seen as fully natural may lead us to think that the pragmatically contextualist position I am sketching is closer to, say, evolutionary epistemology or other forms of naturalized epistemology – or even relativism or epistemological anarchism, as captured in Paul Feyerabend’s famous slogan, “Anything goes”¹⁴ – than anything like the Kantian transcendental critique of reason with its fixed and immutable categories. True, the pragmatist (or pragmatic contextualist) must give up the universalistic element of Kant’s transcendental philosophy: human experience, or our ontological categorizations of reality, lack the universal, immutable, and acontextual (non-relativized) structures that Kant saw as necessary. Whatever necessity there may be in our world-structuring, it is inevitably contextual, hence only relatively a priori. Certainly Kant himself did not endorse any contextualism like this. However, a touch of Kantian transcendentalism is maintained here, because it is only within a given context that we are able to experience or categorize reality in any meaningful manner. It is, thus, only within one or another such practice-embedded context that the world can *be* for us in any determinate way. There is a plurality of such contexts, and they may also change along with natural changes in our practices (in Wittgensteinian terms, again, along with changes in our forms

of life), but such changes can also be more or less rationally discussed and critically examined. Insofar as contexts can, *qua* Peircean “real generals” (cf. above), be compared to the *habits of action* Peirce and other pragmatists saw as fundamental to our being in the world generally – especially to our believing anything to be the case about the world – it is most important to observe that contextualization can and should be continuously reflexively examined and criticized. The habit of self-critically transforming our habits of action is a vital habit, and contextualization similarly needs to be placed in further contexts enabling critical reflection.

Accordingly, no Feyerabendian anarchism or radical relativism follows from pragmatic contextualism. Nor is our contextual world-categorizing reduced to evolutionary survival of the “fittest” schemes or vocabularies. Our schemes and contexts do evolve in the course of human history, but their evolving is much more than the mere biological development of our perceptual and classificatory capacities, and much more than the replacement of a worn-out “vocabulary” by a new one.¹⁵ The pragmatic contextualist, while endorsing naturalism, must bear in mind that human world-categorization is a culturally transmitted, self-reflective habit of action, and that continuous critical reflection, at a normative level, on how such categorization ought to be further developed (within relevant contexts) is part and parcel of that categorization itself.¹⁶

One interesting application of these issues is the recent pragmatist discussion of the “fact-value entanglement”. Fact and value, according to both classical (e.g., James’ and Dewey’s) and more recent (e.g., Putnam’s) pragmatism, are not sharply distinguishable but deeply entangled. In James’ memorable words, values “form the background for all our facts, the fountain-head of all the possibilities we conceive of”.¹⁷ Putnam’s more recent pragmatism maintains that values are inextricably entangled with the ordinary, natural facts we find ourselves immersed in.¹⁸ If there is any distinction between fact and

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Ibid., p. 118. Note, however, that Kant himself does not call these (or anything else) “transcendental facts”. I am employing Hanna’s in my view useful terminology, without claiming to faithfully interpret Kant’s original views in any manner whatsoever.

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Ibid., pp. 117–118.

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I am here briefly responding to some highly useful questions posed by an anonymous referee.

14
See Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method* (London: Verso, 1993; 1st ed. 1975).

15
Rorty’s neopragmatist way of understanding conceptual development in terms of causal clashes of vocabularies – a version of the survival of the fittest – is too reductive from the perspective of the kind of pragmatism I am trying to develop. See, e.g., Richard Rorty, *Truth and Progress* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

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For further reflections on this reflexive structure of naturalized and pragmatic transcendental philosophy, see Pihlström, *Naturalizing the Transcendental*, as well as Pihlström, *Pragmatist Metaphysics*.

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William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), eds. Frederick H. Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers, and Ignas K. Skrupskelis (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 53; also quoted in Michael R. Slater, “Pragmatism, Realism, and Religion”, *Journal of Religious Ethics* 36 (2008), pp. 653–681 (see p. 675).

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See especially Putnam, *Realism with a Human Face* (cited above). Putnam’s reasoning here can be reconstructed as a pragmatic transcendental argument (cf. Pihlström, *Naturalizing the Transcendental*, ch. 7). See the brief discussion in the previous section on the possibility of interpreting pragmatism as a (naturalized) form of transcendental philosophy.

value at all, it is inevitably fuzzy and contextual.¹⁹ However, on the basis of what has been suggested about the contextuality of the scheme-dependence vs. scheme-independence distinction above, we may argue that fact and value are also contextually distinguishable – but even then only in further contexts that specify criteria for distinguishing them. Hence, our ways of contextually distinguishing between fact and value are themselves value-laden, dependent on valuational schemes. Fact and value, therefore, are not absolutely distinguishable, or distinct from a transcendent perspective (which we finite human beings lack). Their entanglement, we may say, is a further transcendental condition for our being able to experience, categorize, and represent the (again only contextually identifiable) entities that we postulate in the world around us. The fact that our world is deeply structured by our values is, again, a transcendental fact about humanly possible ways of experiencing reality. While being, again, relatively far removed from Kant's original transcendental theory of the necessary conditions for possible experience, the pragmatic fact-value entanglement plays an analogous role in setting up and constraining the framework(s) that are needed for the kind of human world-categorization we are familiar with to be so much as possible.

Analogously to Richard Rorty's controversial proposal that the question of how exactly the relation between ontology and "cultural politics" ought to be construed is itself a cultural-political question,²⁰ we might now suggest that the question of how exactly the fact-value entanglement and/or distinguishability ought to be philosophically settled is itself a question that can only be adequately approached within a valuational context. There is no purely factual – e.g., scientific – way to settle this issue independently of valuational considerations. Thus, the specific ways of drawing this distinction, or avoiding it, are themselves dependent on our values. It is, therefore, always already a valuational issue whether there are any purely factual issues to be distinguished from valuational ones. Even to claim that there are such non-valuational matters would be a valuationally relevant move (and admittedly this *is* a move we should make in certain humanly valuable contexts, especially scientific ones).²¹

3. An infinite regress?

Does the view I have described and recommended lead to an infinite regress? This is a serious question, but upon reflection it should be answered negatively. Rather, the result is just a potentially *indefinite* reflexive inquiry into the ways in which we draw and use distinctions in the contexts we continuously construct for ourselves. What our contexts *are* is, again, itself a contextual matter. In this sense, pragmatic contextualism – the version of pragmatism I have tried to tentatively develop above – is a version of Kantian transcendental idealism, without sacrificing empirical (scheme-internal) realism any more dangerously than Kant himself did. Alternatively, this might be regarded as a form of Putnam's internal realism, albeit one not committed to the notorious epistemic "idealization" theory of truth Putnam still maintained in his internal realist period.²²

However, we need to consider the *metaphilosophical* status of our contextuality thesis. It can hardly be regarded as an empirical, factual, and contingent truth about the ways things happen to be in the world. Nor can it be an absolute, non-contextual truth in the sense of supposed metaphysical truths traditionally put forward by philosophers. It would also be hard to believe that it

could be a conceptually necessary truth, or necessary in the way in which, say, logical and mathematical truths are necessary (whatever we ultimately mean by the necessity of logic or mathematics – this is not a topic of the present paper). Pragmatic contextualism should somehow combine (relative) necessity, in a (quasi-)transcendental sense, with non-absoluteness and reflexive contextuality. What we have here is only necessity in a context, relativized to a certain use of concepts, a certain practice-laden way of viewing the world. Pragmatic contextualism is a truth – or at least a reasonable philosophical conviction – emerging from our continuous reflections on our use of concepts to structure the world.²³ If it is “made true” by anything, it is made true by our contextualizing inquiries into the very contextuality of ontology, not by anything “ready-made” in the world itself taken to be independent of contexts.²⁴ The metaphilosophical status of the contextuality thesis might be compared to the status of such controversial philosophical theses as the Wittgensteinian one about the impossibility of a private language. Just as we may see Wittgenstein as arguing²⁵ that, necessarily, language is a public human phenomenon, insofar as there can be any linguistic meaning at all, we may see the pragmatic contextualist as arguing that, necessarily, any entities there can be for us are identified within, and hence exist – as the kind of entities they are – only relative to, one or another context of categorization and inquiry. Like the Wittgensteinian impossibility of a private language (or, say, the impossibility of disembodied agency, also sometimes transcendently defended, for instance in the phenomenological tradition), the impossibility of non-contextual identification of objects, or of any absolute scheme-independence, is

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Cf. Putnam, *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy*; and, *Ethics without Ontology* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2004).

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Richard Rorty, *Philosophy as Cultural Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), especially p. 5. I do not recommend the pragmatist to endorse Rorty’s reduction of philosophy to cultural politics!

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The fact-value entanglement, as a case illustrating the pragmatist metaphysician’s concerns with contextualization, is more comprehensively discussed in Sami Pihlström, “Toward a Pragmatically Naturalist Metaphysics of the Fact-Value Entanglement: Emergence or Continuity?”, *Journal of Philosophical Research* 35 (2010), pp. 323–352.

22

For Putnam’s rejection of the internal realist (epistemic) theory of truth, see Hilary Putnam, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999). For discussions of Putnam’s struggle with realism and pragmatism, see Pihlström, *Structuring the World and Pragmatist Metaphysics* (cited above).

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The Wittgensteinian background of this formulation should, once again, be obvious. For

some discussion of the possibility of integrating pragmatism and late-Wittgensteinian philosophical methodology, see Sami Pihlström, “Shared Language, Transcendental Listeners, and the Problem of Limits”, in Sami Pihlström (ed.), *Wittgenstein and the Method of Philosophy*, Acta Philosophica Fennica 80 (Helsinki: The Philosophical Society of Finland, 2006). I do not want to take any stand on the question of whether it is meaningful at all (either in a Wittgensteinian or, say, Jamesian pragmatist context) to speak about the “truth” of such philosophical or metaphilosophical theses as pragmatic contextualism.

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On the concept of truthmaking in metaphysics, see D. M. Armstrong, *Truth and Truthmakers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); for a pragmatic critique, see Pihlström, *Pragmatist Metaphysics*, ch. 2.

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Here, I cannot discuss the hotly debated question of whether we may take Wittgenstein to be arguing at all, or committing himself to any philosophical theses, in the *Philosophical Investigations* or elsewhere. For a lucid critical discussion, see Thomas Wallgren, *Transformative Philosophy: Socrates, Wittgenstein, and the Democratic Spirit of Philosophy* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books [Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group], 2006).

a transcendental necessity, yet (again) only a contextual one, itself depending on the kind of beings we are (according to the schemes or contexts that we contingently, revisably, and fallibly employ), thus a necessity only in a relativized and not an absolute sense. So are its specific versions, such as the fact-value entanglement: valuation provides one central context within which things and facts may be real for us – or, better, different valuational schemes provide different contexts for identifying things and their relations to each other – and it is (humanly speaking, contextually) necessary that all facts are value-laden. That is, the Putnamian thesis of the fact-value entanglement (see above) is not just a thesis about the ways things contingently are in the world; it is not just a thesis according to which fact and value happen to be entangled. Rather, it is a pragmatic transcendental, and therefore metaphysical, thesis about the ways things necessarily are for us. Without a valuational context, there could be no things – no facts – at all for us. As always, a transcendental philosophical claim, however pragmatic, here expresses a *conditional necessity*: something (valuational schemes) is regarded as a necessary condition for the very possibility of something else we take for granted (such as there being factual things and states of affairs identifiable by us).

Contextuality, furthermore, is a kind of *contingency*: the way the dependence vs. independence distinction is drawn depends on the context we are working in. However, this contingency, I have argued, is (transcendentally) *necessary* – just like, for instance, the facts that any meaningful language is public (as Wittgenstein reminds us) or that human cognition and consciousness are embodied (as phenomenologists like Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jean-Paul Sartre used to argue). Moreover, this necessity is itself contingent at a meta-level: these transcendental reflections are valid only within a human world, our “form of life”. Whether *this* meta-level contingency is itself in some sense necessary, or necessarily contingent, I must leave for others to reflect upon.

What these reflexive reflections indicate, in any case, is that an adequate investigation of any pragmatist metaphysics of the contextuality of scheme-(in)dependence, and hence of the empirical vs. transcendental distinction that I relied on above (and *its* contextuality), requires a dynamic integration of pragmatic and transcendental approaches.²⁶ More specific problems concerning, say, the fact-value entanglement – for example, whether this intertwining is best understood as a matter of, say, emergence or continuity²⁷ – can fruitfully be posed (perhaps only) against such a background. Indeed, specific investigations of, say, the different versions of the contextualization thesis based upon different ontological dependence relations are needed.²⁸

4. Concluding remarks (and some final worries)

My main argument for the contextualizing maneuver I have suggested is, though transcendental in the sense of invoking contextualization as a necessary condition for the possibility of any ontological postulation and individuation we are capable of, also pragmatic (and, hence, itself contextualized into a specific situation in pragmatist philosophical inquiry, though having broader relevance not restricted to pragmatism). This contextualization enables us to maintain both empirical realism and the transcendental-level pragmatic construction of entities that I take to be deeply analogous to Kantian transcendental idealism. This is the pragmatic “cash value” of my proposal. Hence, my strategy, I hope, pragmatically “works”.

It might be asked whether the distinction between subject and object, or subjectivity and objectivity, can be maintained in any form in the pragmatic contextualism I have defended. After all, preserving this distinction might seem necessary, as contextualization must presumably be “done” by someone – that is, the subject, or perhaps something like Kant’s (and other transcendental philosophers’) transcendental ego or transcendental subjectivity. Once again, we should understand the present position as softening some of the conceptual boundaries that were taken to be rigid and absolute in Kant’s system of transcendental philosophy. Just as nothing is, for us, absolutely scheme-independent, but only contextually so, we should also maintain the distinction between subject(ivity) and object(ivity) in a context-relative and thus scheme-dependent sense. Contextualization hence again functions at the meta-level. We do, pragmatically and contextually, need the subject-object distinction (it does have its “cash value”, too), but we can definitely give it up as a sharp dichotomy, let alone a foundationalist principle of metaphysical or epistemological dualism. We must occasionally view ourselves as natural objects in the world, but we must also be able to switch into another perspective – another context – and view ourselves as the very origins of any perspectives or contexts (any kind of “world-viewing”) there may be. We are never *mere* objects in nature, but, given the kind of beings we naturally are, we are definitely also able to contextualize our own ontological status so that we can also see ourselves as objects in nature, too. In critically reflecting and weighing, at a philosophical meta-level, those different contexts and their practical purposes we are... well, something like transcendental subjects?²⁹ At least we may say that our task of self-reflection – a task both intellectual and ethical – as beings capable of contextual world-categorization is endless, or infinitely deep, as we may always open up new critical perspectives on the ways we categorize reality, and on the contexts we employ for that purpose.

We should, finally, consider the reflexive question of whether the position developed here is coherent. My worry is *not* that the pragmatic contextualist embraces a “mystifying” constructivism;³⁰ rather, what is known as (Kantian) constructivism is demystified and made plausible by explicating it in terms of pragmatic contextualism and transcendental pragmatism. My worry, rather, is that the pragmatic contextualist might need a stronger form of *modal realism* than her/his position can deliver. The *pragmatic method* – the contextualizing method of examining ideas/concept(ion)s in terms of their *potential/conceivable* practical effects³¹ – arguably presupposes real modalities, and so does

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This is further defended in Pihlström, *Naturalizing the Transcendental* (cited above).

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See Pihlström, “Toward a Pragmatically Naturalist Metaphysics of the Fact-Value Entanglement” (cited above).

28

See again Lowe, *A Four-Category Ontology* (cited above). Notably, however, most of the work on ontological dependence relations, including Lowe’s, has been strongly metaphysically realist and is therefore only of limited use to the kind of transcendental pragmatist I am here imagining as a potential advocate of the contextualization thesis.

29

At this point, I am indebted to David Carr’s analysis of the “paradox of subjectivity” – our need to understand ourselves as both subjects to whom the world is given and as natural objects in the world – developed in Carr, *The Paradox of Subjectivity: The Self in the Transcendental Tradition* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

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See, e.g., Michael Devitt, *Realism and Truth*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

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Cf. the classical formulation of the pragmatic method in Charles Peirce, “How to Make Our Ideas Clear” (1878), in *The Essential Peirce*, vol. 1.

the transcendental method of investigating necessary conditions for the possibility of given phenomena. Can these necessities and possibilities themselves be “merely contextual”, if pragmatic contextuality itself presupposes them?

This is no problem for Peirce (pragmatism needs “real generals”), but it may be a problem for other pragmatists, old and new. The pragmatic method (which I have not analyzed in this paper in any detail) is needed for identifying and reidentifying contexts in terms of habits of action (see above). So I am afraid I must end with an open question, instead of any definite conclusion: it seems that a tension between (particularly modal) realism and anti-realism remains in pragmatist metaphysics even after my contextualizing proposal.

Even so, the significance of these reflections for pragmatist metaphysics and for the entire post-Kantian literature on the “dependence” of things on the transcendental (yet revisable) schemes (etc.) through which we identify them, and on our transcendental subjectivity, should be obvious. The pragmatist tradition contributes to the Kantian tradition precisely by turning the dependence and contextuality at issue here into something thoroughly pragmatic. It thereby also succeeds in turning our inquiries into that kind of dependence or contextuality more fully reflexive than the original Kantian transcendental inquiry (whose key characteristic already is the reflexivity of reason-use). It is (only) in and through our contextualizing inquiries themselves that the contextuality of any ontological postulations, including our own status as subjects of inquirers and contextualizers, can be philosophically examined.³²

Sami Pihlström

Kontekstualnost shematske (ne)uvjetovanosti u pragmatičkoj metafizici

Sažetak

Ovaj članak razmatra modernu, posebice pragmatičku, varijantu kantovskog problema umske ili shematske uvjetovanosti ontologije. Tvrdi se da je razlika između shematske uvjetovanosti i shematske neuvjetovanosti u (pragmatičkoj) transcendentalnoj metafizici kontekstualna, ne apsolutna, i da je takva kontekstualnost »transcendentalna činjenica« o našim praksom prožetim svjetovnim djelatnostima.

Ključne riječi

pragmatizam, ontologija, metafizika, realizam, konceptualne sheme, transcendentalni idealizam, konteksti, kontekstualizam

Sami Pihlström

Die Kontextualität der Schema(un)abhängigkeit in der pragmatischen Metaphysik

Zusammenfassung

Das Paper erwägt eine moderne, vornehmlich pragmatische Variante der kantischen Fragestellung hinsichtlich der Verstandes- und Schemaabhängigkeit der Ontologie. Man lässt darauf schließen, die Distinktion zwischen der Schemaabhängigkeit und –unabhängigkeit in der (pragmatischen) transzendentalen Metaphysik sei an sich kontextuell, nicht absolut, bzw. eine solche Kontextualität sei ein „transzendentes Faktum“ über unsere praxisverwobenen weltbildenden Aktivitäten.

Schlüsselwörter

Pragmatismus, Ontologie, Metaphysik, Realismus, konzeptuelle Schemas, transzendentaler Idealismus, Kontexte, Kontextualismus

Sami Pihlström

La contextualité de l'(in)dépendance schématique
dans la métaphysique pragmatique

Résumé

Cet article traite de la variante moderne, notamment pragmatique, du problème kantien de la dépendance de l'ontologie de la raison et des schèmes. Il est suggéré que la distinction entre la dépendance et l'indépendance schématique dans la métaphysique transcendantale (pragmatique) est elle-même contextuelle, pas absolue, et que cette contextualité est un « fait transcendantal » concernant nos activités constitutives du monde ancrées dans la pratique.

Mots-clés

Pragmatisme, ontologie, métaphysique, réalisme, schèmes conceptuels, idéalisme transcendantal, contextes, contextualisme