Sami Pihlström

# Pragmatic Realism, Religious Truth, and Antitheodicy

## On Viewing the World by Acknowledging the Other

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# Preface

In this book, I will argue that a pragmatist approach to the realism issue in the philosophy of religion—and more generally—is highly relevant to a novel critical reassessment of the theodicy discourse addressing the problem of evil and suffering. In a number of previous publications, I have examined the problem of realism from a pragmatist perspective (already since my early work in the 1990s) as well as the problem of evil and suffering in the philosophy of religion (especially in my more recent work in the 2010s), and this volume will bring these two topics together in a novel way. I hope to show how, perhaps somewhat surprisingly, they are actually closely related and how pragmatism may be helpful in navigating the philosophical thicket of these complex discourses.

I have investigated the problem of evil and suffering in some of my recent books (see especially Pihlström 2014b; Kivistö & Pihlström 2016), and because those works also develop a pragmatist approach to this issue, some ideas and arguments will inevitably be repeated in the present volume. However, the close link between the problems of realism and truth, on the one hand, and evil and suffering, on the other hand, has (as far as I know) never been studied in any comprehensive manner, and the most important novelty of the present undertaking is my proposed pragmatist approach to this entanglement of those fundamental philosophical issues.

Traditionally, theodicies attempt to show how, or why, an omnipotent, omniscient, and absolutely good God might allow the world to contain apparently meaningless horrible evil and suffering. However, theodicies can also be

formulated in secular contexts, as will also be explained in the book. In addition to developing a pragmatist account of religious and theological beliefs and language use, including the concept of truth applicable in these areas, this book firmly defends *antitheodicism* as an ethically motivated approach to the problem of evil and suffering, seeking to refute all theodicist attempts to force human beings' experiences of meaningless suffering (or the sincere communication of such experiences) into grand narratives of alleged meaningfulness or purposiveness.[1] Thus, I will argue for a pragmatic form of religious and theological realism as well as a pragmatist understanding of antitheodicism as a presupposition for morally serious engagement in religion and theology genuinely seeking to recognize others' experiences (of suffering) as something irreducible to our own attempts to view the world as meaningful. Fundamental issues concerning religious diversity as well as the ethical acknowledgment of otherness and perspectivalness more generally will thereby also be addressed in what follows.

The most significant and (I hope) original philosophical suggestion of the present volume is, as already remarked, the argument that the theodicy issue and the problem of realism are thoroughly entangled, or even inseparable. It is precisely from the standpoint of *metaphysical realism* that theodicies seeking to justify apparently meaningless suffering (as something that is morally and metaphysically meaningful, after all) arise—with all their ethically problematic tendencies to instrumentalize others' suffering in the service of some alleged overall good.[2] The individual perspective of the sufferer, or the victim of evil, tends to be non- or misrecognized when one begins from a 'God's-Eye View' metaphysical realism postulating a pre-fixed ontological—and ethical—structure of the world in general. As some recent contributors to the problem of evil (particularly Susan Neiman in her 2002 book, *Evil in Modern Thought*, but also others) have argued, the problem of evil is in the end a problem concerning the comprehensibility of the world in general. It is therefore not merely a problem to be addressed by the theist, or to be used in an evidential role in the theism vs. atheism controversy; it concerns everyone engaging in serious thought about the moral and existential meaningfulness (vs. meaninglessness) of our lives. It is a problem concerning *the way(s) we view the world*. Therefore, the metaphysically realistic background assumptions of theodicist thinking need to be exposed to thoroughgoing critical assessment, and this can be best done by developing a pragmatist philosophical methodology and applying it to a critical inquiry into both realism and theodicism.

Unlike some of my earlier contributions to pragmatist philosophy of religion, this book will not provide any historical overview of the pragmatist tradition, but it will employ ideas drawn from William James's and other pragmatists' work to critically evaluate the current discussions of both realism and theodicies. In addition to James, the other major philosophical classics to be discussed include Immanuel Kant (who is obviously a key background figure for pragmatism and antitheodicism alike) as well as Ludwig Wittgenstein and (in this context somewhat more marginally) Emmanuel Levinas.

My book is, I think, both specific and very broad. It addresses a carefully chosen specific topic, i.e., the way in which the (hitherto largely unnoticed) link between theodicism and metaphysical realism can be critically examined from a pragmatist perspective. At the same time, it is broad in the sense of offering pragmatist insights into the general issue of realism, building upon the results of decades of extensive work in this area. The book also shows the practical, human, and existential relevance of apparently very theoretical and abstract issues in the philosophy of religion.[3] It refuses to make any artificial distinction between theory and practice; instead, it argues that attempts to defend the theodicy discourse from antitheodicist criticisms by claiming that theodicies are merely theoretical are themselves ethically problematic, failing to recognize the ethical need to avoid excessive theorization when it comes to reacting to others' suffering.

The book aims at taking very seriously our need to recognize the genuine otherness of other human beings, especially their experiences of suffering. It goes without saying that humanly fundamental topics such as evil and suffering need further philosophical analysis and reflection, and this book provides a new perspective on these matters. It also reminds us that theodicies have secular variants that are highly significant in contemporary culture and ought to be subjected to serious critical examination. Finally, the book also shows why (and how) ethics and metaphysics, often thought to be entirely distinct areas of philosophical inquiry, are deeply entangled, both generally (especially from a pragmatist perspective) and more specifically in the context of the philosophy of religion and especially the problem of evil and suffering.[4]

The plan of the book is roughly as follows. The introduction will first offer a general account of pragmatism as a promising approach to the philosophy of religion, both epistemically and ethically or existentially; the latter kind of 'promise' is shown to be fundamentally linked with the need to address the problem of evil and suffering. Chapter 1, the first substantial chapter of the book, then introduces the problem of realism both generally and in theology and the philosophy of religion. It also tentatively formulates a pragmatist approach to this problem, suggesting how pragmatism ought to be applied to examining realism in its various dimensions, and articulating a preliminary pragmatic network of interrelated concepts, such as recognition, objectivity, and inquiry. Chapter 2 then develops the pragmatist approach to realism in some more detail, arguing for a complex reflexive picture of the way in which the world, or any set of objects, facts, or situations we encounter in it, must be regarded as *both* dependent on the pragmatically developed schemes through which we approach and interpret reality *and* contextually independent of any human thought and inquiry. Thus, the chapter defends pragmatic realism as a critical synthesis of realism and pragmatism, rejecting the 'ready-made world' of metaphysical realism, while also abandoning antirealist or relativist distortions of pragmatism. The first two main chapters thus articulate a general pragmatically realist position whose relevance to the philosophy of religion is

(I claim) considerable. They do so in broad strokes, preparing the ground for the more focused chapters that follow.

Chapter 3 shows how the form of pragmatism developed and defended in the first two chapters is to a large extent based on Kantian critical philosophy. I argue that the pragmatist ought to recognize their Kantian roots (while not subscribing to all the details of the Kantian system, of course), especially regarding theodicies and antitheodicism. The basic methodology of pragmatist inquiries into realism, truth, and suffering—into how we ought to view the world, especially in relation to others—is, I suggest, the critical (transcendental) method. Continuing in this pragmatist Kantian vein, Chapter 4 starts from acknowledging the significance of the problem of realism, and especially of truth, to the currently widely relevant issue of religious diversity, moving on to a pragmatist discussion of truth focusing on the relation between truth and truthfulness and the ethical aspects of our pursuit of religious truth, including the truth of sincere attempts to communicate experiences of suffering (in contexts of religious diversity). It is a core chapter in the book in the sense that it also makes the deep, albeit often implicit, connection between metaphysical realism and theodicism explicit. My joint criticism of both of these unfortunate ideas is formulated in this chapter, building on the kind of pragmatism outlined in the earlier chapters. Metaphysical realism is, I suggest, one of the most problematic presuppositions of theodicies. Chapters 3–4 thus constitute a unified argument, on pragmatist-cum-Kantian grounds, against the metaphysically realist background assumptions of theodicism.

Chapter 5 introduces Wittgenstein and Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion into this discussion. As one of the key varieties of antitheodicist thought in recent philosophy of religion has been based on the Wittgensteinian movement in this field, it is important to consider this approach—also in relation to pragmatism—again both in the context of the theodicy vs. antitheodicy discussion and in the context of the realism issue. Like pragmatists, Wittgensteinians such as D.Z. Phillips reject both metaphysical realism and theodicism. Therefore, their ideas may be critically compared to the pragmatists'. The chapter includes an analysis of Wittgenstein's own views on harmony and happiness, which I argue to be problematic in the context of Wittgensteinian antitheodicism. The final substantial Chapter 6 argues that theory and practice are inherently entangled in the antitheodicist criticism of theodicies (and metaphysical realism). Accordingly, all sharp theory vs. practice dichotomies are themselves problematic from a pragmatist perspective. Chapter 6 and the brief concluding chapter following it explore, among other things, Primo Levi's antitheodicism (as a case study of acknowledgment) as well as the fundamental problem of meaningful vs. meaningless life—something that any pragmatist analysis of issues in the philosophy of religion ought to take seriously.

Given the number of topics to be brought into the discussion, this might sound like an argument running the risk of losing its guiding principles or its unifying thread of thought. However, I do think—and this, again, I see as the

true novelty of the book—that the problem of evil and suffering is fundamentally a problem concerning the appropriate way(s) of seeing our place in the world, as finite and limited human beings. In this sense, the book deals with our ethical task of 'see[ing] the world aright' (to quote the closing remarks of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, §6.54; see also Kivistö & Pihlström 2016: chapter 6). As such, the conflict between theodicism and antitheodicism is crucially hooked up with basic philosophical issues regarding (metaphysical) realism and truth, especially in the context of philosophy of religion. I will try to make this connection as clear as possible in the chapters that follow.

# Acknowledgments

Early versions of some of this material appear as parts of articles in *Pragmatism Today*, *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, *Nordic Studies in Pragmatism*, *Religions*, *Philosophical Investigations*, *Phänomenologische Forschungen*, *Human Affairs*, as well as some edited volumes, such as *Pragmatist Epistemologies* (ed. Roberto Frega, Lexington 2011), *Action, Belief, and Inquiry* (ed. Ulf Zackariasson, Nordic Pragmatism Network, 2015), *Pragmatist Kant* (eds. Krzysztof Skowronski and Sami Pihlström, Nordic Pragmatism Network, 2019), *Wittgenstein and the Limits of Language* (ed. Hanne Appelqvist, Routledge, 2019), *Religious Truth and Identity in an Age of Pluralism* (eds. Peter Jonkers and Oliver J. Wiertz, Routledge, 2019), and *Recognition: Its Theory and Practice* (eds. Heikki J. Koskinen et al., forthcoming) (see Pihlström 2011b, 2013b, 2014a, 2015b, 2017, 2018, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c, 2019d, 2019e, 2020a, 2020b; Kivistö & Pihlström 2017). Related papers have been presented at conferences and workshops in 2013–2019, at a number of academic institutions, in Helsinki, Tampere, Uppsala, Oslo, Aarhus, Frankfurt am Main, Tübingen, Berlin, Mainz, Münster, Trento, Bologna, Prague, New York, Boston, and Beijing. I am grateful to several international networks and institutions for these opportunities, including the American Academy of Religion, the European Academy of Religion, the World Congress of Philosophy, the European Society for the Philosophy of Religion, the Nordic Society for the Philosophy of Religion, the European Pragmatism Association, the Nordic Pragmatism Network, as well as, especially, the Academy of Finland Centre of Excellence, 'Reason

and Religious Recognition', hosted by the Faculty of Theology, University of Helsinki, within which I have been affiliated as one of its three team leaders in 2014–2019. Indeed, this book is my main work summarizing my modest contribution to that Centre of Excellence; as can be easily noticed, I loosely use the concept of recognition throughout the book, while not offering any systematic theory about it (in that regard I refer the reader to the work by my colleagues within the Centre).

The process of publishing this book with Helsinki University Press (HUP) has been smooth. I am grateful to Leena Kaakinen and Aino Rajala, as well as the HUP Academic Board and two anonymous reviewers, for constructive comments and efficient collaboration. Having always defended the significance of the monograph as a form of academic publishing in the humanities, I have been excited to work with HUP both in relation to my own book and as a recently appointed Board member, trying to do my own share in developing the practice of publishing open-access monographs. (Needless to say, I participated in no manner whatsoever in those HUP Board meetings in which my own book project was discussed.)

I have had the opportunity to discuss various aspects of the topic of this book over the years with a great number of colleagues, friends, and acquaintances, from whom I have learned immensely: Hanne Appelqvist, Akeel Bilgrami, Johannes Brachtendorff, Niek Brunsveld, Vincent Colapietro, Paolo Costa, Steven Crowell, Espen Dahl, Piergiorgio Donatelli, Dan-Johan Eklund, Russell B. Goodman, Judith Green, Hans-Peter Grosshans, Dirk-Martin Grube, Logi Gunnarsson, Leila Haaparanta, Jaana Hallamaa, Sara Heinämaa, Eberhard Herrmann, Lars Hertzberg, David Hildebrand, Ana Honnacker, Roomet Jakapi, Francis Jonbäck, Peter Jonkers, Matthias Jung, Jacquelynne Kegley, Simo Knuuttila, Leszek Koczanowicz, Timo Koistinen, Heikki J. Koskinen, Sandra Laugier, Sarin Marchetti, Joseph Margolis, Cheryl Misak, Marius Mjaaland, Werner Mooskopp, Yujin Nagasawa, Ilkka Niiniluoto, Martha Nussbaum, Ritva Palmén, John Durham Peters, John Pittard, Mikko Posti, Wayne Proudfoot, Panu-Matti Pöykkö, Tom Rockmore, Phillip Rossi, Henrik Rydenfelt, John Ryder, Boris Rähme, Risto Saarinen, Naoko Saito, Kevin Schilbrack, Magnus Schlette, Ulrich Schlösser, Thomas Schmidt, Christoph Schwöbel, Nadav Berman Shifman, John R. Shook, Chris Skowronski, Lauri Snellman, Friedrich Stadler, Paul Standish, Mikael Stenmark, Ken Stikkers, Kirill O. Thompson, Sigridur Thorgeirsdottir, Nick Trakakis, Olli-Pekka Vainio, the late Rein Vihalemm, Aku Visala, Emil Visnovsky, Åke Wahlberg, Kathleen Wallace, Thomas Wallgren, Niels Weidtmann, Ken Westphal, Oliver Wiertz, and Ulf Zackariasson, as well as a number of students of theology and philosophy who have attended my classes on pragmatism, realism, and the problem of evil and suffering, or my graduate and undergraduate seminars, at the Faculty of Theology, University of Helsinki, in 2016–2019. (If I accidentally forgot to mention someone, which is perfectly possible, I sincerely apologize!)

My greatest debt is, obviously, to Sari Kivistö, with whom the basic antitheodicist approach of my book has been jointly developed (see also Kivistö & Pihlström 2016, 2017; Pihlström & Kivistö 2019); my family, immediate and extended, plays a fundamental role in my on-going attempt to appreciate the depth of the philosophical issue of otherness.

Helsinki, December 2019
*Sami Pihlström*

# Introduction

## The Promise of Pragmatist Philosophy of Religion

Having already briefly outlined the contents of this volume in the preface, I will in this introductory chapter offer some critical remarks on why I think pragmatism is an increasingly important philosophical approach today—and, possibly, tomorrow—not only in philosophy generally but in a specific field such as the philosophy of religion in particular. I will try to provide *an* answer to this question by considering the special promise I see pragmatism as making in the study of religion. A more specific treatment of this promise, especially regarding the complex issues concerning the *objectivity* of religious belief, obviously entangled with questions concerning the *rationality* of religious belief, will be examined in Chapter 1 below. It is against this general background that my defense of pragmatic antitheodicism will unfold in the later chapters.

My discussion and defense of pragmatism in these pages will be partly based on my reading of and engagement with a broadly Jamesian pragmatic pluralism in the philosophy of religion, based on William James's ideas, with due recognition not only of the value of other pragmatists' (including John Dewey's and the neopragmatists') contributions but also of the crucial Kantian background of pragmatism (see Pihlström 2013a). Indeed, if one views pragmatism through Kantian spectacles, as I think we should (cf. Chapter 3, as well as some preliminary comments in this introduction below), the topics of realism, truth, and objectivity will become urgent; Kant, after all, was one of the key modern philosophers examining these notions, and we presumably owe more to him than we often are willing to admit.

We may, I suggest, identify two key 'promises' of pragmatism in the philosophy of religion. These are based on two different philosophical interests in the study of religion, which can be labeled the 'epistemic interest' and the 'existential interest'. The topics of realism, truth, and objectivity—to be explored more comprehensively in the chapters that follow—are fundamental with regard to both. Philosophy of religion could even be considered a test case for pragmatist views on these issues, because religion is often taken to be too personal and 'subjective' to be taken seriously by scientifically minded thinkers pursuing truth and objectivity. Pragmatists themselves are not innocent to this: as we recall, in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, James (1958 [1902]) proposed to study the subjective, experiential phenomena that people go through individually, thus arguably neglecting the more social dimensions of religious experience that Dewey emphasized in *A Common Faith* (Dewey 1991 [1934]).

First, it is extremely important, for a thinking person in a modern (or 'post-postmodern')[1] society largely based on scientific research and its various applications, to examine the perennial *epistemic* problem of the rationality (or irrationality) of religious belief. This problem arises from the—real or apparent—conflicts between science and religion, or reason and faith. It is obvious that this problem, or set of problems, crucially involves the notions of objectivity and truth: religious faith is often regarded as subjective, whereas scientific research and theory construction pursuing truth are objective. Therefore, typically, scientific atheists criticize religion for its lack of solid grounding, while defenders of religion may try to counter this critique by suggesting either that religious beliefs do have objective credentials, after all (e.g., traditionally and rather notoriously, in terms of the 'proofs' of God's existence, which would allegedly be objective enough for any rational inquirer to endorse), or that science is also 'subjective' in some specific sense, or at least more subjective than standard scientific realists would admit (e.g., as argued in various defenses of relativism or social constructivism). The notions of objectivity and rationality are of course distinct, but they are closely related in this area of inquiry in particular. It is precisely because of its pursuit of objectivity that the scientific method is generally regarded as 'rational', whereas religious ways of thinking might seem to be irrational because of their lack of objective testability, or might at least seem to require such testability in order to be accepted as rational.[2]

Here pragmatism can offer us a very interesting middle ground. As James argued in *Pragmatism* (1975 [1907]: Lectures I–II) and elsewhere, pragmatism is often a middle path option for those who do not want to give up either their scientific worldview or their possible religious sensibilities. Defending the pragmatist option in this area does not entail that one actually defends or embraces any particular religious views; what is at issue is the *potential philosophical legitimacy* of such views, which leaves room for either embracement or, ultimately, rejection. Thus, pragmatism clearly avoids both fundamentalist religious doctrines and equally fundamentalist and dogmatic (and anti-philosophical) versions of 'New Atheism', both of which seek a kind of 'super-objectivity'

that is not within our human reach, a kind of 'God's-Eye View'. By so doing, pragmatism in my view does not simply argue for the simplified idea that the 'rationality' of religious thought (if there is such a thing) might be some kind of practical rationality instead of theoretical rationality comparable to the rationality of scientific inquiry (because, allegedly, only the former would be available as the latter more objective kind of rationality would be lacking). On the contrary, pragmatism seeks to reconceptualize the very idea of rationality in terms of practice, and thereby it reconceptualizes the very ideas of truth and objectivity as well, as we will see in later chapters. Truth, objectivity, and rationality are then all understood as deeply *practice-embedded*: far from being neutral to human practices, they emerge through our reflective engagements in our practices.

We may formulate these suggestions in a manner familiar from the mainstream debates of contemporary philosophy of religion by saying that pragmatism proposes a middle path not just between reason and faith (or, analogously, objectivity and subjectivity) but between the positions known as *evidentialism* and *fideism*: according to my pragmatist proposal, we should not simply assess religious beliefs and ideas on the basis of religiously neutral, allegedly fully objective evidence (in the way we would at least attempt to assess our beliefs in science and everyday life), because we do need to understand religion as a very special set of engagements in purposive, interest-driven human practices or language games; on the other hand, nor should we, when rejecting the simplifying evidentialist categorization of religion as little more than poor science, step on a slippery slope ending at the other extreme of fideism, which advances faith in the absence of evidence or reason and consequently in the end hardly leaves any room for a critical rational discussion of religion at all—or any objectivity worth talking about.

We might say that pragmatism advances a liberal form of evidentialism, proposing to broaden the scope of evidence from the relatively narrowly conceived scientific evidence (which is something that religious beliefs generally, rather obviously, lack) to a richer conception of evidence as something that can be had, or may be lacking, in the 'laboratory of life'—to use Hilary Putnam's (1997a: 182–183) apt expression (cf. Brunsveld 2012: chapter 3). Thereby it also broadens the scope of objectivity in religion and theology: when speaking about objectivity in the science vs. religion debate, we cannot take the objectivity of the laboratory sciences as our paradigm. Different human practices may have their different standards for evidence, rationality, and objectivity. Pragmatism hence resurrects a reasonable—extended and enriched—form of evidentialism from the rather implausible, or even ridiculous, form it takes in strongly evidentialist thinkers' such as Richard Swinburne's theories, without succumbing to a pseudo-Wittgensteinian fideism, or naïve 'form of life' relativism (cf. Chapter 5). This is one way in which pragmatism seeks, or promises, to widen the concepts of rationality and objectivity themselves by taking seriously the embeddedness of all humanly possible reason use and inquiry in practices

or forms of life guided by human interests. To take this seriously is to take seriously the suggestion that in some cases a religious way of thinking and living may amount to a 'rational' response to certain life situations, even yielding a degree of practice-embedded objectivity.

It is extremely important to understand the extended notion of evidence and, hence, rationality and objectivity in a correct way here. What is decisive is a certain kind of sensitivity to the practical contexts within which it is (or is not) appropriate to ask for rationally assessible evidence for our beliefs. This sensitivity must, furthermore, be connected with a pragmatist understanding of beliefs as *habits of action*: the relevant kind of evidence, as well as its objectivity, is itself something based on our practices and hence inevitably interest driven. Evidence, or the need to seek and find evidence, may play importantly different roles in these different contexts; ignoring such context sensitivity only leads to inhuman pseudo-objectivity. Thus, the pragmatic question must always be how (or even whether) evidential considerations *work* and/or satisfy our needs and interests within relevant contexts of inquiry. Insofar as such contextuality is not taken into account, the notions of objectivity and evidence are disconnected from any genuine inquiry in the pragmatist sense. These notions, when pragmatically employed, always need to respond to specific problematic situations in order to play a role that makes a difference in our inquiries.[3]

In mediating between evidentialism and fideism and offering a liberalized version of evidentialism, pragmatism also, at its best, mediates between *realism and antirealism*, another dichotomy troubling contemporary philosophy of religion and preventing constructive engagement with the topic of pragmatic rationality and objectivity. The realism issue will be explored in some detail in Chapters 1 and 2, immediately following this introduction. Let me here just note that just as there is a pragmatic version of the notion of objective evidence available, in a context-sensitive manner, there is also a version of realism (about religion and/or theology, as well as more generally) that the pragmatist can develop and defend. Hence, pragmatism, far from rejecting realism, truth, and objectivity, reinterprets them in its dynamic and practice-focused manner.

Secondly, along with serving the epistemic interest in the philosophy of religion and the need to understand better the objectivity and rationality (vs. irrationality) of religious belief, it is at least equally important, or possibly even more important, to study the *existential* problem of how to live with (or without) religious views or a religious identity in a world in which there is so much evil and suffering. When dealing with this set of questions, we end up discussing serious and 'negative' concepts such as evil, guilt, sin, and death (see also Pihlström 2011a, 2014b, 2016). Here, I would like to follow James (1975 [1907]: Lecture VIII) in viewing pragmatism as proposing a fruitful form of *meliorism* reducible neither to naively optimistic views according to which the good will ultimately inevitably prevail nor to dark pessimism according to which everything will finally go down the road of destruction. It is as essential to mediate between these two unpromising 'existential' extremes as it is to mediate between

the epistemic extremes of evidentialism and fideism. And again, I would argue that such a project of mediation is rational—and, conversely, that it would therefore be pragmatically irrational to seek a fully 'rational', or better, rationalizing and thus in Jamesian terms 'viciously intellectualistic', response to the problem of evil. Accordingly, pragmatist meliorism must—as it certainly does in James's *Pragmatism*, for instance—take very seriously the irreducible reality of evil and unnecessary suffering. Pragmatism, in this sense, is a profoundly *antitheodicist* approach:[4] it is, or at least should be, sharply critical of all attempts to explain away the reality of evil, or to offer a rationalized theodicy allegedly justifying the presence of evil in the world. On the contrary, evil and suffering must be acknowledged, understood (if possible),[5] and fought against.

If the reality of evil must be acknowledged and understood for us to be able to take a serious ethical attitude to the suffering of other human beings, then we need to carefully inquire into, for instance, the historical incidents of evil (e.g., genocides and other atrocities) as well as the human psychological capacities for evil. From a pragmatist point of view, such rational inquiries serve a crucial ethical task even if their immediate purpose is to obtain objective scientific and/or scholarly knowledge about the relevant phenomena. For example, the various historical descriptions and interpretations of the Holocaust may be as objective as possible, humanly speaking, and at the same time implicitly embody strong value judgments ('this must never happen again'). The 'objective' psychological results concerning human beings' psychological capacities for performing atrocities, e.g., in conditions of extreme social pressure, can also embody a strong commitment to promoting the development of psychological and social forces countering such capacities.

Pragmatists, then, should join those antitheodicists who find it morally unacceptable or even obscene to ask for God's reasons for 'allowing', say, Auschwitz (whether or not they believe in God's reality). Pragmatism, when emphasizing the fight against evil and the moral duty of alleviating others' suffering, instead of theodicist speculations about the possible reasons God may have had for creating and maintaining a world in which there is evil and suffering, is also opposed to the currently popular 'skeptical theism', according to which our cognitive capacities are insufficient to reach the hidden ('objective') reasons for ('subjectively') apparently avoidable evil. Such speculations even about God's *possible* reasons for allowing evil, or about evil even possibly being a necessary part of a completely rational objective system of creation and world-order, are, from the pragmatist perspective, as foreign to genuine religious practices as evidentialist arguments about, e.g., the a priori and a posteriori probabilities of theologically conceptualized events such as Christ's resurrection.[6]

On the basis of these preliminary remarks on a pragmatist approach to rationality and objectivity in the philosophy of religion, we will in the first substantial chapter below examine the problem of realism from a pragmatist point of view. It is through this discussion that we will in later chapters be led to an engagement with the problem of evil and suffering, as well as pragmatist

antitheodicism. However, I should like to add to this introduction some general remarks on how I find the classical pragmatists relevant to the issue of *recognizing otherness* and especially *acknowledging others' suffering*—the key issue at stake when we consider the theodicism vs. antitheodicism opposition and its relation to the problem of realism.

One reason why pragmatism, I believe, is highly relevant here is due to its philosophical focus on 'deep' democratic politics. One of the preconditions of maintaining and further developing democracy—in a rich pragmatist sense as a 'way of life', as articulated, for instance, in Dewey's views on democratic participation (see especially Dewey 2012 [1927]: 121–122)—is a continuous sincere attempt to respond to individual human beings' legitimate need to be genuinely listened to in the societies they live in and contribute to. This need is manifested in various requests for recognition of others' points of view, as well as responses to such requests, among individuals and social groups (cf. Ikäheimo & Laitinen 2011; Saarinen 2016; Koskinen 2017; Kahlos et al. 2019). Thus, from a pragmatist perspective it is natural to suggest that a socially highly important request concerns the acknowledgment of instances of suffering (individual and social).[7] We may see pragmatists (especially James) as arguing that attempts to respond to such requests by delivering a theodicy are almost invariably ethically and politically problematic, because they fail to adequately acknowledge the individual sufferer and their concrete experience (see Kivistö & Pihlström 2016: chapter 6). The pragmatist antitheodicist may also argue that the theodicist failure to recognize individual and social suffering in its utter meaninglessness and absurdity may be seriously harmful for the preconditions of democracy as a way of life—though this argument will not be developed in the present volume at any length.

Theodicism may, indeed, be as harmful for not only democracy but also genuine religiosity as traditional supernaturalism associated with most religions is according to Dewey. In *A Common Faith*, his small book dealing with religion but perhaps even more strongly (if mostly implicitly) focused on democratic politics, Dewey attacked supernaturalist religions while affirming the continuous relevance of 'the religious' as a quality of experience that can potentially be attached to various kinds of experience (e.g., moral, aesthetic, political, or even scientific).[8] The kind of pragmatist and non-reductively naturalist philosophy of religion available in Dewey's *A Common Faith* can in my view be intimately linked with pragmatist antitheodicism precisely because of its (largely implicit) challenge to recognize especially those experiences and perspectives that institutionalized supernaturalist religions tend to leave aside.

Within pragmatism, the Deweyan conception of democracy as a way of life and his criticism of supernaturalist forms of religion need to be supplemented by a Jamesian concern for the *irreducibility of the individual*: we have to be sensitive to what James (1979 [1891]) called the 'cries of the wounded' and avoid the kinds of Hegelian and Leibnizian theodicies he firmly rejected in *Pragmatism* (to be frequently revisited in the subsequent chapters). By

exploring these issues, we might also make more precise the pragmatist idea that democracy in the deep sense of truly engaged participation in democratic practices requires the recognition of others as (actual or potential) participants. In this sense, my pragmatist explorations in this book will, I hope, be implicitly relevant also to issues in social and political philosophy.

Let us here recall how James (1975 [1907]: Lecture II) compares his *pragmatic method* to a corridor in a hotel. *Very* different intellectual work can be done in individual rooms all of which can be reached by walking along the same corridor (i.e., by using the same pragmatic method): in one of them, we may find a religious believer engaging in prayer, while in another one we may find a scientist conducting empirical experiments or a critic of religion writing an atheist thesis. Pragmatism thus recognizes, and James urges us to recognize, the irreducible and often incommensurable value of *different human practices* having their distinctive purposes and goals. Pragmatism can also facilitate processes of mutual recognition between persons and groups maintaining divergent views on, e.g., science and religion—or, *mutatis mutandis*, evil and suffering. Thus, it may contribute to the integration of theological and secular approaches to evil.[9] Moreover, pragmatism highlights the most vital task we face here, viz., the practical one of getting rid of or fighting against evil, or at least diminishing suffering, while also critically questioning and overcoming any sharp distinction between *theoretical* and *practical* approaches to the problem of evil and suffering (a dichotomy that is itself typical of theodicism, as we will see in Chapter 6 below). This is one obvious reason why pragmatism is considerably more promising than many of its rivals in this particular discourse; we may, indeed, at the meta-level reflexively argue for the *pragmatic significance of pragmatism* in making sense of, and responding to, the antitheodicist challenge of acknowledging innocent suffering.

As already explained in some earlier work of mine (e.g., Pihlström 2003, 2013a), my pragmatist ideas are implicitly based on a Kantian understanding of the relations between theoretical and practical philosophy (which Kant, admittedly, distinguished much more sharply from each other than the pragmatists do). Kant's moral criticism of theodicies in his 1791 'Theodicy Essay' (see Kivistö & Pihlström 2016: chapter 2) can itself be seen as a moral criticism of the failure to appropriately distinguish between theoretical and practical reason and their distinctive concerns, particularly as a criticism of attempts to appeal to the former (in the form of metaphysical, speculative theodicies *à la* Leibniz) independently of the latter (i.e., genuine moral concern with suffering). Kant might somewhat anachronistically be regarded as a 'pragmatist' in the sense that he maintained that the ultimate task of human reason is practical: reason in general—in its theoretical and practical uses—is in the end guided by practical reason and its ethical concerns, because the division of labor between the theoretical and the practical uses of reason is itself inevitably ethically grounded and motivated. There is no non-ethical place for us to stand in order to establish such a division of labor. Kant, then, shifts the attention from meta-

physics to morality—and, as we learn from his doctrine of the 'postulates of practical reason' (see Kant 1983a [1788]: A238–244), it is only on the basis of morality (i.e., the moral law codified in the categorical imperative) that we can hope for the (metaphysical) reality of God and the immortality of the soul.[10]

While we will not be able to deal with the Kantian postulates in any detail in this book, the key Kantian proposal to construct a moral metaphysics starting from practical reason—further developed by the pragmatists—indicates in its own way why the epistemic challenge of viewing the world objectively and rationally is, for Kantian pragmatists at least, inextricably intertwined with the existential challenge of viewing the world (and especially the suffering it contains) in an ethically appropriate, or at least decent, manner.

Next, consider briefly Peirce. He is of course a classical figure in the debates over realism, and his views are increasingly discussed in the philosophy of religion, too, but as far as I know he never explored the problem of evil in any great detail. In a recent commentary, Richard Atkins (2016: 133–136) does consider the problem of evil in relation to Peirce's views on religion, though.[11] He prefers—arguably for Peircean reasons—what he calls the strategy of 'exculpation' to that of 'excuse', suggesting that, 'given the information we have, we are not in the proper epistemic position to issue a verdict on whether God is blameworthy for permitting evil and suffering to exist and so we are at liberty to deny that God is to be blamed for the evil and suffering in the world' (ibid.: 134). It seems to me, as well as (presumably) to many other antitheodicist philosophers of religion, that this is a non sequitur. It could still be argued to be insulting to the victims of evil and horrible gratuitous suffering even to maintain that we might '*hold for now* that God is blameless, that God has some reason for permitting evil and suffering, however inscrutable that reason may be to us now' (ibid.: 135).

Insofar as Peircean philosophy of religion based on (as Atkins persuasively argues) sentiment and instinct in matters of vital concern leads us to such an exculpation approach to the problem of evil comparable to what is today discussed under the rubric of skeptical theism—and one can easily see it tends to do so—I think this might provide us with one reason for *rejecting* the Peircean approach in this area, possibly in favor of a Jamesian one. From James's point of view, any theodicist attempt to speculate about God's possible reasons for allowing evil and suffering is morally problematic—and this will become clear in the subsequent chapters through more detailed remarks on James. While Atkins's examination of the problem of evil remains brief (and, unlike his general defense of Peirce's sentimental conservatism in ethics and religion, ignores James's contribution to the matter), this might in fact be one of the most important divisions between the Peircean and the Jamesian perspectives in the history of pragmatism. Jamesian antitheodicists taking seriously the meaninglessness of suffering would presumably challenge Peirce's theodicist belief that 'God is loving the world into greater and greater degrees of perfection' (Atkins 2016: 161; cf. ibid.: 162).

James's relevance in this area is indeed rather different. It even seems to me that James, far from seeking any rationalizing theodicy or even an 'exculpation', is as firmly focused on the significance of the deeply vulnerable and embodied character of human experience of suffering, as, say, Levinasian phenomenologists are. The notion of the *embodied other* is, implicitly if not explicitly, at the core of Jamesian pragmatist antitheodicism. It is, very simply, our concrete embodiment that makes us vulnerable to suffering, and it is this vulnerability that we ought to ethically perceive in other human beings around us. Without appreciating such vulnerability in the lives we share with other human beings, no 'cries of the wounded' can be heard, and no pragmatic method can get off the ground. Therefore, James's physiological metaphors of human finitude should be taken seriously as fundamental to his pragmatism: he finds both *deafness* (to what he calls the cries of the wounded) and *blindness* (to others' experiences in general) significant to his analysis of our responses—or, better, failing responses—to vulnerability and suffering. In an opening comment to a famous 1899 lecture, he notes: 'Now the blindness in human beings, of which this discourse will treat, is the blindness with which we all are afflicted in regard to the feelings of creatures and people different from ourselves' (James 1983 [1899]).[12]

James narrates his personal experience, which I am here quoting at considerable length in order to illustrate the phenomenological thickness of his description:

> Some years ago, while journeying in the mountains of North Carolina, I passed by a large number of 'coves,' as they call them there, or heads of small valleys between the hills, which had been newly cleared and planted. The impression on my mind was one of unmitigated squalor. The settler had in every case cut down the more manageable trees, and left their charred stumps standing. The larger trees he had girdled and killed, in order that their foliage should not cast a shade. He had then built a log cabin, plastering its chinks with clay, and had set up a tall zigzag rail fence around the scene of his havoc, to keep the pigs and cattle out. Finally, he had irregularly planted the intervals between the stumps and trees with Indian corn, which grew among the chips; and there he dwelt with his wife and babes—an axe, a gun, a few utensils, and some pigs and chickens feeding in the woods, being the sum total of his possessions.
>
> The forest had been destroyed; and what had 'improved' it out of existence was hideous, a sort of ulcer, without a single element of artificial grace to make up for the loss of Nature's beauty. Ugly, indeed, seemed the life of the squatter, scudding, as the sailors say, under bare poles, beginning again away back where our first ancestors started, and by hardly a single item the better off for all the achievements of the intervening generations.

> Talk about going back to nature! I said to myself, oppressed by the dreariness, as I drove by. Talk of a country life for one's old age and for one's children! Never thus, with nothing but the bare ground and one's bare hands to fight the battle! Never, without the best spoils of culture woven in! The beauties and commodities gained by the centuries are sacred. They are our heritage and birthright. No modern person ought to be willing to live a day in such a state of rudimentariness and denudation. (Ibid.)

But then he continues:

> Then I said to the mountaineer who was driving me, "What sort of people are they who have to make these new clearings?" "All of us," he replied. "Why, we ain't happy here, unless we are getting one of these coves under cultivation." I instantly felt that *I had been losing the whole inward significance of the situation.* Because to me the clearings spoke of naught but denudation, I thought that to those whose sturdy arms and obedient axes had made them they could tell no other story. But, when *they* looked on the hideous stumps, what they thought of was personal victory. The chips, the girdled trees, and the vile split rails spoke of honest sweat, persistent toil and final reward. The cabin was a warrant of safety for self and wife and babes. In short, the clearing, which to me was a mere ugly picture on the retina, was to them a symbol redolent with moral memories and sang a very pæan of duty, struggle, and success.
>
> *I had been as blind to the peculiar ideality of their conditions as they certainly would also have been to the ideality of mine*, had they had a peep at my strange indoor academic ways of life at Cambridge.
>
> Wherever a process of life communicates an eagerness to him who lives it, there the life becomes genuinely significant. Sometimes the eagerness is more knit up with the motor activities, sometimes with the perceptions, sometimes with the imagination, sometimes with reflective thought. But, wherever it is found, there is the zest, the tingle, the excitement of reality; and there is 'importance' in the only real and positive sense in which importance ever anywhere can be. (Ibid.; first and last emphasis added.)

He then concludes by answering his own question:

> And now what is the result of all these considerations and quotations? It is negative in one sense, but positive in another. It absolutely forbids us to be forward in pronouncing on the meaninglessness of forms of existence other than our own; and it commands us to tolerate, respect, and indulge those whom we see harmlessly interested and happy in their own ways, however unintelligible these may be to us. Hands off:

> neither the whole of truth nor the whole of good is revealed to any single observer, although each observer gains a partial superiority of insight from the peculiar position in which he stands. Even prisons and sick-rooms have their special revelations. It is enough to ask of each of us that he should be faithful to his own opportunities and make the most of his own blessings, without presuming to regulate the rest of the vast field. (Ibid.)

In the context of this example, we should observe how fundamentally important pluralism, tolerance, and the recognition of otherness are for James. These are all related to individual embodiment and bodily experiences, constitutive of both enjoyment and suffering. James, on my reading, employs not only the pragmatic but also the phenomenological method here by showing us how easy it is to dismiss others' experiential perspectives on reality—both their perspectives of meaningfulness and their perspectives of despair and meaningless suffering. Simultaneously, he shows us how such blindness (or, analogously, deafness) is detrimental to the ethically challenging attitude to the world generally that his pragmatism requires. Hence, pragmatism, as we will see below, is framed by the problem of evil and suffering—to the extent, we might say, that the pragmatic method receives its philosophical relevance only by being intimately linked with this problem. This link also shows us an even more profound link, the one between the epistemic project of knowing reality and the ethico-existential one of acknowledging others as suffering individuals with their distinctive points of view.[13]

James can be read as recommending a certain kind of pragmatic *involvement* in others' experiences, especially experiences of suffering. We must not simply look aside when faced by the suffering other. We should, rather, attend to the concrete life of the other manifested in their bodily pain and experiences of meaninglessness—or, conversely, to their experiences of meaning. However, things are not quite as simple as this. There is a sense in which the pragmatist antitheodicist her-/himself might also find it necessary to at least occasionally adopt a 'detached' (rather than constantly involved) perspective. I will try to explain in later chapters in more detail what this means. Note that James, after all, does *not* step out and go to meet the manual laborers he seeks to understand better (avoiding his instinctive deafness and blindness); nor does he invite them to his 'indoor academic ways of life at Cambridge'. He keeps a critical distance, knowing that there is no way of fully sharing a truly different way of life, while seeking to get rid of his blindness. When it comes to the pragmatic critique of metaphysical realism and theodicies, the key question is exactly what kind of distance we should maintain. It is this question that needs our constant self-critical attention.

One implication of all this is that we must very carefully determine how exactly the pragmatist should assess the prospects of philosophical realism. To what extent is the world, including others' experiences and perspectives, an

'other' to us—and to what extent can we *really* be involved in it, or in those experiences? I am not at all recommending any naïve understanding of practical involvement or embeddedness. Others' points of view will to a certain degree inevitably remain other to us. We can never take the place of another—nor, vice versa, can any other replace us. But we can constantly—from a critical and self-critical, hence to some extent detached, point of view—consider how exactly, and to what extent, we are able to acknowledge otherness, and better do so. This consideration requires a thoroughgoing pragmatist examination of the problem of realism and various related topics, including truth and objectivity. We will now turn to such an examination.

CHAPTER 1

# A Pragmatist Approach to Religious Realism, Objectivity, and Recognition

This rather long chapter offers some conceptual preliminaries for the inquiries of the subsequent chapters. We will explore realism, objectivity, recognition, and the very idea of inquiry in a pragmatist framework.

When examining the problems and prospects of realism in religion and theology, we should begin by contextualizing the realism vs. antirealism debate (or, better, debates) into different local problem areas.[1] In order to outline a plausible form of pragmatic realism in the philosophy of religion, I will first provide some brief remarks on relatively standard varieties of realism (or of the problem of realism) and then move on to applications of these realisms in the philosophy of religion. I will in that context introduce my own preferred pragmatist perspective on the realism controversy, enriched with a notion not usually employed by pragmatist philosophers, namely, the concept of recognition. The issues of pragmatic objectivity, already tentatively taken up in the introduction above, will be revisited toward the end of the chapter in the context of a pragmatist theory of inquiry enriched by the concept of recognition.

## Realisms: some preliminaries

First of all, we should note that realism has been a major theme in the philosophy of science over the past few decades, and continues to be actively discussed by philosophers of science. According to *scientific realism*, there 'really' are unobservable theoretical entities postulated in scientific theories (or, in a somewhat more careful formulation, it is up to the world itself to determine *whether or not* there are such entities); those theories have truth values independently of our knowledge and experience; and scientific progress may be understood as convergence toward mind-independently objective ('correspondence') truth about the world. These features of scientific realism may, furthermore, have more specific applications in sub-fields such as the philosophy of physics, the philosophy of biology, or the philosophy of history. Another interesting example is *mathematical realism*, according to which numbers and other mathematical entities and/or structures exist independently of minds (possibly in a

Platonic world of eternal Forms), and our mathematical truths about them are objectively what they are.

Clearly, the realism debate is not restricted to the philosophy of science. In ethics (or, rather, metaethics), *moral realism* has been a major topic of dispute for decades. This is a controversy about whether there are objective moral values and/or mind-independent moral truths about 'moral facts' (or, perhaps better, about the nature of the moral values there are, or are not, independently of human minds). Just as the scientific realist believes in the objective truth values of scientific theories, even when they postulate observation-transcendent theoretical entities and structures, and the antirealist denies that theories have such truth values, especially insofar as they are about the unobservable, the moral realist maintains that moral statements are objectively true or false (even though their truth or falsehood cannot, of course, be immediately perceived), while the antirealist argues that this is not the case (for instance, for the reason that moral 'statements' are not really factual statements at all but moral discourse is, instead, mere expression of attitudes, e.g., emotions). More generally, *axiological realism* is the view that values (including not only moral but also aesthetic, epistemic, and other values) are objectively real, instead of being mere human projections or constructions.

Highly important dimensions of the realism issue are also discussed and debated in relation to other traditional core areas of philosophy, such as general metaphysics. For example, the *modal realist* seeks to formulate a realistic account of the modalities, i.e., possibilities and necessities. According to such realism, possibilities, for instance, are 'real'—or there are real possible worlds in addition to the actual world. A related—and of course ancient—for of realism is *realism about universals*, that is, the kind of realism about abstract Forms that may (or may not) be instantiated in particular objects that classical philosophers like Plato and Aristotle (in their different ways) maintained. Metaphysicians and epistemologists have also debated, e.g., *realism about the past* (and about future, or about temporality in general). The question here is whether past (and future) objects and events really exist independently of the mind and of any human discourse and whether statements about the past—analogously to statements about the unobservable world in science—have objective truth values. And many other examples of realism and antirealism in different fields of philosophy can easily be distinguished. These are all, as we may say, different *local* versions of realism (vs. antirealism).

These contextualizations or localizations of the problem of realism are to be distinguished from the quite different distinctions between the various philosophical dimensions of the general or *global* realism issue that concerns the mind independence and discourse independence (vs. dependence) of reality in general. The *ontological* realism question is, obviously, whether there is a mind- and language-independent world at all. *Epistemologically*, we may ask whether we can know something (or anything) about such an independent world. The *semantic realist*, furthermore, maintains that we can refer to such a world by

using our language and/or concepts; according to such realism, our statements about the world are true or false independently of the mind, and truth is typically construed as correspondence with the way things are. All these differentiations between the dimensions of realism and antirealism can also be applied more locally to the kind of issues preliminarily catalogued above. For example, scientific or modal realism can be discussed from the point of view of the ontological, epistemological, or semantic dimension of the realism issue.[2]

The concept of *independence*—as well as, conversely, *dependence*—is crucially important for the entire realism discussion (see also Chapter 2). According to typical forms of realism, the world is (largely) independent of various things: minds or subjects; their experiences, perceptions, and observations; concepts or conceptual schemes; language, linguistic frameworks, or language games; theories and models; scientific paradigms; perspectives or points of view; traditions; practices; and so forth. I will mostly just use 'mind independence' as a shorthand for all these and other standard forms of independence (to be contrasted with the relevant kinds of dependence). Furthermore, it should be noted that, in the realism discussion, the relevant concept of (in)dependence is, at least primarily, *ontological*: A is ontologically dependent on B, if and only if A cannot (or could not) exist unless B exists. Different modal forces are of course invoked insofar as this definition is formulated in terms of 'cannot' or 'could not', respectively. This ontological notion of (in)dependence, in both stronger ('could not') and weaker ('cannot') modal versions, is to be distinguished from, for example, *logical* (in)dependence and *causal* (in)dependence. Statements or theories are logically independent of each other insofar as there is no logical entailment between them. (It is hard to say in what sense exactly the notions of logical dependence and independence could even be applied to the relation between, say, a statement and a non-linguistic fact, insofar as entailment is a relation between logical, propositional, and/or linguistic entities.) Regarding causal dependence and independence, we may say that, for example, a table is causally dependent on its maker but ontologically independent of them because it can continue to exist when they disappear from the world. When made, its existence no more ontologically presupposes its maker's existence—even though antirealists may deny that the table, or anything, could exist entirely independently of human beings' thought, language, or experience.

Having reached a preliminary conception of what kinds of realism there are, globally and locally, we should also get clear about the different varieties of antirealism. There are, in fact, various rather distinct antirealisms, or several ways of being an antirealist, both globally and locally. An easy way of listing such antirealisms would be to just list the denials of the corresponding realisms. However, let me briefly indicate in what sense some traditionally best-known antirealisms are opposed to realism—and in what sense some of them are not.

First, *idealism* is often represented as a version of antirealism. The problem, however, is that idealists can also be realists, depending on how exactly these

views are defined (there will be more to be said on this matter below in relation to pragmatism). Another key version of antirealism is, as is well known, *relativism*, according to which the way the world is is relative to, for instance, conceptual schemes or perspectives. There is, then, no way the world is 'in itself', independently of perspectives or schemes. Relativism is often relatively close to *constructivism* (which can also be compared to at least some forms of idealism): we 'construct' the world in and through our perspectival language, discourse, or conceptualization, and it is precisely for this reason that there is no non-relative existence at all. A quite different version of antirealism is *empiricism* (as a view discussed primarily in the philosophy of science), which maintains that only the observable world is real and that metaphysical speculations about the existence of unobservables merely lead us astray. According to such empiricism (e.g., instrumentalism), scientific theories should be interpreted as mere instruments of calculation and prediction, instead of sets of mind-independently true or false statements about (unobservable) reality. Furthermore, *nominalism* is a form of antirealism in the universals debate in the sense of claiming that there are no mind- and language-independent universals but only particulars. Yet, nominalists could be realists in other ways; for example, many influential contemporary scientific realists are nominalists in metaphysics. The varieties of antirealism are by no means exhausted by these well-known and much disputed doctrines.

Finally, an important distinction ought to be drawn between *antirealisms* and *nonrealisms*. Not all denials of realism can be simply classified as antirealisms. For example, Richard Rorty (e.g., 1998) has repeatedly claimed that his 'antirepresentationalism' leads us beyond the entire issue of realism, which in his view crucially depends on representationalist assumptions, that is, on the idea that the business of language use is to represent non-linguistic and mind-independent reality and that it may succeed or fail in this task. Another influential nonrealist position in the philosophy of science in particular was formulated by Arthur Fine (1986) with the label 'NOA', 'the natural ontological attitude'. The 'NOAist' just accepts the ontological postulations of science, avoiding any further philosophical speculation, problematization, or interpretation of them.[3] These nonrealisms, which can be regarded as close relatives, cannot be discussed here, but I want to note that the version of pragmatic realism to be articulated and tentatively defended below is *not* committed to the kind of Rortyan antirepresentationalist neopragmatism that has given a fertile context to nonrealism. It is realism itself that we can and should, I think, save through pragmatism, even though the realism thus saved will have to be a thoroughly revised one. (Similarly, pragmatism may and should accommodate its own specific—pragmatic—notion of representation instead of giving up representationalism altogether.)

After this brief preliminary survey, we should take a closer look at how the different forms of realism and antirealism—or, more modestly, some variants of them—are applicable to the philosophy of religion and theology.

## Applying realism(s) to theology and religion

The problem of realism in theology and religion obviously concerns the (in-) dependence of the world and/or objects purportedly referred to in religious and/or theological language use. These objects could include God, souls, angels, and many other things traditionally postulated in religious practices and theological theorization. At least in principle, it is possible to be a local realist about some of these ontological commitments while being an antirealist about some others: for instance, one could be a realist about God's existence while being an antirealist about angels. That is, one could maintain that it is a mind-independently objective matter whether or not God exists, and which properties God has (if He does exist), while maintaining that statements about the existence of angels, or about their properties, do not have mind-independently determined objective truth values. Note, however, that at least according to most formulations of realism and antirealism, one does not qualify as an antirealist about God if one just denies God's existence, or as an antirealist about angels if one just denies their existence, because one may very well be a realist about the features of the mind-independent world itself that make it the case that there is no God, or that there are no angels. Atheism is not antirealism but typically presupposes realism.[4]

There are, to be more precise, different 'levels' of realism about religion. At least four such levels can be distinguished. It is helpful to introduce these distinctions by referring to the relevant relations between practices of language use and the relevant objects that those practices of language use can be supposed to be about. First, we may apply the realism issue to religious language itself—that is, to the relation between religious language and its objects (whatever they are). Secondly, we may speak about realism and antirealism in relation to theological (e.g., Christian, Jewish, or Islamic) language and its objects. Thirdly, we may distinguish the language of non-confessional religious studies (or comparative religion)—and its objects—from the first two levels. Fourthly, and finally, the language of philosophy of religion—and its objects, whatever they might be—is a yet higher 'meta-level' context for investigating realism in relation to religion.

Accordingly, when asking whether to be realists or antirealists about religious matters, we may ask this question at four different levels (at least), that is, as the question of whether there are, e.g., mind-independent truths about objective reality in (1) religion, (2) theology, (3) religious studies, and (4) philosophy of religion. Let us pursue these questions in turn.

First, according to *religious realism*, the objects of religious beliefs and/or statements (e.g., God) exist, or fail to exist, independently of religious language use. That is to say, God is real or unreal independently of whether you, I, or anyone else believes or fails to believe Him to be real. If God exists, He will continue to exist even if no one believes in His existence.[5] And conversely, if God does not exist, He will not come into existence no matter how strongly

He is believed in. Religious antirealism denies this independence and regards God as mind-dependent in some sense, for instance, as a construction based on religious language use, or a discourse-dependent construal, as some postmodernist orientations in philosophy of religion might put it.

Secondly, according to *theological realism*, certain theological doctrines are true or false depending only on the way the (religious) world those doctrines purportedly refer to objectively is, i.e., again, independently of the mind or of any theological discourse. For example, the doctrine of divine simplicity—that is, the view that God is the simplest possible being, which may also be taken to entail the view that all of God's attributes, such as His absolute goodness and omnipotence, are identical to God himself—is either true or false depending on the true metaphysical nature of God. Either God is the way this doctrine says He is, or He is not that way; it is not up to the theological doctrine to determine what God's metaphysical nature is, but it is the other way round. The truth or falsity of the doctrine is grounded in the nature of the world, and of God. The theological antirealist, again, denies such independence, maintaining that the truth or falsity of the kind of doctrines at issue here depends on their theological formulation, or our theological perspectives on God and the world.

It may, however, be difficult to draw the exact line between religious and theological language use, and the corresponding versions of realism (and antirealism), although generally theological doctrines could be regarded as meta-level interpretations of actual religious beliefs. For example, Christological, pneumatological, soteriological, and other sophisticated interpretations of Christian beliefs—regarding, respectively, the nature of Christ, the Holy Spirit, and salvation—can be regarded as doctrines belonging to this set of meta-level theological construals of 'first-order' religious beliefs. A 'normal' believer need not, and typically does not, have the kind of theological sophistication that the formulation and understanding of these doctrines requires. One's entitlement to religious realism (or antirealism) cannot therefore depend on one's being a realist (or an antirealist) about the meta-level theological doctrines.

One could, then, in principle, be a religious realist about, say, the existence of Christ but an antirealist about some more specific theological views, such as the doctrine of Christ's second coming. But could one be a theological realist while being a religious antirealist? This would, presumably, be an awkward position. One could hardly reasonably maintain that the truth values of claims about Christ's second coming are mind independent and objective while denying such mind independence and objectivity to claims about God's (or, indeed, Christ's) existence. Furthermore, it may also be difficult to determine what it is to be a realist about Christ if one is not committed to the theological doctrines that *define* Christ. Which specific doctrines should be taken to play such a defining role? This may be a matter of theological dispute. Does Christ (or, for that matter, God) have only essential properties or also contingent ones? *Could* one, then, be an antirealist about a doctrine such as Christ's second coming, let alone a highly central doctrine such as Christ's resurrection (or, say,

Christ's two natures), without also being an antirealist at the basic religious level about God?[6]

The third level to be discussed is the problem of *realism about religious studies*. This may be compared to the more general realism issue that arises in the human sciences (such as history, anthropology, cultural studies, literary theory, and other fields): Is the human cultural and social world also objectively the way it is, analogously to the way the scientific realist regarding natural science believes the natural world to be, so that truths about it are determined independently of our theories and discourses? Or is it somehow a human cultural–theoretical construct, in a stronger sense than the natural world? The age-old nature vs. culture distinction is of course in some sense presupposed here. Scientific realism in the natural sciences must certainly be distinguished from realism about the humanities and social sciences. There is clearly a sense in which human culture and society are human and therefore mind-dependent constructs, but the intended sense of 'independence' should be understood correctly here; obviously there is no a priori reason why one could not apply realism across the board, not only in the sciences but also in the humanities. Even if it may not be easy to regard human sciences such as literary theory as pursuing objective truth in the same sense in which we may regard physics or biology as pursuing objective truth, there is no principled reason why our statements and theories in these different fields could not be objectively true or false depending on the ways in which the (admittedly very different) objects of study are. The objects of the human sciences are not independent of human thought and action, but they could still be independent of the theorist's or scholar's views and experiences in a sense relevantly similar to the mind independence of physical entities. Hence, according to realism, it would still be possible to pursue objective truth in the human sciences, even if that kind of truth would be about humanly constructed reality.

Now, insofar as religious studies (or comparative religion) is part of the human sciences in the same sense as history or anthropology are, the realism debate in the latter is directly applicable to the former, or the former is only a special case of the latter. Of course it must be kept in mind that the social and cultural world of religion, any more than the cultural world generally, is not fully objective or 'mind independent' in the same sense as physical nature is (according to the realist); yet, again, it can (arguably) be independent of the researchers'—the religious studies scholars'—minds, or of their theories, in an analogous sense.[7]

The relation between religious studies and theology is far from clear, however. Theological doctrines, such as (again) divine simplicity or Christ's second coming, could be and often are seen as 'confessional': to be a Christian is to maintain that these and many other doctrines about God, Christ, and related matters are true (though it may be open to further discussion what it practically means in religious life to be committed to their truth).[8] However, theological doctrines can also be studied entirely 'neutrally' and non-confessionally

as objects of religious believers' (and theologians') beliefs—and the one who engages in such non-confessional study need not at all engage in the practices, either religious or theological, within which those beliefs are actually maintained, or taken to be true. Thus, it may be a result of theological inquiry that a religious group X maintains, or has maintained at some point in its history, a doctrine Y (e.g., as interpreted in a certain way). Is this still theology, or is it, rather, religious studies? Or perhaps comparative religion? The disciplinary identities may be extremely unclear here.[9]

If theology can be pursued without commitments to any Christian or other theological doctrines, then there is no fundamental distinction between theology and religious studies, nor between the relevant versions of the realism vs. antirealism debate. The same general points about realism in the human sciences will then apply to religious studies and theology alike. However, if theology *is* interpreted confessionally, as it might be at various divinity schools around the world, then one could be a realist about a theological doctrine while being an antirealist about a meta-level interpretation and/or explanation of that doctrine within non-confessional religious studies (comparative religion). But is the converse position coherent? Could one be a realist about a non-confessional interpretation of a religious doctrine about which one is a theological antirealist? I am tempted to answer affirmatively. One can of course be a realist about, for example, historical issues regarding the emergence, prevalence, and maintenance of certain theological ideas and/or views in certain historical or contemporary communities while rejecting theological realism about those ideas themselves. One need not be a realist about, say, theological doctrines postulating angels, even if one is a strong realist about religious studies examining people's and communities' beliefs in angels. Even so, it might be more natural to maintain a realistic commitment across the board, at both levels.

Fourthly, how about philosophy (of religion)? Things get even more complicated when philosophy enters the picture to supplement the practices of religion, theology, and religious studies. Philosophy of religion can be more or less directly concerned with religious concepts and beliefs, but it can also examine their relation to both theological interpretations and non-confessional explanations and accounts offered within religious studies. We may here also want to distinguish, on the one hand, philosophy of religion, and on the other hand, philosophy of science—or something corresponding to the philosophy of science—as applied to (i) the 'science' of theology (if it can be regarded as a science in any sense) and to (ii) the inquiries within religious studies.

Does philosophy of religion have any 'objects of its own'? Can one be a realist (or an antirealist) about the language used within the philosophy of religion, and the relation between that language use and its relevant objects? Arguably, the complex *relations* between the objects of religion, theology, and religious studies, and the relations between the different ways (different languages) of speaking about those objects, can be among the 'objects' of the philosophy of religion.

The more general question, not to be answered here, is whether there can be mind-independent and objective facts about philosophical theories and their actual or potential objects at all. Is there, moreover, a mind-independent and objective truth about, say, realism itself (or other topics in the philosophy of religion, such as the nature of evil)? That is, is it objectively true or false that realism holds, or does not hold, about religious views, about theological doctrines, or about the results of religious studies inquiries? (Are the statements made in this chapter on realism objectively true or false, accurately representing a subject matter independent of them?) The 'reality' studied by the philosophy of religion should include *all* the levels of the realism debate: religious and theological entities (e.g., God), as well as relevant human activities within which such entities—and questions concerning their existence—are referred to, spoken about, and inquired into.

As has become clear through this discussion, however preliminary it must remain, there is a certain analogy between scientific realism and the different realisms applied to religion and theology. However, even though this analogy may be helpful, it may also be seriously misleading; at least we should be careful to avoid *too easy* analogies. The entire attempt to discuss theological realism by means of an analogy to scientific realism is, arguably, problematic, as it presupposes an evidentialist view of theology as relevantly comparable to science. According to evidentialism, religious beliefs—as well as, by extension, their theological meta-level interpretations—need to be evaluated on the basis of the rationally acceptable evidence that can be presented in their favor, just as one would generally evaluate scientific (and everyday) beliefs. Realism and antirealism cannot, then, be strictly separated from the evidentialism vs. fideism issue (although these two issues are in principle distinct); this is part of a broadly Kantian entanglement of metaphysics and epistemology. Pragmatism, which we will soon discuss in more detail, rejects evidentialism, while also rejecting straightforward versions of fideism, and hence also the direct scientific realism analogy. At any rate, when developing a pragmatist approach to the realism debate (in science, religion, and theology—and elsewhere), the *genuine differences* between all these practices must be appreciated.[10]

## A pragmatist approach to the realism debate

The tradition of pragmatism offers a fresh perspective on the realism vs. antirealism issue. The rest of this chapter is devoted to showing—inevitably only very briefly—what the pragmatist contribution might be, and how it could, especially in the philosophy of religion, be enriched by considerations adapted from the theory of recognition.

The so-called classical pragmatists—especially Peirce, James, and Dewey—all defended views that can be regarded as to some extent realistic but to some extent anti- or nonrealistic—or, if not strictly speaking antirealistic, at least in

some sense idealistic or constructivist (even though it also needs to be pointed out that none of the classical pragmatists was really tempted to defend any form of relativism). The tensions we find in these thinkers' positions regarding realism and its alternatives illuminate the ways in which the realism issue has been and continues to be at the heart of the pragmatist tradition in philosophy. A similar tension seems to be at work in contemporary neopragmatism, that is, in the thought of philosophers like Richard Rorty and Hilary Putnam. In theology and philosophy of religion specifically, this tradition has more recently been represented by scholars such as Eberhard Herrmann and Dirk-Martin Grube.[11]

Pragmatism can be seen as a philosophical approach seeking to mediate between realism and antirealism in a manner comparable to Kant's attempt to argue that empirical realism is compatible with (and even requires) transcendental idealism. More critically, this means that the realism vs. antirealism tension is indeed inevitably present in pragmatism, both classical and 'neo'. However, pragmatists have typically attempted to move beyond this tension in interesting ways. The relevant tension that needs to be dealt with here can be briefly expressed as follows: the world is (empirically) independent of us, but its independence is itself a human construct within our purposive practices and may receive different forms within different practices.

Moreover, the world and whatever exists or is real within it can exhibit a number of different practice-laden forms of mind independence. For example, the mind independence of electrons, of historical facts, and of God (*if*, indeed, such entities or structures are real independently of minds) are all quite different kinds of mind independence, and it makes sense to speak about these different kinds only within different purposive practices in which they play some functional roles. The practice of physical science within which the independent existence of electrons is at issue does not, presumably, have any role for God to play, but on the other hand the religious person's prayer addressed to a God believed to be real independently of that activity of praying hardly presupposes that electrons, or any other pieces of material world, are real. There is no need to reduce all these to the same essence of what it means to be mind-independent. Pragmatic realism—if we may use such a label—is itself 'practice involving', not just a view maintained for 'practical' (e.g., non-theoretical or instrumental) reasons.[12] Rearticulating realism itself, like religion, in terms of human practices is the key program of pragmatic realism. This program is very different from the more radical neopragmatist program of giving up realism, or even the issue of realism altogether (as Rorty suggests).

Some contemporary pragmatists, including Eberhard Herrmann (e.g., 1997, 2003), have suggested that the realism issue in religion and theology can be fruitfully articulated in terms of Putnam's distinction between *internal and metaphysical realism*. According to Herrmann, Putnam's internal realism can plausibly be used as a model for realism in theology and religion. While I am not entirely convinced by this proposal, let me briefly recapitulate the main

points of Putnam's form of realism; this will only serve as an example of an influential and theologically relevant version of neopragmatism here.

One of Putnam's (1990: 28) characterizations of the difference between internal and metaphysical realism is based on his observation that our perceptions and conceptions of the world are relative to language and/or conceptual schemes, since 'elements of what we call "language" or "mind" *penetrate so deeply into what we call "reality" that the very project of representing ourselves as being "mappers" of something "language independent" is fatally compromised from the very start*'. This formulation seems to employ a relatively straightforward idea of language dependence (or mind dependence). The contrasting view, metaphysical realism, maintains that we can, in principle at least, theorize about a language- and mind-independent world *an sich*, as it is independently of our thoughts and language use. The basic point of internal realism is that there is no such external, disengaged viewpoint available for us. All our engagements with reality begin from an internal standpoint that already involves human practices and linguistic categorizations of reality. One way of summarizing this distinction between two kinds of realism is by saying that metaphysical realism dreams of a *theocentric* conception of the world, while internal realism argues that we human beings cannot get rid of our *anthropocentric*, and therefore inevitably limited and contextual, ways of coping with reality. This corresponds to the way in which the world has, in the pragmatist tradition more generally, been seen as a 'human world', as in a way plastic or malleable to human beings' purposeful actions and practice-related conceptual categorization.[13]

A pragmatist perspective on theological realism can be summarized in terms of the following key points, which arguably represent the main strengths of pragmatism in comparison to more standard versions of theological/religious realism and antirealism. First, pragmatism should be firmly set *against scientism* (e.g., strong and reductive forms of scientific realism): non-scientific perspectives and practices are equally important for us as scientific ones. Secondly, even if scientific or metaphysical realism in any strong forms cannot be accepted, there is, nevertheless, a kind of *realistic spirit* operative in pragmatism.[14] This is especially clear in James's reflections on the brute reality of pain, suffering, evil, and death; these ethically pregnant themes seem to be, for the Jamesian pragmatist, in the end much more important than purely theoretical construals of realism vs. antirealism. More generally, thirdly, it can be argued that *ethics and metaphysics* are deeply entangled in pragmatism, both in early pragmatism such as James's and in more recent pragmatism such as Putnam's. According to these pragmatists, there is a sense in which our metaphysical construals and categorizations of reality depend on our ethical perspectives; thus, the relevant realism issues are also entangled.[15]

These basic points about pragmatism correspond to the ways in which I see pragmatism as a major promise in the philosophy of religion more generally—as outlined in the introduction above. Epistemically, as we saw, pragmatism

seeks to move beyond the evidentialism vs. fideism controversy and to thereby transform the debates on the rationality vs. irrationality and objectivity vs. subjectivity of religious belief (both of which are closely related to, while not being identical with, the realism vs. antirealism issue). Existentially, pragmatism, at least in the form in which I am hoping to develop it, seeks to move beyond 'theodicist' attempts to solve the problem of evil; responding to the reality of evil—in a 'realistic spirit'—is thereby seen as a major challenge for any ethically serious religious and theological thought (cf. especially Chapters 3–6 below). The epistemic and the existential challenges in contemporary philosophy of religion are, of course, entangled—as should be clear, for instance, on the basis of the undeniable relevance of moral realism and antirealism to the problem of evil.

There are also further pragmatist ideas that may seem to be only indirectly related to realism but are nevertheless relevant to it. For example, most pragmatists have been *non-reductive naturalists* of some kind; the key example of such a position in the philosophy of religion would be Dewey's (1991 [1934]) pragmatic religious naturalism. Moreover, pragmatists' general attempt to occupy a middle ground between realism and antirealism leads to the need to examine the complex relation between *relativism and pluralism*. It must be somehow secured that the idea of a plurality of acceptable (and, possibly, equally rational) human practices and perspectives does not lead to a full-blown relativism according to which there are in the end no normative standards governing human reason-use and theorization at all, or no reasonable choices to be made between rival perspectives. Finally, the relations between *religion, ethics, and politics* need to be taken very seriously by any pragmatist who claims that philosophy of religion ought to make a difference to the ways in which human beings live in this world. That is, what is the place of religion in the public sphere, and how should it, possibly, be reconsidered? While this issue may not seem to be closely related to the problem of realism, it can be argued that it does in the end have a deep connection with that issue. Ethical and political realism need to be reconsidered from the point of view of the problem of introducing, or reintroducing, religious and theological perspectives into public discussions. (This book will not take any stand on this set of problems; I am just mentioning this topic as an example of the way in which pragmatist philosophy of religion can seek to be truly practically relevant.)

All these aspects of pragmatist philosophy of religion have dimensions that touch the realism debate. For example, should we settle the realism issue (at some specific level) before making any commitments regarding 'religion in the public sphere'? Or can we leave the issue open? Furthermore, when developing pragmatic religious or theological realism, the multi-level structure of the realism issue examined in the previous section must be kept in mind: one could, for instance, be a pragmatic realist about religion while being an antirealist about theology or religious studies. These commitments arguably require *holistic* pragmatic assessment.[16]

## Recognition and recognition transcendence

My next suggestion in this discussion is that the pragmatist philosopher of religion may fruitfully apply the (broadly Hegelian) concept of *recognition* (*Anerkennung*): it may be argued that our religious identities are largely based on relations of mutual recognition—loosely employing the concept of recognition as articulated by Axel Honneth and his many followers and critics.[17] One key idea here, keeping in mind the general entanglement of ethics and metaphysics in pragmatism, is that the ethical relations of recognition may be primary to the ontological relations constituting our identities. Could the relations between realists and antirealists also be analyzed in terms of recognition? In particular, how should we make sense of the idea of recognizing a person (or a community) as being committed to shared norms of rational thought and/or inquiry, that is, as a member of the same community of inquirers?[18] Furthermore, how exactly should we distinguish between the notions of recognition, tolerance, and agreement—and make sense of the fact that these are, indeed, different notions, playing somewhat different roles in our habits of action and in our practices of sharing an ethically problematic world with other human beings?

Instead of attempting to provide answers to these questions, let alone a general treatment of recognition in the philosophy of religion, even just pragmatist philosophy of religion, let me take up the more specific theme concerning recognition and *recognition transcendence* in pragmatic realism. There is a sense in which antirealism, e.g., relativism or fideism about religion (both culminating in some kind of rejection of objectivity), makes recognition too easy: we can certainly without difficulties (mutually) recognize each other as mere utterers of 'inarticulate sounds' or as mere 'enunciators' whose words have no normatively evaluable content.[19] This is what radical relativism, arguably, ultimately leads to. But when it comes to judgments with normatively evaluable content, objectivity becomes a challenge for us, something to be pursued in the 'space of reasons'.[20] Then, if we slide toward the other extreme—strong objectivity and realism (e.g., metaphysical realism in Putnam's sense)—recognition may become too difficult: we would presumably first have to settle whether religious beliefs can be true or false independently of the mind, before being able to decide whether a person or a group is able to be 'objective' in this area, and to thereby recognize them as rational thinkers. These are in the end questions about the possibility of recognizing others as inquirers, as inhabitants of the space of reasons. But how objective do we have to be *qua* inquirers? Recognizing ourselves as responsible to others in our inquiries can be argued to be a matter of recognizing our own fallibility and dependence on our membership in a community of inquirers.[21]

In the semantically oriented realism debate in particular (as developed by Putnam as well as Michael Dummett), *recognition-transcendent* truths have played a major role: to be a realist is to accept that (possibly) recognition-transcendent statements (e.g., 'There are no intelligent extraterrestrials') are determinately

objectively true or false, in principle just like statements whose truth values it is easy to recognize (e.g., 'There is no cup of coffee on the table'); to be an antirealist is to deny this.[22] One could also invoke recognition transcendence in another sense: if someone is 'beyond recognition' in the sense that s/he cannot be recognized as something or someone under some normative description (e.g., as an inquirer, or more specifically as an inquirer into recognition-transcendent truths), we may regard this as another kind of recognition transcendence.

Now, we can presumably recognize someone as a potential recognizer (or non-recognizer) of (some or all) potentially recognition-transcendent truths. One might, indeed, argue that we should recognize each other as potential recognizers of there being recognition-transcendent truths. There is, then, a certain kind of iterability and variability in the notions of recognition and recognition transcendence, yielding a potentially indefinite complexity of relations of recognition and recognition transcendence. What does this teach us? Perhaps it only shows that metaphysical issues concerning the recognition of truths, or their recognition transcendence, inevitably invoke the ethically relevant perspective of recognition directed at other human beings instead of either mere truths (or facts) or mere principles of rationality or other norms. This also necessarily includes recognizing our own fallibility and dependence on other inquirers (cf. also Westphal 2013). Our recognizing, or failing to recognize, truths about the world depend on our always already being involved in practices whose normative governance inevitably involves (potential) relations of recognition and non-recognition among their participants.[23]

Moreover, a point worth emphasizing is that religious truths, if there are any, might be (humanly) recognition-transcendent. A reasonable form of religious or theological realism (as well as, by extension, a reasonable form of realism regarding religious studies) needs to account for this idea. Even more strongly, *whether* there are any religious truths may be recognition-transcendent. It may, arguably, be a feature of our religious practices and their theological interpretations and articulations that these limits of human recognition abilities need to be recognized by those (successfully) engaging in such practices or seeking to theologically articulate and understand them (or at least by anyone who could be recognized as successfully doing so). At least, at the meta-level, it needs to be recognized that it might be recognition-transcendent whether religious truths (if there are any) are recognition-transcendent or not. There are, as can easily be seen, several versions of recognition and recognition transcendence at work here; a more detailed theory of this matter would have to sort out their relations much more comprehensively.

Any such theory, if adequate, will also need to deal with the key distinction between recognizing people and recognizing something else—truths, principles, criteria, norms, etc.—which in this case amounts to the distinction between recognizing people as recognizers (or non-recognizers) of truths and/or their recognition transcendence, on the one hand, and recognizing recognition transcendence itself, or there being recognition-transcendent truths. All

of these recognition acts shape the normative 'space of reasons' within which humans live and inquire.

## 'Objectivity without objects'

Let me now return to the issue concerning objectivity in a pragmatist setting, already preliminarily discussed in the introduction. It is important to keep in mind that when dealing with the two philosophical 'interests' in the inquiry into religion—the epistemic one and the existential one—pragmatism should not claim to be an absolutely novel approach. On the contrary, pragmatists (who, in James's memorable words, are offering a 'new name for some old ways of thinking') should acknowledge their historical predecessors.

One of those predecessors is undoubtedly Kant, whose great insight in the philosophy of religion was that religious and theological questions must be considered primarily on the basis of 'practical philosophy', that is, ethics (Kant 1983a [1788]). I see pragmatism as sharing this basically Kantian approach while not denying the epistemic and metaphysical significance of the philosophical study of religion (see also Chapter 3 below). Again, this yields a novel account of the peculiar kind of objectivity we are able to pursue in this field. We *are* still interested in, e.g., the metaphysical (and epistemic) problems concerning the nature of reality, the possible existence or non-existence of the divinity, and our epistemic access to such matters—and these are clearly 'objective' issues—but as human beings embedded in our habitual practices of life we are dealing with all this from ethically loaded, value-laden (and hence partly 'subjective') standpoints. For us as the kind of creatures we are, there simply is no non-interested standpoint to occupy in such matters. To admit this, however, is not to collapse objective inquiry into mere subjective preferences.

Insofar as this Kantian-inspired entanglement of ethics and metaphysics is taken seriously, we may also say that pragmatism incorporates a modern version of Kantian transcendental philosophy. The philosophical issues of religion are examined by paying attention to the ethical context within which they are so much as possible as topics of philosophically interested study for beings like us. This is, in a way, transcendental philosophy 'naturalized'. Therefore, it may also be suggested that pragmatism simultaneously proposes a liberal form of naturalism, distinguishing between a narrow (or 'hard') scientistic naturalism from a more pluralistic (and 'softer') form of naturalism according to which even religious qualities in experience can be humanly natural.[24] This liberalization of naturalism is parallel to the recognition that there are pragmatically embedded degrees of objectivity between the 'full' rigorous objectivity often associated with natural science and complete subjectivity some people may associate with religious experiences.[25]

A Jamesian interpretation of pragmatic objectivity can be taken to maintain that there is no metaphysically objective 'fact of the matter' regarding, for

instance, metaphysical issues or questions (such as, paradigmatically, God's reality or human immortality) in abstraction from our ethical and more generally *weltanschaulichen* contributions; there are no fundamental objective metaphysically realistic truths about metaphysical questions in that sense. Rather, our ethical perspectives contribute to whatever metaphysical truths there are, and ever can be, for us.[26] Thus, when developing a (Jamesian) pragmatist account of religion, especially an account of the famous Kantian 'transcendental ideas', viz., God, freedom, and immortality, as a pragmatically reinterpreted version of what Kant in the Second Critique called the 'postulates of practical reason',[27] we arguably may, in addition to steering a middle course between objectivity and subjectivity generally, make a legitimate commitment, from within our religious and ethical practices themselves, to a certain kind of transcendence (that is, the 'transcendental ideas').[28] The legitimacy or, perhaps, moral necessity of such a commitment might even be defended by means of a certain kind of (practice-involving, hence 'naturalized') transcendental argument: as James argued—though, of course, not explicitly transcendentally—it may be necessary for us to embrace a religious view if we are seriously committed to a 'morally strenuous' mood in life and seek to, or find it necessary to, maintain this commitment.

However, we cannot employ this account of religion to develop a theory of any religious *objects*, because in the Kantian context only properly transcendental conditions, such as the categories (e.g., causality) and the forms of pure intuition (space and time), are necessary conditions for the possibility of the objects of experience in the sense that all empirical objects must conform to them. Religious and/or theological ideas, such as the ideas of God, freedom, and immortality, do not play *this* objectifying and experience-enabling role, even if they can be argued to play a quasi-transcendental role as enablers of moral commitment. More precisely, while the categories, in Kant, are normative requirements of objecthood, this cannot be said about the postulates of practical reason, even if their status is also based on a transcendental argument.

Hence, although there can be a certain kind of pragmatic objectivity in religion and theology—or so my (real or imagined) Jamesian pragmatist would argue—there cannot be religious or theological objectivity in the sense of any legitimate rational postulation of religious objects, understood as an analogy to the postulation of, say, theoretical objects in science serving the purpose of explaining observed phenomena. Here, once again, the pragmatist must be firmly opposed to what is going on in mainstream Anglo-American philosophy of religion dominated by a strongly realist and evidentialist model of objectivity. Indeed, according to Kant himself, the key mistake of the traditional proofs of God's existence was to overlook these restrictions and to treat God as a kind of transcendent object, instead of a mere idea whose human legitimacy can be derived only from moral action.[29]

Now, we may see this (Jamesian) pragmatist understanding of religious and/or theological objectivity, analogous to the Kantian postulates, as a version

(or extension) of what Putnam (2002, 2004) calls 'objectivity without objects'. The examples Putnam provides primarily come from mathematics and ethics. We can, and should, he argues, understand the objectivity of these different practices—and the related fact-value entanglement in ethics—as something not requiring the postulation of mysterious (transcendent) objects out there, whether mathematical (numbers, functions) or ethical (values, moral facts). As Putnam has argued for a long time (at least since Putnam 1981), there is no need to think of moral objectivity or (pragmatic) moral realism (cf. Pihlström 2005a) as needing any ontological commitments to 'queer' objects, *contra* metaethical 'error theorists' like J.L. Mackie (1977). We should now understand whatever 'religious objectivity' or 'theological objectivity' there is available along similar lines. The relevant kind of objectivity lies in our practices of engagement and commitment themselves, in our habits of action embodying certain ways of thinking about ourselves and the world in terms of religious notions such as God, freedom,[30] and immortality.

This conception of pragmatic realism and objectivity in the philosophy of religion (and, analogously, in ethics) is compatible not only with certain views on religion as a practice or form of life derived from the later Wittgenstein's writings (even though, as was pointed out above, I resist the fideist tones some Wittgensteinians resort to), but also with a transcendental position we find in the early Wittgenstein: God does not appear *in* the world; immortality is timelessness, or life in the present moment, instead of any infinite extension of temporal existence; and my will cannot change the facts of the world but 'steps into the world' from the outside.[31] Accordingly, God is not an object of *any* kind, nothing—*no thing* whatsoever—that could 'appear in the world'. Nor can my freedom or possible immortality be conceptualized along such objectifying lines. The subject philosophy is concerned with—that is, the metaphysical or transcendental subject—is a 'limit' of the world rather than any object in the world (Wittgenstein 1974 [1921], § 5.64).[32] This idea is not as foreign to pragmatism as it might seem; on the contrary, as soon as pragmatism is reconnected with its Kantian background, something like the Wittgensteinian conception of subjectivity, objectivity, and the world can also, in a rearticulated form, be seen as the core position of a transcendental-pragmatic account of objectivity and subjectivity (see also Chapter 5 below). In particular, a wrong form of objectifying will turn out to be the decisive mistake of metaphysical realism leading to a non-recognition of others' perspectives on reality, and hence to a failure to adopt an appropriate relation to the world we live in by sharing it with others.

## Recognition and a processual conception of objectivity

One way of cashing out the pragmatist promise I opened this book with is by formulating the issues concerning the objectivity and rationality of religious belief and the appropriate reactions to the problem of evil in terms of the con-

cept of recognition, already discussed in relation to recognition transcendence and realism above. This concept must be rooted in not only the Hegelian discourse on *Anerkennung* but also (again) the underlying Kantian idea of there being limits or boundaries that shape human cognitive and ethical life and need to be recognized by people (and groups) engaging in common projects of inquiry, understanding, and moral deliberation. Developing pragmatist philosophy of religion into a pragmatic theory of relations of recognition will be a step toward a processual, hence properly pragmatic, account of objectivity. I cannot develop such a theory here, but I will offer a sketch, as the notion of recognition will figure repeatedly in later chapters as well.[33]

Since Hume and Kant, philosophers of religion have generally acknowledged that it is problematic, or even impossible, to ground theological and/or religious beliefs in rational demonstrations, such as the traditional 'proofs'. Kant, as was noted above, drew a particularly sharp boundary between our cognitive capacities (that is, human reason and understanding), on the one hand, and matters of religious faith, on the other. Yet, while attempts to demonstrate the reality of God inevitably fail, according to Kant, God's existence and the immortality of the soul must (along with the freedom of the will) be accepted as postulates of practical reason. Religious faith can only be grounded in what needs to be postulated in order to make sense of moral duty, not the other way round. Even so, theological issues are not beyond objectivity and rationality; they just require the *practical use* of reason, instead of theoretical or speculative use.

The concept of a *limit* is crucial for the entire post-Kantian paradigm in the philosophy of religion, and post-Kantian philosophy more generally, as Kantian transcendental philosophy examines the necessary conditions for the possibility of, and thereby also the limits of, cognitive experience. Concepts and beliefs reaching out for the transcendent do not fall within those limits. According to Kant's (1990 [1781/1787]: BXXX) famous dictum, he had to limit the scope of knowledge in order to make room for faith. (Hence there can be no legitimately postulated objects of faith, because all objects would have to fall within the scope of possible cognitive experience.) This creates challenges for acts of recognition across boundaries constituted by the transcendental features of human capacities.

The central role played by notions such as limit, boundary, and reason opens up a number of fundamental issues in post-Kantian philosophy of religion (including pragmatism) that can be approached in terms of the concept of recognition. Most importantly, the boundary between religious belief and non-belief—believers and non-believers—marks an intellectual, cultural, and political division that needs to be examined from the perspective of recognition. Such a practice-oriented examination may lead to novel ways of approaching the highly controversial issues of science vs. religion (or reason vs. faith) and thereby also the methodological debates within religious studies today.

The relevant issue of recognition here relates not only to the challenges of *recognizing different groups of people* (e.g., believers and non-believers) but also

to the need to *recognize the relevant limits dividing them*, as well as the reasons why those limits are taken to be there. These are often based on whether (and how) the relevant groups are recognized, or denied recognition, *as* certain specific kinds of groups or in some specific capacity. Accordingly, examinations of the limits of reason are, or contribute to, specifications of the *content* of the relevant act(s) of recognition. One must understand how 'the other'—a person or a group 'on the other side of the boundary'—employs certain concepts, especially normative concepts such as reason and rationality, in order to engage in any acts of recognition at all. Furthermore, one must realize that different people or groups may, for various reasons, recognize the same limits (and each others' ways of recognizing them) or quite different limits. The possible differences here need not (and should not) be reduced to merely intellectual differences among people (or groups); they are much more deeply embedded in our practices of life, including the existential dimensions of religious beliefs.

For example, from the point of view of atheism, theists simply fail to recognize certain limitations of human reason, or intellectually responsible thought more generally: they postulate an immaterial spiritual being without having adequate objective evidence for its existence (and in many cases even without seeking or evaluating evidence in appropriate ways). As Kant argued, no rational a priori demonstration of God's existence is possible, and as Hume and many others have noted, the traditional a posteriori 'design' argument is highly implausible as well (although it continues to flourish in contemporary 'intelligent design' theories). Conversely, theists may accuse atheists for a failure to respect another kind of limitation or boundary: scientifically oriented atheists may believe in the unrestricted capacities of scientific research, or human reason use more generally, in providing explanations to all phenomena and thus solving the mysteries of the universe. Believers often find it important to acknowledge that there may be 'more things between heaven and earth' than rationalizing philosophy—or science—can ever demonstrate. Accordingly, there is a very important boundary between these two groups—theists and atheists, or believers and non-believers, or their respective ways of thinking—and both groups emphasize certain humanly inevitable limits that according to them should not be overstepped.

Issues of recognition, then, are not restricted to the mutual recognition among persons or groups (e.g., representing different religious or non-religious outlooks) as being epistemically or rationally entitled to their (religious or non-religious) views, but extend to the need to recognize (from the perspective of certain intellectual and/or ethical outlooks) certain limitations or boundaries that define the proper sphere of human experience, cognition, or reason use, and even to the need to recognize different groups and people as actual or potential 'recognizers' of quite different boundaries. The diverging ways in which theists and atheists recognize something as a boundary limiting human capacities should themselves be recognized by both groups—in a way that not merely tolerates these different boundary drawings but acknowledges that there may

be legitimately different ways of drawing them, without simply agreeing with the other party, either. Moreover, recognition in this rich sense also extends to the recognition of cases of recognition transcendence (see above).

Various acts of recognition across the boundary dividing believers and non-believers may have as their content at least the following different types of recognition: one party may recognize the other as (i) human beings (e.g., with certain inviolable human rights), as (ii) thinkers capable of formulating thoughts and/or judgments with intelligible content, as (iii) actual or potential participants in political discussion and deliberation, and/or as (iv) 'fellow inquirers' (e.g., possibly, philosophers) seeking the truth about the matter at issue (e.g., about God's existence or non-existence). These different specifications and qualifications of the content of the act of recognition involve quite different factual and normative commitments and expectations. The acts of recognition at issue here also presuppose at least some kind of understanding of the ways in which the people or groups to be recognized (or requesting recognition) view life and its problems.

For example, recognizing someone as a (fellow) inquirer in the pursuit of truth yields expectations significantly stronger than 'merely' recognizing the same person or group as (a) member(s) of the human species, or even as sharing a common humanity in some stronger sense invoking, say, fundamental human rights. The different contents of the relevant acts of recognition may be crucially related to the concept of rationality: we may recognize someone as rational (as an inquirer, etc.) while disagreeing with them on fundamental issues—but can we also consistently disagree about the criteria of rationality itself? And how about the criteria of objectivity?

A key meta-level issue in contemporary philosophy of religion is the very possibility of critical discussion of religious beliefs. In order for such discussion to be possible across the boundary dividing believers and non-believers, both groups must recognize each other *as members of the same intellectual (and, presumably, ethical) community*—as rational discussion partners pursuing objectivity—and must in a sense overcome or at least reconsider the boundaries dividing them. In order for such discussion to extend to ethical and political matters related to religion, the rival groups must also recognize each other as belonging to the same moral and political community. (However, again we should avoid drawing another sharp limit between intellectual matters, on the one side, and moral or political ones, on the other; this division plays only a heuristic role here.) The issues of recognition arising in this situation can be philosophically analyzed by means of the model of recognition developed by scholars of recognition following Hegel, Honneth, and others.[34] The pragmatist philosopher's job here is to examine critically the conceptual presuppositions for the possibility of the relevant kind of recognition acts. For a pragmatist, such presuppositions are inevitably practice-embedded—in short, habits of action.

Now, if Christian believers and 'new atheists' are able to recognize each other ethically, politically, and/or intellectually, can they also recognize each other as

belonging to the same community of inquirers (a community that is, arguably, *constituted* by mutual acts of recognition)? Can they recognize each other *as 'fellow inquirers' committed to the pursuit of objective truth*? Could they do this even while maintaining very different normative conceptions of the role of reason, objectivity, and evidence in the evaluation of religious thought and beliefs, recognizing quite different (both factual and normative) limits for human thought and capacities? Examining these questions pragmatically, from the point of view of the theory of recognition, can be expected to lead to rearticulations of the traditional issues of, say, evidentialism vs. fideism. Thus, it will also be necessary to pragmatically re-evaluate key assumptions of contemporary philosophy of religion, seeking to critically transform the field from the perspective of the theory of recognition enriched by pragmatism. The different ways in which objective evidence can and ought to be taken into account in the evaluation of the rationality of religious belief must themselves be subjected to a critical examination in terms of actual and potential structures of recognition: an evidentialist (or anti-evidentialist) methodology in the philosophy of religion must be grounded in (potential) acts of recognition across 'post-Kantian' boundaries.

Moreover, emphasizing recognition in this manner contributes to articulating objectivity itself *dynamically* as a mutual process of different subjects' (people's, groups') recognizing each other as co-constructors and -interpreters of common normative standards, instead of simply recognizing some pre-given, allegedly fully objective standards. There is no royal road to recognizing the absolutely correct standards—that is not what it means to be committed to a project of inquiry. Rather, the notion of objectivity relevant to inquiry is itself constantly in the making, open to creative construction and reconstruction—and, hence, recognition. Just as there are different kinds of acts of recognition, there are also different types and/or degrees of pragmatic objectivity.

The notion of recognition—to be sure, only intuitively used here—is *a* key to the way in which epistemic issues (e.g., realism and objectivity) are in pragmatist philosophy of religion entangled with existential ones (e.g., the ethics of otherness, the problem of evil and suffering). We may now, equipped with a preliminary conception of recognition as a notion potentially useful in making sense of the dynamics of both epistemic and ethical inquiry, pause to reflect on the way in which the notion of inquiry itself should be understood in pragmatist philosophy of religion.

## Pragmatism and inquiry

How, then, does, or how ought to, the pragmatist understand the key concept of *inquiry* in general terms?[35] One should begin answering this question by emphasizing the pragmatists' resolute anti-Cartesianism. While Descartes, famously, started by doubting everything that can be doubted and arrived at the 'Archimedean point' at which, allegedly, doubt is no longer possible—that

is, the thinking subject's self-discovery, *cogito, ergo sum*—Peirce's anti-Cartesian essays in the 1860–70s questioned the very possibility of this traditional approach to epistemology.[36] Skipping (here) the details of Peirce's arguments, we may appreciate the pragmatist point that we can never begin from complete doubt; on the contrary, we always have to start our inquiries from the beliefs we already possess. There is no way of *living*—no way of 'being-in-the-world', to use terminology well known in a very different philosophical tradition, that is, Heideggerian phenomenology—in the absence of *believing*, that is, holding certain beliefs to be true about the world, at least one's more or less immediate surroundings with which one is in constant interaction. Doubt does play a role in inquiry, but it is subordinate to belief in the sense that it is triggered only in specific situations within contexts of belief.

Moreover, beliefs themselves, as pointed out above, are habits of action. This is a basic pragmatist idea, also shared by those pragmatists that may not be as helpful as Peirce and Dewey in developing a general theory of inquiry, including James. Beliefs do not just give rise to habits of action; they quite literally *are* such habits. To believe something to be the case amounts to being prepared to act in the world in a way or another—indeed, not only to concretely act but to be disposed to act in certain ways should certain types of situation arise. Pragmatism, thus, does not reduce beliefs to concrete individual actions but more generally rearticulates our notion of believing as tied up with the notion of habitual action.[37]

In the emergence of inquiry, the crucial step is taken when a habit does *not* function smoothly, when our action is interrupted or yields a surprise. Then, and only then, does doubt come to the picture. The surprise leads to genuine doubt (instead of the Cartesian 'paper doubt' that Peirce ridiculed), a state of doubt that is directed to the original belief(s) that gave rise to, or *were*, the habit(s) of action that led to the surprise. The purpose of the inquiry that then naturally follows is to settle that doubt and to fix a new belief or set of beliefs that do(es) not yield the same kind of surprising result that the original belief(s) and/or habit(s) of action did. Through this process of inquiry, the original belief(s) and/or habit(s) are either replaced by new and better ones or are revised. The way Dewey (e.g., 1960 [1929]) describes inquiry as an intelligent response to problematic situations that need to be transformed into unproblematic ones is essentially similar, though by and large somewhat more naturalistically phrased, emphasizing inquiry as a continuous 'transaction' between a living organism and its environment.

How, then, does a process of inquiry, pragmatically conceived, proceed in seeking to terminate doubt and fix (new) belief? Peirce's examination of the 'fixation of belief' is the pragmatist *locus classicus* here (though the term 'pragmatism' does not yet appear in this 1877 essay). Famously, Peirce rejects the three methods of fixing belief he finds unsatisfactory for various reasons—the methods of tenacity and authority, as well as the 'intuitive' method of what is 'agreeable to reason'—and defends the *scientific method* as the only method

capable of truly rational belief-fixation in the long run. The distinctive feature of the scientific method in comparison to the inferior methods is that it lets the 'real things' that are independent of us—that is, independent of the inquirers and their beliefs or opinions[38]—to influence the way in which the new beliefs are fixed. Our beliefs must thus be responsive to our experiences of the objective world that is largely independent of us in order for them to be properly scientific (see also Pihlström 2008b).

Peirce's theory of the progress of scientific inquiry is also well known: if the ideal community of rational inquirers (who need not be human) were able to engage in inquiry, using the scientific method, for an indefinitely long time, its beliefs regarding any given question would converge to an ideal 'final opinion'. This final opinion will, however, never be *actually* achieved; it is an ideal end, a 'would' rather than a 'will'.

Now, how does the Peircean–Deweyan pragmatist conception of inquiry accommodate non-scientific inquiries, including religious and theological ones? One way of approaching this question is by asking whether the pragmatist conception of inquiry is *monistic* or *pluralistic*. Does it seek to provide us with the *essence* of objective inquiry? These questions are difficult to answer unless we make the relevant terms clear. It is, I think, helpful to view inquiry as a 'family resemblance' notion in Wittgenstein's sense, without any permanent fixed essence. There are, as we know, quite different inquiries in different areas of life, from our everyday affairs to science as well as art, politics, ethics, and religion, and many other practices. There is no pragmatic need, or point, to force all these different modes of inquiry into the same model. In this sense, pragmatism definitely defends a pluralistic conception of inquiry. Hence, there is no reason to a priori exclude religious and theological 'inquiries' from the set of pragmatically acceptable forms of inquiry. However, it can simultaneously be maintained that all these rather different inquiries share a similar pragmatic approach, that is, the 'doubt–belief' theory of inquiry (as it is often called) and the related scientific method (as distinguished from the inferior methods Peirce attacks) briefly sketched above. The movement from habits of action and beliefs through surprise and doubt to inquiry and new or revised beliefs and habits is general enough to allow an indefinite amount of contextual variation. A certain kind of context sensitivity is, then, a crucial feature of pragmatism—not only of pragmatist theories of inquiry but of pragmatism more generally. Even if we can say that the 'same' pragmatist account of inquiry can be applied to inquiries taking place in very different contexts, or different human practices (including practices we consider non-scientific), that is only the beginning of our inquiry into inquiry. The notion of inquiry will only be pragmatically clarified—its pragmatic meaning will be properly brought into view—when its local contexts are made clear.

Moreover, when those contexts *are* made clear, it no longer matters much whether we call the methods that are used 'scientific' or not. This is mostly a terminological matter (though it is also important to keep in mind that ter-

minological issues are often not at all trivial). We may, that is, employ Peirce's 'scientific method' also when we are not pursuing science literally speaking. Political discussion, for instance, may be 'scientific' and 'objective' in the relevant pragmatist sense if it is genuinely open to belief revision in the face of recalcitrant experience, argument, and evidence, even if it does not aim at scientific-like results. If it is not open in this way, or if it is, rather, based on stubborn ideological opinions never to be changed no matter what happens, it is simply not a form of inquiry at all. And the same clearly holds for religion. It can be a form of inquiry if (and only if) it genuinely seeks to test and evaluate religious faith in the 'laboratory of life' (to cite Putnam's apt phrase again)—and to revise one's beliefs in a fallibilist spirit should that turn out to be necessary.

However, I would like to suggest that we leave the concept of inquiry, quite deliberately, vague enough to cover inquiries that do not exactly 'pursue truth' in the sense in which scientific and more generally academic and/or scholarly inquiries can be regarded as pursuing the truth. We should of course admit that the pursuit of (objective, mind-independent) truth is a pervasive phenomenon in academic life, not only in the natural sciences but also in those areas of inquiry (say, literary criticism or religious studies) where truth itself is largely a matter of interpretation, or construction of new illuminating perspectives on, e.g., certain historical documents.[39] Again this directly applies to religious and theological reflections—or 'inquiries', insofar as this notion is appropriate in this context. But we should also admit that inquiry extends even to areas in which it no longer makes much sense to speak about the pursuit of truth. For instance, political discussion may take the form of an (objective) inquiry as long as the participants are genuinely responsive to each others' possibly conflicting ideas and the evidence and other considerations brought to the picture by the discussants. Artistic inquiries, in turn, may very interestingly question our received views and conceptualizations of the world much more effectively than scientific theory-formation ever can. And even religious 'inquiries' into one's most fundamental ways of relating to the world and to one's individual and communal life may deserve the honorific title of an inquiry even if they are never responsive to evidence in the way science is but are, rather, primarily responsive to the deeply personal existential needs of the subject and the satisfaction of those needs in that person's concrete life situations.

A critic might argue that we are extending the concept of inquiry too far from its legitimate pragmatic meaning by seeking to accommodate even religious inquiries under this concept. If inquiry must be truly objective—responding to Peircean 'real things'—how can one's personal struggle with religious faith, or with losing one's faith, be an instance of inquiry? Moreover, are we not running the risk of sacrificing objective truth in this frightening age of 'fake news' and 'post-truth'? It could be suggested that especially by Peircean (and/or Deweyan) lights, inquiry aiming at the truth must be responsive to experience in a way that religious inquiry or even political deliberation can never be. In particular, religious faith might be *defined* in such a manner that it *cannot* be responsive to experience in the relative sense (in order to be religious).[40] This would lead to

fideism, according to which religious faith is simply not a rational matter—not a matter of inquiry. Now, my pragmatist account of realism, objectivity, and inquiry is clearly very different; as explained earlier, pragmatism seeks to transcend the received opposition between evidentialism and fideism by developing a form of religious inquiry responsive to experience without thereby losing the distinctive character of religious thought in comparison to science. The key to this is the general pragmatist account of inquiry, enriched with the concept of recognition outlined above. Religious inquiry may be a genuine inquiry—and even genuinely 'objective'—in the relevant pragmatic sense while being very different from standard scientific inquiries. It may still be responsive to experience and evidence drawn from the 'laboratory of life', distinguished from the scientific laboratory. There is no reason why our *Weltanschauungen*, or views of life and its significance, should not be regarded as pragmatically testable.

Religious inquiry, in the pragmatic sense, might be seen as an attempt to *recognize* different ways—one's own and others'—of being responsive to experiences of different types (or more generally of being responsive to argument, criticism, and other considerations that might lead to revisions in one's belief system). The notion of recognition, briefly discussed above, would thus again seem to be highly central in the pragmatic understanding of inquiry in general, and religious inquiry in particular. Such recognitions would never be 'objective' in the sense of being based on a 'God's-Eye View' on the world (cf. also Chapter 4 below); on the contrary, they would always, inevitably, be *someone's* actions and perspectives, humanly situated and engaged acts in the social world in which we live in and in which our very identities may depend on our relations (including relations of recognition) to other socially engaged subjects.[41] This kind of inquiry would indeed *be* a species of recognition. From a pragmatist point of view, then, the notions of inquiry and recognition would not just be contingently related to one another but would actually be fundamentally linked, to the extent that for a pragmatist it may in the end be impossible to understand the relevant concept of inquiry without understanding what it is to recognize other inquirers. Nor would acts of recognition be possible without implying dynamic projects of inquiry into the shared world.

The religious and theological significance of these ideas, left implicit here but to be made more explicit in the chapters that follow, may in fact be enormous. In particular, the pragmatist idea of inquiry as a pluralistic, fallibilist, and self-critical process of recognition is a necessary background for the entanglement of pragmatic realism and antitheodicism—as a response to our sharing the world with suffering others—to be developed later in this book.

## Science and religion

What *is* it to recognize someone or some group as belonging to the same intellectual community of inquirers, or as engaging in the practices of inquiry? What does it mean to be committed to a membership in such a community?

Is this ultimately a matter of recognizing certain *people* ('fellow inquirers') as rational (or attributing some other normative properties to them) or of recognizing certain *methodological norms or criteria* as objectively valid or binding?[42] Are these acts of recognition essentially different from the corresponding acts required for one's being able to live in a moral, political, and/or religious community? One hypothesis that a pragmatist could examine further is that the structures of recognition at work in these various cases can be used to clarify and evaluate certain important cases of conflict, e.g., situations in which one's 'objective' intellectual duties seem to run into conflict with one's 'subjective' religious (or, possibly, ethical) commitments. The very notion of an intellectual duty, investigated in what is called the 'ethics of belief', could thereby also be analyzed and redefined.[43] It is clear that the notions of objectivity and realism will have to be invoked here.

Moreover, it may be asked why the relatively heterogeneous (yet allegedly objective) 'scientific worldview' is usually regarded as a single and unified picture of the world maintained by a single, unified community of inquirers based on relations of mutual recognition, even though that worldview is itself full of tensions and disagreements (and so arguably *fails* to be a unified worldview at all). Why should, e.g., religious views be automatically excluded from such a worldview? This is again a question addressing our practices of recognition in contexts of inquiry. It is not immediately obvious why, for instance, the different philosophical interpretations of basic ('objective') ontological structures of reality—regarding, e.g., universals or modalities (cf. also Chapter 2)—would be any less dramatic conflicts of reason or rationality than the opposition between theism and atheism. Why do, say, realists and nominalists belong to the same community of rational inquirers committed to a scientific worldview and to the same rational methods of inquiry, while theists (according to new atheists, at least) do not? Analyzing these relations of recognition, or the lack thereof, is a key task for both pragmatists and non-pragmatists today, regarding both philosophy of religion and interdisciplinary religious studies.[44]

In cases of extreme intellectual conflict (between, say, conservative Christian fundamentalism and militant new atheism), there is little hope for mutual recognition or even tolerance. In some other cases, including the much narrower gap between liberal Christianity and, say, philosophical agnosticism based on some version of non-reductive naturalism rather than eliminative scientism, it is possible to aim not only at tolerance but at deep mutual respect grounded in acts of recognition. Even then, the somewhat conflicting accounts of reason and its role in religion and theology must be carefully considered. It might be suggested that a kind of *intolerance* may already be built into the Enlightenment project of reason use itself, if the latter is understood as being committed to the idea that the 'objectively best argument' necessarily 'wins' and that argumentative and/or intellectual considerations always ought to be followed 'wherever they lead'. Philosophical argumentation may itself have, e.g., ethical limitations that again need to be duly recognized. The pragmatist will therefore

also need to consider models of recognition that can be employed in a self-critical examination of one's ethical limitations, and those of the groups and social practices one engages in: it should be possible to recognize (while disagreeing with) a perspective from which one's argumentation, however intellectually sound, leads to ethically problematic conclusions.[45]

I have in this chapter emphasized pragmatism as a critical middle path between the implausible extremes of (strong) realism and antirealism, as well as evidentialism and fideism, among others. In conclusion, I should note that it would be an interesting further inquiry to reflect on this proposal to develop pragmatism as a *via media* by making a comparison to an apparently very different but on a closer look related position articulated and defended by Richard Kearney (2010), also intended as a middle ground option between traditional theisms and atheisms, and also offering an intriguing contribution to the problem of evil. I see Kearney's 'anatheism' as analogous to the kind of pragmatism I am defending in relation to both the epistemic and the existential interest in the philosophy of religion. The anatheist, just like the pragmatist, rejects mainstream realisms and antirealisms, as well as mainstream conceptions of religious belief either as merely subjective or (alternatively) as objective in the sense presupposed in standard analytic evidentialist philosophy of religion. These conceptions of religion simply do not help us in making sense of the ways in which religion is a distinctive human practice or phenomenon that invites neither militant rejection nor anti-intellectual acceptance but requires an ethically sensitive way of viewing the world and other human beings.

In brief, both the pragmatist (in my sense) and the anatheist (in Kearney's sense) seek to move beyond the standard dichotomies between evidentialism and fideism, as well as theism and atheism; both reject received views of objectivity and realism (as contrasted to subjectivity and antirealism); and both also reject all rationalizing attempts to resolve the problem of evil as manifestations of 'vicious intellectualism'. Here, however, I only want to recognize Kearney's position as a potential discussion partner for pragmatist philosophers of religion pursuing practice-laden objectivity and rationality. Future pragmatist studies of theological realism, objectivity, recognition, and religious inquiry would have to engage with the anatheist alternative as seriously as they have hitherto engaged with the various received views that are now ready to be left aside as potential blocks to the road of inquiry.

There are also explicitly pragmatist resources still not in full use in the general realism debate (and in its various localizations and contextualizations), as well as in the specific debate(s) on realism vs. antirealism regarding religion, theology, and religious studies. Pragmatism may be uniquely able to critically analyze the relations between these levels of the debate by contextualizing them in the underlying purposive practices and the needs or interests they serve (viz., religion, theology, scientific inquiry, philosophy itself), and due to its philosophical flexibility and inherent polyphony it may be well equipped to recognize other philosophical approaches, including mainstream ones such as

recognition theory and more idiosyncratic ones, such as Kearney's anatheism, as relevant conversation partners in its on-going inquiries. Pragmatism may, moreover, be the only perspective on the debate on realism and objectivity in religion and theology that can seriously make sense of the idea that 'mind independence' itself is not just a realistic 'given' but a human practice-laden construct. The concept of recognition, as we have seen, can be employed to enrich the pragmatist approach to the realism issue. This is a further Kantian-inspired (and certainly not only Hegelian) development of pragmatism.

This final point about pragmatic realism being a fundamentally Kantian way of thinking, in philosophy of religion and elsewhere, needs to be taken seriously. This even extends to the need to take seriously a pragmatic analogy of Kantian 'things in themselves' (or 'noumena') in this area (see again Chapter 3 below). Putnam (1983: 226), who generally sought to avoid strong metaphysical commitments, once pointed out that he is 'not inclined to scoff at the idea of a noumenal ground behind the dualities of experience, even if all attempts to talk about it lead to antinomies'; furthermore, he added that because 'one cannot talk about the transcendent or even deny its existence without paradox, one's attitude to it must, perhaps, be the concern of religion rather than rational philosophy'. In some later writings, too, Putnam (arguing against, say, what he regarded as pseudo-Wittgensteinian relativistic 'language-game theology') seems to maintain that a realistic attitude to what religious perspectives are perspectives on is a presupposition of making sense of religious and theological language use: 'A perspective on something cannot simply be "constructed"; if it is to be a perspective at all, it must be constrained by *what* it depicts […]' (Putnam 1997b: 414).

Insofar as such a realistic postulation of a transcendent reality of religion cannot really be spoken about in any ordinary language, pragmatic realism cannot be committed to any strong epistemological realism (or even semantic realism) about the transcendent. It can perhaps only incorporate a minimal assumption of ontological realism regarding transcendence, along with a fallibilist recognition of the possible recognition transcendence of any truths (or falsities) about it. There is something out there that we may have to postulate insofar as our religious attitudes are to have any sense in our practices (or to be sensibly denied), but we need to recognize that such postulations could always be completely mistaken. It is in terms of pragmatism itself that this kind of theological, religious, and philosophical attitudes and their presuppositions are to be critically evaluated.

Many of the themes of this book—realism, truth, recognition, objectivity—have in a preliminary way figured in my admittedly long, winding, and exhausting—even if still preliminary—sketch of a pragmatist approach to the realism debate and the philosophy of religion in this chapter. The next chapters will more systematically focus on more specific issues, each of which needs to be examined by employing these pragmatist notions now tentatively developed. First, however, we need to deepen our understanding of the pragmatist account of realism in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 2

# The Pragmatic Contextuality of Scheme (In)Dependence

This chapter has two main parts. First, I will present a brief historical survey of what I call, echoing the title of one of W.V. Quine's famous papers, seven 'milestones' in the historical development of the problem of realism. The final milestone I will arrive at is the pragmatic one—or, more precisely, an integration of Kantian and pragmatist approaches to the realism issue—and in the second half of the chapter I will examine *one* possible way of cashing out the pragmatic attitude to this issue, and of thus articulating *a* distinctively pragmatist line of thought in epistemology and metaphysics.[1] This is what I propose to call the *contextuality* of the notion of *ontological scheme dependence* (and, similarly, of scheme independence). While the first half of the chapter will go through a historical development of 2500 years in extremely broad strokes, the second half will offer a more detailed (albeit still relatively abstract and general) look at how the outcome of this development could, or should, be reconceptualized. A brief concluding section will then pull the threads together and point toward the subsequent chapters. This chapter will thus develop further the tentative pragmatist articulation of the interrelated issues of realism, objectivity, recognition, and inquiry that Chapter 1 was devoted to.

## Seven milestones in the history of the problem of realism

There are at least three importantly different perspectives on the realism issue (see Chapter 1). First, realism vs. nominalism is the traditional debate focusing on the problem of universals. Secondly, realism vs. idealism (or, in more recent discussions, realism vs. constructivism, relativism, etc.) is primarily a problem concerning the existence of mind-independent reality and the objectivity of truth. Thirdly, we may speak of 'realism about X', applying the problem of realism to different problem areas, e.g., theoretical entities, modalities, moral facts, or God.[2] In both historical and systematic treatments of the realism issue, these different meanings ought to be kept separate. Nevertheless, it is important to inquire into their points of contact. In my view, 'realism' is not just a homonymous term denoting quite different doctrines; the issues of real-

ism vs. nominalism and realism vs. idealism, for instance, do have something in common.

Let me also briefly recapitulate how different varieties of the problem of realism can be distinguished as follows (cf., e.g., Niiniluoto 1999):

- *Ontological realism*: is there a *mind-independent reality*, existing ontologically independently of the existence of minds (or, similarly, of concepts, theories, language, perspectives, etc.)?
- *Semantic realism*: can we refer to, or represent, such an independent reality by means of language; in particular, can the notions of *reference* and *truth* be cashed out realistically?
- *Epistemological realism*: is it (humanly) possible to (at least partly) *know* the mind-independent reality?
- *Methodological realism*: can we formulate methodological norms to guide our search for objective truth and knowledge about reality?
- *Scientific realism*: are scientific theories true or false about a mind-independent reality (including the unobservable theoretical entities they postulate), and can we understand the progress of science as a progress toward the truth?
- *Axiological and/or normative (e.g., moral) realism*: are there objective moral facts and/or moral truths (or other valuational and/or normative truths)?

Different forms of antirealism can, of course, be construed analogously, as we already saw in Chapter 1. The ontological antirealist denying the reality of a mind-independent world is typically a subjective idealist (e.g., a solipsist or a phenomenalist), while epistemological realism can also be disputed by a skeptic who subscribes to ontological realism. Semantic realism is rejected by, e.g., coherence theorists about truth. Furthermore, methodological and scientific realisms are criticized by instrumentalists, according to whom scientific theories lack truth values, and others who refuse to accept the idea that science could be seen as progressing toward truths about a mind- and theory-independent world. Finally, axiological realisms are attacked by antirealists who do not believe in objective moral (or other) values and truths, e.g., by moral noncognitivists and 'error theorists' who claim either that ethics is not a cognitive enterprise at all or that all moral (or generally valuational) statements are false, because there is nothing objective in the world corresponding to them.[3]

Let me in this historical overview draw particular attention to the ways in which the issues of realism vs. idealism and realism vs. nominalism are, though different problems with diverging histories, nevertheless entangled with each other. They are certainly not the same issue, but they are both historically and systematically connected in important ways, and these connections will play a role in the discussion of the second main section of the chapter. I will integrate my remarks about their entanglement into a brief, and admittedly very loose, historical story about the development of this set of problems, epitomized in seven 'milestones'.

**First milestone: ancient perspectives on realism.** Generally, *metaphysical realism*—more precisely, the view that the world possesses its 'own' (presumably humanly cognizable) intelligible structure ontologically independently of our beliefs, experiences, or conceptualizations—is a common presupposition in ancient metaphysical and epistemological discussions. However, there are interesting debates related to the modern realism issue(s) already in antiquity. These include at least Plato's (and Socrates's) criticisms of the Sophists, focusing on the latters' subjectivism and relativism; Plato's and Aristotle's disagreements on Forms (universals); and the debates over skepticism (usually also presupposing metaphysical realism, however). Generally, from these very old discussions, it is a long way to go to the modern problem framework of realism. Still, Plato's refutation of Protagoras's relativistic view that 'man is the measure' of all things (*anthropos metron*, *homo mensura*) is a standard reference in discussions of relativism even today. It also resurfaces in the pragmatist tradition through F.C.S. Schiller's 'humanism': according to Schiller, Protagoras's perspectivalism ultimately prevails over Plato's realism.[4]

**Second milestone: the medieval realism vs. nominalism dispute.** While Plato and Aristotle, though disagreeing about the independent existence of Forms, were both realists about universals, *nominalism* becomes, as is well known, a genuine option in the late Middle Ages, through the work of Duns Scotus and especially William Occam. According to Occam's Razor, we should avoid postulating explanatorily unnecessary entities, and universals were, for medieval nominalists, the prime example of such postulations. This has dramatic consequences for a number of other philosophical topics and issues, including the emergence of modern individualism. However, although the nominalist rejects the mind-independent reality of universals, endorsing the existence of particulars merely, those particulars are still usually regarded as mind- and conceptualization-independent entities. In this sense, nominalists are still metaphysical realists, believing that the world's 'own' structure is such that it lacks a general structure (universals) but contains only particulars.

**Third milestone: early modern philosophy.** Metaphysical (or what Kant called 'transcendental') realism is the common presupposition of the realism discussions in early modern philosophy, shared by very different thinkers before Kant's critical philosophy (e.g., Hobbes, Descartes, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Spinoza, and Leibniz). However, new aspects of the problem of realism arise during the early modern period. Most importantly, the problem of the existence of a mind-independent reality, posed from the perspective of *skeptical* challenges, becomes urgent largely thanks to René Descartes and David Hume (although this problem does have its historical background already in ancient skepticism). In addition, nominalism and extreme subjective idealism (phenomenalism) are now combined in George Berkeley's doctrine of *esse est percipi*. Still, it must be observed that a Berkeleyan idealist is a transcendental realist in Kant's sense. Indeed, Berkeley's phenomenalism is, from a Kantian perspective, a splendid example of a case in which transcendental realism leads

to 'empirical idealism'. The basic distinction to be later emphasized by Kant, the one between things in themselves and appearances, is not yet made by any of the early modern thinkers—not, at least, in its Kantian and post-Kantian sense. Without this distinction, the problem of realism can hardly be posed in its truly modern sense.

**Fourth milestone: Kant.** It is only with Kant that we finally arrive at the realism issue in (roughly) its contemporary shape. Kant is, then, *the* key figure of the development of the problem of realism (at least according to the pragmatist picture I am proposing). Here we can only briefly pay attention to some of the most central aspects of his views on this matter.

The distinction between *transcendental idealism* and *transcendental realism*—closely related to the dispute over 'one world' and 'two worlds' conceptions of the distinction between things in themselves and appearances, as discussed by recent commentators (e.g., Allison 2004)—is undoubtedly Kant's most important contribution to the development of the realism issue. Kant sought to rescue *empirical realism* within his transcendental idealism. According to Kant, we can only successfully be realists if we acknowledge that the basic spatio-temporal and categorial structure of the world is imposed by the subject—by us—and does not exist as 'ready-made' in the world *an sich*. Yet, empirical objects and events, Kant's appearances, are real—not fictitious or merely imagined. Appearances are cognitively accessible to us in experience. So, realism is possible within a transcendental conception of the 'ideal' nature of space and time (as forms of pure intuition) and of the categories, i.e., the pure concepts of the understanding. This combination of realism and idealism sets the stage for later attempts to 'save' realism within a somewhat different kind of idealism (e.g., pragmatism or constructivism). I will in the second half of the present chapter explain more fully what this pragmatist rearticulation of Kantian idealism may look like.

In addition to reconceptualizing realism through transcendental philosophy, Kant reinterpreted the very nature of metaphysics: this traditional philosophical discipline is now to be understood as examining the necessary structure of our thought about reality, instead of examining (*per impossibile*) the structure of reality 'in itself', thus (re-)entangling metaphysics and epistemology (and, possibly, even ethics). In such Kantian metaphysics, there is no room for metaphysical realism presupposing the world's 'own' ontological structure. Ontological categorization is up to us instead of being up to the world in itself. Whatever realism can be defended must, again, be subordinated to a critical transcendental theory of our human epistemic standpoint. Ontology, even realistic ontology, ceases to be epistemologically neutral or non-epistemic; rather, ontology (metaphysics) is possible only within a critical examination of our epistemic perspectives.

**Fifth milestone: classical pragmatism.** In the post-Kantian and post-Hegelian situation of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the classical pragmatists Peirce, James, and Dewey made further significant contributions to

the realism debate. What makes pragmatism 'post-Kantian' is not just the time of its historical appearance but also its tendency to place any humanly possible and meaningful pursuit of metaphysics, or ontology, in an epistemological context.

Peirce's pragmatism includes a severe critique of nominalism, integrated with a vigorous defense of 'extreme scholastic realism' and 'real generals', as well as an early version of scientific realism (understanding the advancement of science as a progress toward the truth, or toward the 'final opinion' of an idealized community of rational inquirers); yet, this realism is developed in connection with a kind of idealism: the world is not an unknowable *Ding an sich* but cognitively accessible, that is, within the reach of rational inquiry. According to James's more 'humanistic' pragmatism, we 'carve up' reality on the basis of our needs and interests; there is no ready-made world but only a humanly structured world. This position is most naturally interpreted as a naturalized version of transcendental idealism, James's distaste for Kant's heavy vocabulary and aprioristic methodology notwithstanding. For Dewey, finally, the objects of knowledge do not exist ready-made prior to inquiry but are constructed through the process of inquiry; yet, this construction is a natural process taking place in the fully natural world. Dewey combines Peirce's interest in the scientific method of inquiry with James's ideas of our active 'shaping' of reality into a humanly intelligible structure.

The pragmatist tradition—if a possibly somewhat overhasty generalization is allowed here—is generally characterized by a deep but fruitful tension between realism and idealism, connected with the tension between realism and nominalism. James and Dewey are more nominalistically oriented compared to the strongly realist Peirce, who is an idealist of his kind, however. None of these philosophers embraced any simple form of idealism or constructivism, but none of them was a naïve realist either, though all of them were some kind of naturalists. This desire to integrate a plurality of relevant perspectives on the realism issue is what makes pragmatism particularly relevant here. We will see toward the end of this chapter how the pragmatist insights into the realism issue could be further developed (and how their interesting developments require us to take seriously their Kantian background). The search for *pragmatic realism*, a critical middle path between extreme views along the scale of realism vs. anti-realism, is characteristic of the classical pragmatists' struggles with the realism issue(s), and its complexity and perspectivalness are something it shares with Kantian transcendental idealism.[5]

**Sixth milestone: 20th century philosophy of science and scientific realism.** The issue of *scientific realism* became urgent in twentieth century philosophy of science, especially after the demise of logical positivism. Leading thinkers like Karl Popper, J.J.C. Smart, and Wilfrid Sellars defended realism in the 1960s, whereas radical new philosophers of science like Thomas Kuhn and Paul Feyerabend criticized realism (and positivism), ending up with a kind of constructivism that again bears a striking resemblance to Kantian transcendental idealism (and arguably Jamesian pragmatism). These debates prepared the ground for

'post-analytic' neopragmatists', especially Hilary Putnam's and Richard Rorty's, contributions. Several more or less independent, yet related, issues can be distinguished in this complex development, which is highly relevant to the philosophy of religion, too, while primarily placed within the philosophy of science.

Scientific realism can, first, be contrasted with *instrumentalism*. In addition to the logical positivists of the earlier half of the twentieth century, Quine's empiricism, as well as the more recent versions of empiricist philosophy of science, including Bas van Fraassen's *constructive empiricism*, are perhaps the most relevant points of reference here. In this controversy, the crucial issue is whether scientific theories have truth values, whether they can be said to be true or false also about the unobservable world, and whether (if their truth-valued nature is acknowledged) we have any reasons to believe any theories to actually be true. The realist usually answers these questions affirmatively.[6] However, scientific realism also contrasts with (Kuhnian, neo-Kantian) *constructivism*. Here the main issue is whether scientific theories are true or false about a mind- and theory-independent world or whether the world they are 'about' is somehow 'constructed' (or constituted, shaped, carved up, etc.) in and through scientific inquiry. Parallels to the Jamesian–Deweyan pragmatist ideas introduced above can easily be found here.[7] The opposition between metaphysical and internal realism, as formulated by Putnam in the 1980s, does not, however, simply reduce to the controversy over realism and constructivism, because here a connection to the realism vs. nominalism dispute must also be observed; indeed, Ian Hacking (1983) plausibly characterized Putnam's internal realism as 'transcendental nominalism'. On the other hand, as internal realism allows multiple 'correct' ontological structures, it would be arbitrary to restrict these to nominalistic ones merely. As Putnam's position is (primarily) pragmatist, the different ontological 'structurings' of reality are evaluated on the basis of their human (in a broad sense, practical) relevance.

More metaphilosophically, there is an opposition between those who take seriously the problem of realism and those more 'quietist' or antirepresentationalist thinkers (e.g., Rorty, Fine, some Wittgensteinian philosophers, perhaps Quine) that would rather give up, or deconstruct, the entire realism issue. In twentieth century philosophy, one may, in addition, perceive a turning to 'local' problems of realism in different fields, e.g., metaethics, philosophy of biology, philosophy of religion, etc. The sixth milestone in the development of the realism issue is thus ambivalent between novel perspectives on the issue itself and critical perspectives skeptical of that very issue, at least as a 'global' philosophical problem.

**Seventh milestone: Kantian pragmatism.** The final, seventh, milestone in this development is the reintegration of the Kantian and the pragmatist perspectives on the realism issue. This is something that can only arise through the post-analytic neopragmatist contributions to the realism debate. Hence, it might even be described as a post-Putnamian phase in this dispute. Thus: back to Kant, but through the classical pragmatists!

We must, if we have arrived at this seventh milestone, instead of being satisfied with either Kant's transcendental idealism or (classical or contemporary) pragmatism as such, interpret pragmatism itself transcendentally, and thereby also 'naturalize' Kantian transcendental idealism. A reinterpretation of Peircean realism about 'generals' will also fall into its place as a natural element of such a reconceptualization of the entire realism issue (cf., e.g., Pihlström 2003, 2009: chapter 6). Finally, the Kantian-pragmatic perspective on realism also enables us to avoid the radical postmodern, deconstructive, quietist, or 'minimalist' metaphilosophical proposals, according to which the entire issue of realism is 'dead'. This *is* a genuine philosophical issue, and has been since antiquity, with a number of different forms and variations, to be constructively (and reconstructively) debated further in contemporary philosophy.

In the latter half of this chapter, I want to suggest *one* way of integrating Kantian and pragmatist perspectives into a (hopefully) novel account of realism. It is right here that we should move on to what I call the contextuality of scheme (in)dependence—an inescapably Kantian notion that I will try to illuminate in an irreducibly pragmatist way.

## Contextuality

One way of reviewing the developments that have been very briefly sketched in the first section of this chapter is to note that several thinkers in the central traditions of modern philosophy, including the pragmatist tradition, 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. This relativity or dependence is seen as crucial in overcoming standard forms of metaphysical realism, as well as scientific realism.

Among the historically influential defenders of key variations of this 'dependence thesis', as we will now call it—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, the following twelve major thinkers (not to be commented on here in any scholarly detail):

- Kant: the empirical world is constituted by the transcendental faculties of the human mind, i.e., the forms of intuition and the categories;
- James: whatever we may call a 'thing' depends on our purposes and selective interests;
- Schiller: we 'humanistically' construct the world and all truths about it within our purposive practices;
- Dewey: the objects of inquiry are constructed in and through inquiry, instead of existing as 'ready-made' prior to inquiry;

- 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;
- Quine: ontology is not absolute but relative to a theory, language, or translation scheme;
- 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;
- Putnam: there is no 'ready-made world' but only scheme-internal objects and properties;
- Goodman: we 'make worlds', or 'world versions', by employing our various symbol systems;
- Kuhn: different scientific paradigms constitute different 'worlds';
- Rorty: our 'vocabularies' constitute the ways the world is for us, and we must 'ethnocentrically' start from within the vocabularies we contingently possess;
- (possibly) Sellars: the best-explaining scientific theories are the 'measure' of what there is and what there is not.[8]

In their distinctive ways, these and many other thinkers have suggested, against strong(er) realists, that there is no absolute world *an sich* that we could meaningfully conceptualize or cognize; if there is a world 'in itself' at all, 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 framework comparable to Kantian transcendental idealism, as we have seen. The pragmatist who has reached our 'seventh milestone' will not, as should be clear by now, simply opt for antirealism or radical constructivism and relativism in ontology but, rather, seek a moderate pragmatic realism compatible with non-reductive naturalism. The problem is how to combine the (transcendental) scheme dependence of entities[9] with their pragmatic scheme independence (at the empirical level) in pragmatist metaphysics.[10]

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, the hero of our 'fourth milestone', spatio-temporal objects in the empirical world are 'outside us' (*ausser uns*) and in this sense exist empirically speaking independently of minds or schemes. Nevertheless, they are transcendentally 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, an issue importantly characterizing the seventh milestone of the development of realism.

Now, the main proposal of the remainder of this chapter, one I hope could be attractive to pragmatist epistemologists and metaphysicians in particular (though not only to them), is that one promising way of dealing with the realism issue, as explicated above, is by *contextualizing* the distinction between scheme-dependent and scheme-independent entities.[11] Nothing is *absolutely* scheme (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).[12] One may, in other words, maintain the former by redescribing it through practice-relative contextualization.

However, the contexts (or perspectives) invoked here are also themselves 'entities' that need to be contextualized in order to be identifiable as contexts at all. 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 (in principle *ad infinitum*). For pragmatists, not even the contextualization—and, hence, the contextual validation—of the distinction between scheme dependence and scheme independence can be a non-contextual or absolute (or absolutely scheme-independent) matter. It is, rather, in and through our practice-laden 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 for us. 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.[13] Moreover, 'we' are whatever we are only in certain contexts we find ourselves in. I am not even assuming that 'we' ourselves, though we in a sense construct experienceable reality, or realities, through our contexts, 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 (cf. Pihlström 2003, 2008a, 2009). Therefore, it is possible only after the 'seventh milestone' has been reached. 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') that constitute (again contextual) quasi-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 still transcendentally idealistic in the sense of emphasizing the Kantian-like constitutive 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 even the natural, worldly objects surrounding us on our specifically human, context-laden ways of conceptualizing, experiencing, and representing them from standpoints lying within our practices, or within contextually situated points of view embedded in those practices.

However, Kantian transcendental mind dependence or scheme dependence must not, as Robert Hanna (2001: 104) points out, 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'—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.[14] Thus, I want to propose a profound analogy between Kantian transcendental structures and the inevitable pragmatic 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 dependence are always inevitably contextual as well are transcendentally necessary presuppositions of 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*.

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 so. Our world-constituting, contextual activity is both transcendental and empirical, both constitutive of the world and part of it. It is this circularity, or these double perspectives, 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 is, again, 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—features that are themselves only relatively a priori and constitutive.

A critic, for instance, a Deweyan pragmatic naturalist, might ask why we should employ the Kantian vocabulary of the 'transcendental' here at all.[15] 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 (1993 [1975]) famous slogan, 'Anything goes'—than anything like the Kantian transcendental critique of reason with its fixed and unchangeable categories. True, the pragmatist (or pragmatic contextualist) must give up the universalistic element of Kant's transcendental philosophy: human experience and our ontological categorizations of reality lack the universal, immutable, and acontextual (non-relativized) structures that Kant saw as necessarily governing humanly possible experience. Whatever necessity there may be in our world structuring, it is itself inevitably contextual, hence only relatively a priori.[16]

Certainly Kant himself did not endorse any pragmatic contextualism (or pluralism) like this. However, a touch of Kantian transcendentality is maintained here—after the 'seventh milestone'—because it is only within a given context that we are so much as 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 (or, 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, albeit again only contextually, never from any absolute perspective supposedly provided by some kind of super-practice.

Accordingly, no Feyerabendian anarchism or radical relativism follows from pragmatic contextualism. Nor is our contextual world-categorizing reduced to the mere 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.[17] The pragmatic contextualist, while endorsing naturalism, must bear in mind that any 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. This would be an illustrative pragmatist case of fostering the habit of critically reflecting on and transforming one's habits.[18]

This leads us to a very important observation on the relations between the two dimensions of the problem of realism that were emphasized above. While the contextuality thesis is perhaps primarily an attempt to steer a middle course between realism and idealism by proposing a pragmatist variant of Kantian transcendental idealism, it is crucial to notice its connections with the realism vs. nominalism issue as well. Contextuality is generality; thus, even though I somewhat metaphorically called contexts 'entities', they are certainly not particulars. Instead, they are what enable us to ontologically individuate particulars

(and also other kinds of entity—that is, to engage in ontological categorization at all). In particular, when contextuality and contextualization are examined in close relation to the Peircean (and generally pragmatist) notion of habits of action, the link to Peircean realism about generality should be obvious. Again, I do not wish to interpret this form of realism in a metaphysically realistic manner; yet, when subordinated to the kind of transcendental pragmatism[19] I am generally proposing as the framework of this entire inquiry, Peircean 'real generals', including contexts, *can* definitely be ontologically postulated—though, again, only contextually.

## Fact and value

Let us briefly discuss an application of these issues to a special case, the fact-value entanglement. Fact and value, according to both classical (e.g., James's and Dewey's) and more recent (e.g., Putnam's) pragmatism, are deeply entangled. As James (1958 [1902]: 53) put it, values 'form the background for all our facts, the fountain-head of all the possibilities we conceive of'.[20] Values, then, obviously re-emerge in the realism discussion after our 'seventh milestone', while in a sense they were never really absent from it; after all, the earliest formulations of realism in antiquity were based on Plato's theory of Forms, with the Form of the Good as the highest conceivable reality whose 'light' emanates to everything there is. When later philosophers, including pragmatists, maintain that there really are no value-independent facts or objects at all, they are, then, in a good company.

One of Putnam's (e.g., 1990) central arguments for the fact-value entanglement and the related picture of moral objectivity he defends is a kind of indispensability argument. Putnam points out that objective, action-guiding moral values (that is, values that are no more subjective than facts) should not—*pace* moral skeptics, radical relativists, and 'error theorists' like Mackie—be regarded as ontologically 'queer' objects difficult to locate in the natural-scientific picture of the universe. Were values queer, *all* normative notions, including the ones we assume when defending the scientific conception of the world that Mackie and other critics of objective values regard as ontologically superior to ethical, value-laden conceptions, would be equally suspect. We would have no 'empirical world' at all as the object of our (scientific and non-scientific) descriptions, if we did not subscribe to the objectivity of at least some values. In order to have a coherent concept of a fact, Putnam believes, we must invoke values. The ways we discuss factual matters reveal and presuppose our entire system of value commitments; values are, in this sense, indispensable in all of our dealings with the world.

If this reasoning is plausible, there is no coherent way to deny the normative, action-guiding role played by the notions of rational acceptability, warrant, justification, and the like, and if such notions are allowed in our scientific con-

ceptual scheme(s)—or contexts—then there is no clear motivation for excluding moral values. However, far from being located in any transcendent realm beyond the natural and social reality familiar to us, values are, according to Putnam's pragmatism, entangled with the ordinary, natural facts we find ourselves embedded in.[21] The pragmatist, in any event, questions the scientistic tendency to regard virtually everything non-scientific as ontologically and epistemically 'queer'. In short, a truly pragmatic naturalism must be *non-reductive*, preserving the natural features of our human world, including full-blown normativity. There is, then, no reason to see the pragmatist's defense of the objectivity of moral values as non-naturalistic; on the contrary, we need to rethink our very idea of naturalism and accommodate distinctively human activities, including valuation, within nature, just as Dewey—the paradigmatic pragmatic naturalist—did in his thoroughgoing antireductionism about nature and experience (cf. Dewey 1986 [1929]).

Furthermore, drawing attention to the contingent actualities defining our practices of ethical evaluation, Putnam argues that as soon as that practical context is adequately taken into account, as any pragmatist should, there is no room for an artificial philosophical dichotomy between factual and evaluative discourse—nor, consequently, for a reductively naturalist or physicalist picture of reality that takes only scientifically established facts seriously and disregards values as 'queer' (cf. Mackie 1977). The human world is 'messy': if there is any fact/value distinction at all, it is inevitably fuzzy and contextual (cf. Putnam 2002, 2004; Pihlström 2005a). Yet, on the basis of what was said above about the contextuality of the scheme-dependence vs. scheme-independence distinction, we may now argue that fact and value are also *contextually distinguishable*—but only in contexts that specify criteria for distinguishing them. Hence, our ways of distinguishing between them, contextually, are themselves value-laden, dependent on further contexts, i.e., valuational schemes.

Fact and value, therefore, are not absolutely distinguishable, or distinct from a transcendent perspective (which we lack). Their entanglement, we may say, is a further pragmatic transcendental condition for our being able to experience, categorize, and represent the (only contextually identifiable) entities that we postulate in the world around us. The fact that our world is deeply structured by values is, again, constitutive of our being able to experience reality (facts) at all. While being, again, far removed from Kant's original transcendental theory of the necessary conditions for possible experience, it 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.

In *Philosophy as Cultural Politics*, the last collection of essays published in his lifetime, Rorty suggested that 'cultural politics' should replace systematic philosophical questions of ontology and epistemology. No serious pragmatist should in my view endorse this reductive view of philosophy, but an analogy to the present discussion ought to be acknowledged. Just as Rorty notes that the question of how exactly the relation between ontology and cultural politics

ought to be construed is itself a cultural-political question (Rorty 2007: 5), we may suggest that the question of how exactly the fact-value entanglement and/or distinguishability ought to be settled is itself a question that can only be adequately discussed within a valuational context. 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, and in which contexts, any purely factual issues to be distinguished from valuational ones. Even to claim that there are is a valuationally relevant move—and this definitely *is* a move we should make in certain humanly valuable contexts.

Once again, we must very carefully pay attention to the ways in which all this connects with the realism vs. nominalism issue. I suggested above that contexts should be understood as Peircean 'real generals' (themselves postulated only contextually), and now the same suggestion can be made about values and valuational (or value-laden) schemes, which themselves function as contexts for ontological postulations of facts (or of anything). No pragmatist should mischaracterize the ontological status of values in terms of particularity; values are no ordinary—or extraordinary—'things' that would be located in a queer transcendent realm of Platonic objects. They can be described as things or entities only in our extremely broad sense of these notions. Better, they are, once more, contextual schemes enabling us to so much as engage in ontological categorization; hence, they have a Peircean-like nature of generality.

## An infinite regress?

Does the view I have described and recommended as an explication of the seventh milestone of our historical development lead to an infinite regress? This is a serious question, but upon careful reflection I believe 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 in this chapter—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 that 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 in the history of philosophy. 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). 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* (see also Chapter 5 below), relativized to certain practice-embedded inquiries and uses of concepts, certain practice- and value-laden ways of viewing the world (ways that are themselves habitual 'generals' in the relevant Peircean sense). Pragmatic contextualism is a truth—or at least a reasonable philosophical conviction—emerging from our continuous critical 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 arguing[25] 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 transcendentally defended, for instance in the phenomenological tradition),[26] the impossibility of non-contextual identification of objects, or of any absolute scheme independence, is a transcendental necessity, yet again a contextual and pragmatic 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 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 metaphysico-epistemological, thesis about the ways things necessarily are for us. Without a valuational context, there could be no things—and 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 (in this case, 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, and our occupying a certain context is at least to some extent a contingent matter. 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, as well as more recent thinkers like Charles Taylor [1995] have argued). Moreover, this necessity is itself contingent at a meta-level: these transcendental reflections are valid only within a human world, our 'form of life' (see further Chapter 5). 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 the prospects of pragmatic realism, of any pragmatist theory 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.[27] More specific problems concerning, say, the fact-value entanglement—for example, whether this intertwinement is best understood as a matter of, say, emergence or, perhaps, Peircean synechistic continuity itself intelligible only in terms of real generality[28]—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.[29]

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 historical situation in pragmatist philosophical inquiry, after the 'seventh milestone' identified above, 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, I submit, is the pragmatic 'cash value' of my proposal. Hence, my strategy, I hope, pragmatically 'works'.

## Subjectivity

It might finally be asked whether the distinction between subject and object, or subjectivity and objectivity, can be maintained in any form in the pragmatic contextualism I am defending. After all, preserving this distinction might seem necessary, as contextualization must presumably be 'done' or 'performed' by

someone—that is, the subject, or perhaps someone or something like Kant's (and other transcendental philosophers') transcendental ego or transcendental subjectivity. Once again, however, we should understand the present pragmatist 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 anything can be only contextually so, we should also maintain the distinction between subject(ivity) and object(ivity) in a context-relative and thus scheme-dependent sense merely. 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.

Accordingly, 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 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?[30] At least we may say that our task of self-reflection—a task both intellectual (epistemic) 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.

The significance of these reflections for pragmatist philosophy, and for the entire post-Kantian literature on the 'dependence' of things on the transcendental (yet revisable) schemes and/or perspectives 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 into something thoroughly pragmatic. It thereby also succeeds in turning our inquiries into that 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 inquiry and contextualizers, as well as the contextuality of the epistemic points of departure of this inquiry itself, can be examined. This meta-level insight is possible only after a digestion of the basic ideas of the Kantian-pragmatic 'seventh milestone' of the history of realism. However, as we have seen, it also maintains a crucial connection to the earlier investigations—to be traced back to the first and second milestones—of realism in the sense of realism about universals or generals that Peirce greatly admired.

Thus, I want to once again emphasize the depth of the realism issue. It is not just one philosophical puzzle among many. It is, in many areas of philosophy, an absolutely central question that must be taken into account when determining what a responsible thinker should say about not only science and knowledge but also morality, politics, and religion. It is Kant who made this problem possible in its current form; it is the pragmatist tradition that enables us to fruitfully work on it further in the contemporary philosophical context. As the later chapters will show, the realism issue itself—elaborated on in this Kantian-cum-pragmatist spirit—will provide a crucial context for exploring key topics in the philosophy of religion, especially the theodicy problem. In this chapter I have stayed at an abstract metaphilosophical level and left those issues implicit, but it should be obvious that the pragmatic contextualism we have reached is relevant, or even indispensable, to the pragmatist elaborations of the next chapters.

CHAPTER 3

# Pragmatism and Critical Philosophy

According to Dewey's famous words—toward the end of *Experience and Nature*—philosophy can be characterized as the 'critical method of developing methods of criticism' (Dewey 1986 [1929]: 354). I have already argued in Chapter 2 that we should appreciate the way in which pragmatism is indebted to, or is even a species of, critical philosophy, perhaps not exactly in Kant's original sense of this term but in a developed sense that still retains something from the Kantian idea of criticism, especially the idea of the *reflexivity* essential to human reason use and inquiry. It is through inquiry itself that we can (only) hope to shed light on what it means to inquire. Philosophy is an inquiry into inquiry, and this is a fundamentally Kantian critical point. 'Der *kritische* Weg ist allein noch offen', Kant (1990 [1781/1787]: A856/B884) wrote when concluding his first *Critique*.

The relationship between Kant and pragmatism can and should be critically considered not only in general terms but also through specific instances. In this chapter, I will first make some broad remarks on the relevance of Kantian critical philosophy as a background of pragmatism, moving on to pragmatist philosophy of religion from the rather general metaphilosophical considerations of Chapter 2 (cf. also Pihlström 2010a, 2013a). I will then examine the ways in which Kantian issues are present in the distinctive way in which James—at the very core of his development of the pragmatic method, already hinted at though not properly discussed in the introduction and Chapter 1—takes seriously the reality of evil and suffering, developing a thoroughly 'antitheodicist' philosophical outlook. However, I also want to connect this theme with another development in more recent neopragmatism that might prima facie be taken to be relatively far from any Kantian ideas, namely, Rorty's ironism, as it emerges from his reading of George Orwell's groundbreaking novel, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949).

I am certainly not claiming Rorty to be a critical philosopher in anything like the Kantian sense, but I am confident that even the context of pragmatist inquiry within which his liberal ironism is developed owes fundamental points of departure to Kantian transcendental philosophy. Finally, I will show how a certain worry regarding what might be considered a potential slippery slope from James to Rorty arises from the Kantian background of pragmatist antitheodicism. We will begin from an overall view of the Kantian roots of

what I am calling the 'pragmatist protest' and then move on to James's pragmatic method and antitheodicism, and finally to Rorty and Orwell—and, simultaneously, to the Kantian dimensions of pragmatist inquiry into suffering. In this way, the present chapter will make a gradual transition from general pragmatist issues and arguments to more specific examinations of the problem of evil and suffering.

## Pragmatism and the Kantian postulates

It may be argued that it is, to a significant extent, the Kantian nature of pragmatism, as well as the ability of pragmatism to critically reinterpret, transform, and further develop some key Kantian ideas, that makes pragmatism a highly relevant philosophical approach today—in, e.g., metaphysical and epistemological discussions of realism and idealism, ethics and axiology, the philosophy of religion, and many other fields. There are a number of central aspects in which pragmatism, early and late, can be regarded as a Kantian philosophy, focusing on the nature of metaphysics, the relation between fact and value, and religion.

James, to be sure, saw philosophical progress as going 'round' Kant instead of going 'through' him. Undeniably, many pragmatists have defended non- or even anti-Kantian views regarding various philosophical problems: contrary to Kant's universalism and apriorism, pragmatism tends to emphasize the contingent practice embeddedness of knowledge, morality, and value. However, pragmatism—even James's—also shares crucial assumptions with Kant's critical philosophy, to the extent that Murray Murphey (1966) aptly called the classical Cambridge pragmatists 'Kant's children'. Recent scholarship has extensively covered the Kantian background of pragmatism and the affinities between pragmatism and transcendental philosophical methodology (see, e.g., Gava & Stern 2016). In this chapter or even the entire book, we obviously cannot do justice to the richness of the question concerning the pragmatists' relation to Kant—either historically or systematically—although the basic Kantian-cum-pragmatist idea of scheme dependence was already pursued in the previous chapter. One may, however, shed light on this topic by exploring this relation through the case of pragmatist philosophy of religion and its relation to one of the fundamental ideas of Kant's philosophy of religion, i.e., the postulates of practical reason, as well as the more specific case of the theodicy issue.

As is well known, Kant transformed and transcended various controversies and dichotomies of his times, critically synthesizing, e.g., rationalism and empiricism, realism and idealism, determinism and freedom, as well as nature and morality. Similarly, pragmatism has often been defended as a critical middle ground option (cf. the introduction above). For James, famously, pragmatism mediates between extreme positions, particularly the conflicting temperaments of the 'tough-minded' and the 'tender-minded'. In the philosophy of religion, in particular, one may also find Kantian aspects of prag-

matic approaches in, e.g., the problems of theism vs. atheism and evidentialism vs. fideism (see Chapter 1). For virtually no pragmatist can religious faith be said to be a strictly evidential issue on a par with scientific hypotheses. Evidence plays only a relatively marginal role in religion, as religion has to do with the way in which one understands and relates to one's life as a whole. According to Kant as well as pragmatism, religion must be intimately connected with the ethical life. We can pursue moral theology, no theological ethics: religion cannot be the ground of ethics but must itself be grounded in the requirements of morality. One may, then, employ both Kantian and pragmatist insights in order to argue that the theism vs. atheism issue is not exhausted by the narrowly intellectual (evidentialist) considerations one might advance in favor of either theism or atheism.

Pragmatist philosophy of religion (especially James's) can be seen as reinterpreting and further developing Kant's postulates of practical reason, i.e., the freedom of the will, the existence of God, and the immortality of the soul. It is, in particular, from the perspective of the pragmatist proposal to (re-)entangle ethics and metaphysics that this Kantian topic deserves scrutiny. One may ask whether the defense of the postulates in the Dialectics of Kant's second *Critique* leads to a metaphysical position according to which God exists. Here the pragmatist may plausibly suggest that Kant's postulates are, again, *both* metaphysical *and* ethical—with metaphysical and ethical aspects inextricably intertwined.

Although this is not Kant's own way of putting the matter, one may say that the postulates presuppose that the world is not absolutely independent of human perspectives but is responsive to human ethical (or more generally valuational) needs and interests, or (in a Jamesian phrase) 'in the making' through such needs and interests. Human beings structure reality, including any possible religious reality, partly in terms of what their commitment to morality requires; there is no pre-structured, 'ready-made' world that could be meaningfully engaged with. It remains an open question whether, or to what extent, this structuring is really metaphysical. Some interpreters prefer a purely ethical, 'merely pragmatic', account of the Kantian postulates. Is there 'really' a God, or is one just entitled to act 'as if' there were one? This question needs to be pursued by pragmatists as much as Kantians (see also Pihlström 2013a).

Kant constructs his moral argument for the existence of God and the immortality of the soul in the 'Canon of Pure Reason' (Kant 1990 [1781/1787]: A795/B823ff.) and the Dialectics of the second *Critique* (Kant 1983a [1788]: A223ff.). As mere ideas of pure reason ('transcendental ideas'), the concepts of freedom, God, and the soul lack 'objective reality'. At best, they can be employed *regulatively*, not *constitutively*. This, however, is only the point of view that theoretical, speculative reason offers to the matter. From the perspective of practical reason—which, famously, is ultimately 'prior to' theoretical reason in Kant's system (see ibid.: A215ff.)—there is a kind of 'reality' corresponding to these concepts. Their epistemic status, when transformed into postulates of practical reason, differs from the status of the constitutive, transcendental conditions

of any humanly possible experience, i.e., the categories and the forms of pure intuition, explored in the 'Transcendental Analytic' and the 'Transcendental Aesthetic' of the first *Critique*. The latter kind of conditions necessarily structure, according to Kant, the (or any) humanly cognizable world, that is, any objects or events that may be conceivably encountered in experience. However, the postulates of practical reason also structure—in an analogical albeit not identical manner—the human world as a world of ethical concern, deliberation, and action. Yet, this 'structuring', one may argue, is not 'merely ethical' but also metaphysical.

From a pragmatist point of view, as much as from the Kantian one, ethics and metaphysics are deeply entangled here. Religion, or theism, is pragmatically legitimated as a postulate needed for morality, for ethical life and practices. Yet, no theological ethics can be accepted; what is needed, according to both Kant and pragmatists like James, is *moral theology*. Any attempt to base ethics on theology, or religion, would (in Kantian terms) be an example of heteronomy instead of autonomy, but the only critical and rational way to provide a basis for theology is the ethical way.

The Kantian pragmatist needs to consider a problem here, though. Is theism in the context of this kind of argumentation practically legitimated a priori, as it of course is in Kant, or does it receive its legitimation empirically or psychologically, as an attitude 'energizing' moral life, because we are the kind of beings we are, as in James and perhaps other pragmatists? One possible suggestion is that just as Kantian transcendental (critical) philosophy synthesizes the pre-critically opposed epistemological doctrines of empiricism and rationalism, and just as pragmatism bridges the gap between facts and values, one may try to reconcile Kantian (transcendental) and Jamesian (pragmatist, empirical, psychological) ways of justifying theism ethically. The Kantian perspective on theism needs pragmatic rearticulation, and the thus rearticulated pragmatic aspects of theism are not disconnected from the Kantian transcendental work of practical reason.

It is part of such rearticulation to perceive that Kant's criticism of *theodicies* as rationalizing, speculative, intellectualistic attempts to provide reasons for God's allowing the world to contain evil and suffering can also be reread from the standpoint of pragmatist (especially Jamesian) attacks on theodicies (to be soon explored in some more detail). It is not an accident that Kant is the starting point for both pragmatist criticisms of metaphysical realism and for pragmatist criticisms of theodicies, as both are crucial in the project of critical philosophy continued by pragmatism. From the pragmatist as well as Kantian perspective, theodicies commit the same mistake as metaphysical realism: they aim at a speculative, absolute account (from a 'God's-Eye View') of why an omnipotent, omniscient, and absolutely benevolent God allows, or might allow, the world to contain apparently unnecessary and meaningless evil and suffering. Kantian critical philosophy denies the possibility of such a transcendent account or such metaphysical, speculative truths—and this denial is itself, again, both

ethical and metaphysical, followed by James's firm rejection of any theodicies as insensitive to the irreducibility of other human beings' suffering.

We might even speak about a pragmatist 'protest' in the philosophy of religion, and about its Kantian roots. This is simply because we can see pragmatism as protesting against various received views of mainstream philosophy of religion today, such as metaphysical realism, evidentialism, and theodicism, all of which are typically maintained by leading analytic philosophers of religion—but also against various tendencies in contemporary 'postmodern' or 'Continental' philosophy of religion, such as radical anti-metaphysics, constructivism, and relativism.

We should study this protest in relation to a special case, the theodicy vs. antitheodicy controversy. I want to emphasize that *protest needs critique*: it is one thing to simply abandon some position or protest against it, and quite another to base one's protest on a careful critical analysis and argumentation. In the case of critical philosophy, this particularly means self-criticism and self-discipline.[1] The pragmatist version of this idea is the Deweyan view of philosophy as a critical method for developing methods of criticism. In this fundamental sense, even Deweyan pragmatists (despite Dewey's occasionally sharp attacks on Kant) continue the Kantian critical project—and this is even more clearly so with James, whose antitheodicist protest we will now examine.

## The pragmatic method and the reality of evil

To properly set the stage for a pragmatist inquiry into the problem of evil and suffering, I will now briefly explore James's views on the pragmatic method and metaphysics, thus elaborating on the kind of Kantian reading of James already hinted at earlier. I will then suggest that the problem of evil and suffering plays a crucial role in James's philosophy of religion, metaphysics, and the pragmatic method—and it is this problem, in particular, that needs to be examined in relation to its Kantian background.

James famously argued that in *every* genuine metaphysical dispute, some practical issue is, however remotely, involved. If there is no such issue involved, then the dispute is empty. Jamesian pragmatism is thus here both influenced by and in contrast with the Kantian (somewhat proto-pragmatist) idea of the 'primacy of practical reason' in relation to theoretical reason. As we just saw, for Kant, the metaphysical ideas of God, freedom, and immortality are only vindicated by the practical, instead of theoretical, use of reason. The Jamesian pragmatist, however, goes beyond Kant in emphasizing not simply the 'primacy' of ethics (or practical reason) to metaphysics but their profound inseparability and entanglement. Pragmatist inquiries into metaphysical topics, such as James's, lead to the radical claim that metaphysics might not, in the last analysis, even be *possible* without a relation to ethics: pragmatically analyzed, we cannot arrive at *any* understanding of reality as we humans, being ourselves

part of that reality, experience it, without paying due attention to the way in which moral valuations and ethical commitments are constitutive of that reality by being ineliminably involved in any engagement with reality possible for us. Ethics, then, plays a 'transcendental' role constitutive of any metaphysical inquiry we may engage in. It is omnipresent in the contexts enabling our use of any ontologizing schemes (cf. Chapter 2).

More specifically, ethics seems to function as a ground for evaluating rival metaphysical hypotheses and for determining their pragmatic core meaning. The (conceivable) practical results the pragmatist metaphysician should look for are, primarily, ethical. Examples of such ethical evaluation of metaphysical matters can be found in the Jamesian pragmatic search for a critical middle path between implausible metaphysical extremes, as discussed in the third lecture of *Pragmatism*, 'Some Metaphysical Problems Pragmatically Considered'. The topics James there (and in the fourth lecture in which the analysis continues) considers include debates over substance, determinism vs. freedom, materialism vs. theism, monism vs. pluralism, and (somewhat indirectly) realism vs. nominalism. Some of these metaphysical examples are quite explicitly ethical. Such are, for instance, the dispute between determinism and free will, as well as the one between materialism and theism, which the philosopher employing James's pragmatic method examines from the point of view of what the rival metaphysical theories of the world 'promise': how does, for instance, the conceivable future of the world change if theism, instead of materialism (atheism), is true, or vice versa? In Lecture III of *Pragmatism* James argues, among other things, that theism, unlike materialism, is a philosophy of 'hope', because it promises us a world in which morality could make a difference.[2]

In this context I want to draw attention to a very important special way in which ethics is prior to, or contextualizes, any humanly possible metaphysical (and, arguably, theological) inquiry in Jamesian pragmatism. Recognizing the reality of evil is a key element of James's pluralistic pragmatism and its conceptions of religion and morality. The critique of monism, especially the attack on monistic Hegelian absolute idealism, is a recurring theme in James's philosophy. An investigation of the problem of evil can show how he argues against monism and defends pluralism on an ethical basis and how, therefore, his pragmatic metaphysics is grounded in ethics in a Kantian manner.

James was troubled by the problem of evil already during his spiritual crisis in 1870. He felt that the existence of evil might be a threat to a 'moralist' attitude to the world, leading the would-be moralist to despair. 'Can one with full knowledge and sincerely ever bring one's self so to sympathize with the total process of the universe as heartily to assent to the evil that seems inherent in its details?' he wondered, replying that, if so, then optimism is possible, but that for some, pessimism is the only choice.[3] Already at this stage, he saw a problem with the idea of a 'total process' optimistically taken to be well in order. According to Ralph Barton Perry (1964 [1948]: 122), both optimism and pessimism were impossible for James, because he was 'too sensitive to ignore evil,

too moral to tolerate it, and too ardent to accept it as inevitable'. It is already here that we can find the seeds of his *melioristic* pragmatism, which he later developed in more detail. This view says, in short, that we should *try* to make the world better, fighting against evil, without having any guarantee that the good cause will win, but having the right, or even the duty, to hope that it might and to invest our best efforts to make sure it will.

James worked on these issues throughout his life. In his last book, *Some Problems of Philosophy*, he offered several arguments against monism, among them the argument that monism creates, and will not be able to solve, the problem of evil:

> Evil, for pluralism, presents only the practical problem of how to get rid of it. For monism the puzzle is theoretical: How—if Perfection be the source, should there be Imperfection? If the world as known to the Absolute be perfect, why should it be known otherwise, in myriads of inferior finite editions also? The perfect edition surely was enough. How do the breakage and dispersion and ignorance get in? (James 1996 [1911]: 138.)

That pragmatists, unlike monists, must take evil and imperfection seriously, refusing to 'be deaf to the cries of the wounded' (as James put it elsewhere), is presented as one of the ethical motivations grounding the entire pragmatist method in the first lecture of *Pragmatism*. Referring to the actual fate of some suffering people, such as (drawing from a publication by Morrison I. Swift, an anarchist writer) an unemployed and in various ways disappointed and discouraged sick man who found his family lacking food and eventually committed suicide, James argued, against 'the airy and shallow optimism of current religious philosophy' (James 1975 [1907]: 20), that what such desperate human beings experience '*is* Reality': 'But while Professors Royce and Bradley and a whole host of guileless thoroughfed thinkers are unveiling Reality and the Absolute and explaining away evil and pain, this is the condition of the only beings known to us anywhere in the universe with a developed consciousness of what the universe is' (ibid.: 21).[4]

Thus, idealist, optimistic philosophers 'are dealing in shades, while those who live and feel know truth' (ibid.: 22); a Hegelian or Leibnizian theodicy postulating a metaphysical or theological ultimate harmony of the universe is 'a cold literary exercise, whose cheerful substance even hell-fire does not warm' (ibid.: 20). What I am calling theodicism is, for James, part of the 'unreality in all rationalistic systems' of 'religious' philosophy that remain 'out of touch with concrete facts and joys and sorrows' (ibid.: 17). James here even quotes at length from Leibniz's *Théodicée* (ibid.: 19–20), concluding that 'no realistic image of the experience of a damned soul had ever approached the portals of his mind' (ibid.: 20). In order to overcome the ethically unbearable condition of the philosophical (and theological) tradition of theodicism, James offers

pragmatism as a philosophy that can, pluralistically, respond to a *variety* of experiences, including genuine loss and evil, without simply tolerating such experiences, and without entirely losing the potential consolation of religion with the abandonment of theodicies (cf. ibid.: 23). It is from this antitheodicist challenge that *Pragmatism*, like pragmatism, unfolds.

We should take seriously the fact that James uses the notion of *truth* in this context, as well as terms such as 'fact', 'reality', 'unreality', and 'realistic'. His invoking the concept of truth in particular is not just a non-technical loose way of speaking but, I submit, an instance of his pragmatist account of truth in action. We must, in particular, take James's concern with the truth of pluralism (and the falsity of monism and absolute idealism) in his own pragmatic sense, the same sense in which he speaks about 'living' and 'feeling' people knowing 'the truth' (ibid.: 20, cited above). This is truth not in the sense of metaphysical realism postulating a correspondence relation holding (or failing to hold) independently of human beings and their needs and interests, but a pragmatic truth dynamically emerging from human valuational practices of engaging with reality and their experiences of it (see further Chapter 4 below).[5]

Nevertheless, it would be highly misleading to claim that James was not interested in the question about the 'real' (genuine, objective) truth of (say) pluralism (vs. monism), or other metaphysical views he considers in *Pragmatism* and elsewhere—just as it would be misleading to claim that Kant would not have been interested in the truth of theism, for instance. Certainly truth plays a role here, and neither James nor Kant subscribes to an easy antirealism or relativism according to which the truth (vs. falsity) about evil and suffering (or about God) would simply be a human perspectival construction; yet, our human practice-embedded perspectives can never be eliminated from the consideration of these truths, and this is exactly where the Kantian and the Jamesian approaches to the philosophy of religion join forces.[6] Indeed, it can be suggested that the special moral significance of the pragmatist conception of truth (and reality), as articulated by James in *Pragmatism* (and elsewhere), arises from the fundamental link between antitheodicism and the acknowledgment of truth and reality along the phrases just quoted. We (pragmatically) need the pragmatist conception of truth in order to make sense of this demand of acknowledgment of the reality of pain and suffering. A non-pragmatic (e.g., metaphysically realistic correspondence) notion of truth just cannot do the job. Moreover, it is, from the Jamesian perspective, a kind of 'fake news' based on an *un*concern with truth to claim, with theodicists, that there 'really' is no unnecessary or meaningless evil, or that suffering has some 'real' sense or purpose.

James's pragmatist and pluralist position can now be summarized as an outcome of a transcendental argument in a quasi-Kantian fashion (cf. Kivistö & Pihlström 2016: chapters 5–6). Our taking seriously the reality of evil is understood by James to be a necessary condition for the possibility of ethically meaningful or valuable life (in a pluralistic metaphysical setting), including any true religious meaning one may find in one's life. Evil itself is not intrinsically,

metaphysically, necessary to the universe itself, as the absolute idealist would be forced to hold, but it is necessary in a *presuppositional* sense: *if* there is any legitimate role for religious (theistic) beliefs to play in our lives, such a system of beliefs must acknowledge the reality of evil while resisting the 'corrupt', immoral idea that an ultimately moral creator 'planned' it and is prepared to pay the price in order to secure some greater good.

Furthermore, the metaphysical acceptance of evil and the fight against it constitute a pragmatic criterion of adequacy for pragmatism itself. Pragmatism proves to be a philosophy taking evil seriously (cf. Pihlström 2014b), without hiding it or trying to explain it away (as monistic idealism does, according to James), yet encouraging us to join in a struggle against it, melioristically trying to make our world a better one. This is a reflexive pragmatic argument in favor of pragmatism and pluralism themselves. By enabling us to make a difference, pragmatism offers a more satisfactory picture of the nature and role of evil in human lives than monistic idealism (or, *mutatis mutandis*, many contemporary analytic philosophers' evidentialist theism typically postulating a theodicy). The price to be paid here, however, is an irresolvable metaphysical and theological insecurity: there is no final solution to the problem of evil, as new experiences of ever more horrendous evils may eventually even make it impossible for us to go on actively fighting against evil. Insofar as a pragmatic defense of pragmatism is available, such a defense will have to remain thoroughly fallibilist. We may be unable to react pragmatically to the problem of evil, after all, and for many thinkers this may be a ground for rejecting religious beliefs altogether.

According to this Jamesian antitheodicy, the recognition of genuine evil is required as a background, or as I prefer to say, a transcendental condition, of the possibility of making a difference, a positive contribution, in favor of goodness.[7] The problem of evil can be seen as a *frame* that puts the other philosophical explorations of James's *Pragmatism* into a certain context. It shows that reacting to the problem of evil—and the highly individual experiences of being a victim to evil that we may hear in the 'cries of the wounded'—is essential in our ethical orientation to the world we live in, which in turn is essential in the use of the pragmatic method as a method of making our ideas clear, both metaphysically and conceptually (and even religiously or theologically). *Pragmatism*, as we saw, opens the project of advancing a melioristic philosophy with a discussion of the concrete reality of evil, and in the final pages of the book James returns to evil, suffering, loss, and tragedy:

> In particular *this* query has always come home to me: May not the claims of tender-mindedness go too far? May not the notion of a world already saved *in toto* anyhow, be too saccharine to stand? May not religious optimism be too idyllic? Must *all* be saved? Is *no* price to be paid in the work of salvation? Is the last word sweet? Is all 'yes, yes' in the universe? Doesn't the fact of 'no' stand at the very core of life? Doesn't the very 'seriousness' that we attribute to life mean that ineluctable noes

> and losses form a part of it, that there are genuine sacrifices somewhere, and that something permanently drastic and bitter always remains at the bottom of its cup?
>
> I cannot speak officially as a pragmatist here; all I can say is that my own pragmatism offers no objection to my taking sides with this more moralistic view, and giving up the claim of total reconciliation. […] It is then perfectly possible to accept sincerely a drastic kind of a universe from which the element of 'seriousness' is not to be expelled. Whoso does so is, it seems to me, a genuine pragmatist. (James 1975 [1907]: 141–142.)

It is this very same moral seriousness that I find essential to emphasize in the contemporary discourse on evil. There is a sense in which our moral life with other human beings in a world full of suffering is tragic: given our finitude, we will never be able to fully overcome evil and suffering; yet we must constantly try. James's pragmatism is not only generally relevant as a critical middle path solution to several controversies in contemporary philosophy of religion, but also *a* promising move toward the kind of antitheodicism I think we vitally need in any serious moral philosophy. It may also keep our eyes open to the reality of the tragic dimension of human life. Yet, even the notion of tragedy might lead us astray here in something like a theodicist manner. Tragedies, though not themselves theodicies, are meaningful and 'deep' in a sense in which human real-world evils and sufferings such as the Holocaust often are not. It is presumably better to speak about Jamesian *melancholy*—about the sick soul's fundamentally melancholic way of approaching ethics, religion, and the world in general.

Moreover, it must be kept in mind that James's antitheodicy (and the understanding of the problem of evil as a 'frame') emerges in the context of developing pragmatism in general as a *philosophy*—not only as an ethical approach but as a philosophical orientation in general. It is in this context that James offers pragmatism as a critical middle ground between 'tough-minded' and 'tender-minded' philosophies. Antitheodicy and melancholy are, thus, conditions for the adequacy of (pragmatist) philosophizing as such.

## Rortyan ironism and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

Having briefly defended a resolutely antitheodicist reading of James and an antitheodicist way of developing pragmatism generally—as a philosophical contribution to the discourse on evil, but also more comprehensively as a contribution to the examination of the relations between ethics and metaphysics—we should consider the way in which this antitheodicism is both rooted in Kantian antitheodicism and threatened by a certain kind of problematization of the notions of truth and reality that James's own pragmatism takes some

crucial steps toward. In this context, we will have to expand our horizon from James and Kant to Rorty's neopragmatism and especially to Rorty's treatment of Orwell (again, see also Kivistö & Pihlström 2016: chapter 5).

According to Rorty, famously, *cruelty* is the worst thing we do. This is, one might suggest, another pragmatist version of the Jamesian principle according to which we should always listen to the 'cries of the wounded'. There is a kind of *holism* involved in Rorty's position, just like in James's: 'don't be cruel' could be regarded as a meta-principle governing all other moral principles (and, to put it in a Kantian way, governing the choice of all moral principles), yet itself (like all more specific principles, and unlike the Kantian meta-principle, the categorical imperative) fallible and revisable, even though it may be difficult or even impossible to imagine how exactly it could fail—just like it is impossible to imagine, say, in the context of Quinean holism, what it would really be like to falsify a logical or mathematical principle.[8] There are, *pace* Kant, no *unconditional* ideals or principles, either for James or for Rorty, while both pragmatist philosophers do operate with broader and more inclusive (as well as narrower and less inclusive) moral views and principles. Whereas for James the broadest imaginable principle seems to be the requirement to realize the largest possible universe of good while carefully listening to the cries of the wounded, for Rorty an analogous role is played by the liberal principle of avoiding cruelty and realizing individual freedom as fully as possible. All ethical requirements, including these, are contingent and in principle fallible, as everything is contained in a holistic, revisable totality of our on-going ethical thought and conversation. (Analogously, we may say, the transcendental is contained in the empirical, and vice versa: for a Kantian pragmatist, the transcendental constitutes and constrains the empirical, but also arises from our empirically real capacities.)

In his essay on Orwell, Rorty—whose protest against mainstream analytic philosophy is much stronger than most other pragmatists'—rejects realistic readings of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, according to which the book defends an objective notion of truth in the context of a penetrating moral critique of the horrible and humiliating way in which the protagonist, Winston, is made to believe that two plus two equals five.[9] Consistently with his well-known position (if it can be regarded as a 'position' at all), Rorty denies that 'there are any plain moral facts out there in the world, […] any truths independent of language, [or] any neutral ground on which to stand and argue that either torture or kindness are preferable to the other' (Rorty 1989: 173). Orwell's significance lies in a novel redescription of what is possible: he convinced us that 'nothing in the nature of truth, or man, or history' will block the conceivable scenario that 'the same developments which had made human equality technically possible might make endless slavery possible' (ibid.: 175). Hence, O'Brien, the torturer and 'Party intellectual', is Orwell's key invention, and he, crucially, offers *no answer* to O'Brien's position: 'He does not view O'Brien as crazy, misguided, seduced by a mistaken theory, or blind to the moral facts. He simply views him as *dangerous* and as *possible*' (ibid.: 176).

The key idea here, according to Rorty, is that truth as such does not matter: '[…] what matters is your ability to talk to other people about what seems to you true, not what is in fact true' (ibid.).[10] Famously, in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Winston's self is in a way destroyed as he is made to believe that two plus two equals five and to utter 'Do it to Julia!' when faced with his worst fear, the rats. Rorty points out that this is something he 'could not utter sincerely and still be able to put himself back together' (ibid.: 179).

The notion of *sincerity* is central here, as it leads us to the way in which Kant critically discusses theodicies in his 1791 essay, 'Über das Misslingen aller philosophischen Versuche in der Theodicee' ('On the Miscarriage of all Philosophical Trials in Theodicy'), a largely neglected short piece that usually does not get the kind of attention that Kant's more famous doctrine of 'radical evil' does (not to speak of the main works of his critical philosophy).[11] I believe we should follow Kant in rejecting theodicies not only for intellectual but also for ethical (and, therefore, religious) reasons; indeed, James (as I have interpreted him above) is, in this sense, a Kantian. As Richard Bernstein points out in his introduction to what is one of the most important contributions to the problem of evil in the 21st century, Kant's rejection of theodicies is a crucial part of his critical philosophy: insofar as theodicies aim at theoretical knowledge about God, they are not merely contingent failures but, much more strongly, impossible and *must* fail, given the limitations of human reason; on the other hand, it is precisely by limiting the sphere of knowledge that Kant, famously, makes room for faith (Bernstein 2002: 3–4). Kant, therefore, is 'the modern philosopher who initiates the inquiry into evil without explicit recourse to philosophical theodicy' and hence also leads the way in our attempt to rethink the meaning of evil and responsibility 'after Auschwitz' (ibid.: 4).[12] Kant writes about evil in a conceptual world entirely different from the one occupied by his most important predecessors, such as Leibniz. This Kantian conceptual world is, if my argument in the earlier sections of this chapter is on the right track, shared by James. We may say that Kant's antitheodicism was transformed into a pragmatist antitheodicism by James.

The details of Kant's analysis of the failures of theodicies need not concern us here (cf. Kivistö & Pihlström 2016: chapter 2). As I want to focus on the issues of realism and truth, I must emphasize how Kant invokes the Book of Job as an example of the only 'honest' way of formulating a theodicy—which, for him, actually seems to be an antitheodicy. Job's key virtue, according to Kant, is his *sincerity* (*Aufrichtigkeit*), which establishes 'the preeminence of the honest man over the religious flatterer in the divine verdict' (Kant 1983b [1791]: 8:267):

> Job speaks as he thinks, and with the courage with which he, as well as every human being in his position, can well afford; his friends, on the contrary, speak as if they were being secretly listened to by the mighty one, over whose cause they are passing judgment, and as if gaining his favor through their judgment were closer to their heart than the truth.

> Their malice in pretending to assert things into which they yet must admit they have no insight, and in simulating a conviction which they in fact do not have, contrasts with Job's frankness […]. (Ibid.: 8:265–266.)

For Kant, the leading feature in Job's virtuous character is not, then, his patience in suffering (as many traditional, particularly Christian, interpreters of the Book of Job might suggest), but his inner sincerity, integrity, and honesty. Indeed, Job protests against his suffering in the poetic dialogues of the book; he does not simply endure his fate or quietly suffer, but complains and insists on the injustice of his adversities. Thus, Job's honesty, rather than his alleged patience, is his greatest virtue.

Toward the end of his essay, Kant discusses the moral evil of insincerity—of our tendency 'to distort even inner declarations before [our] own conscience'—as '*in itself evil* even if it harms no one' (ibid.: 8:270). Thus, he seems to be saying in so many words that speculative, rationalizing theodicies—the kind of theodicies manifested by Job's 'friends'—are themselves exemplifications of evil. They are also evil in a very specific sense: they do not acknowledge the Kantian—and more generally Enlightenment—ideal of free, autonomous, and responsible thinking based on the idea of inner truthfulness (which is something that we should see pragmatist philosophers like James and Rorty very highly appreciating as well). They are therefore revolts (not primarily against God but) against humanity itself, conceived in a Kantian way. We might even say that the insincerity of theodicist thinking does not recognize the essential human capacity for freedom and responsibility, for the kind of autonomous thinking that is the very foundation of morality.[13] It is not implausible, it seems to me, to suggest that James could have sympathized with, or even implicitly shared, this Kantian line of thought in his criticism of theodicies. For James, too, there is something ethically fundamentally insincere in theodicies, which, as we saw through some illustrative quotations from *Pragmatism*, do not live up to the ideal of knowing the truth instead of living in shades.[14] Moreover, reflecting on what goes wrong in *our own* tendencies to succumb to the temptations of theodicy (as Bernstein [2002] calls them in his discussion of Levinas) is a prime example of critical yet pragmatic reflexivity at work.

A fundamental distinction between truth and falsity is, however, necessary for the concepts of sincerity and truthfulness, and given the role these concepts play in Kantian antitheodicism, such a distinction is necessary for the antitheodicist project generally as well, also in its Jamesian reincarnation. Now, insofar as Rorty's pragmatism carries Jamesian pragmatism into a certain kind of extreme, one is left wondering whether there is any way to stop on the slippery slope arguably leading from James to Rorty (and eventually even bringing in, with horror, Orwell's O'Brien). Reality, shocking as it often is, must still be contrasted with something like unreality, while truth and truthfulness must be contrasted not only with falsity but also with lying and self-deception, and possibly other kinds of loss of sincerity and truthfulness that may follow from the

collapse of the truth vs. falsity distinction itself. What we find here is, one might say, *the problem of realism in its existential dimensions*. This is, arguably, the core pragmatic meaning of the problem of realism—or even, echoing the reading of *Pragmatism* presented above, an approach to the problem of realism framed by the problem of evil. In the terms introduced in the introduction above, it is right here that the epistemic and the existential interests in our inquiry into religion, or into the world, merge.

Insofar as the distinction between truth and falsity collapses, as (in a sense) it does in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the very project of antitheodicy, which (I believe we may argue) is based on and depends on the Kantian notion of *Aufrichtigkeit* (sincerity),[15] becomes threatened. Truthfulness or sincerity itself collapses here. Hence, this is another special message and problem of Orwell, an implicit warning of his great novel: there may be no theodicy available even in this negative sense, no happy end or moral harmony available, even by going through antitheodicism. Taking evil and suffering seriously entails acknowledging that we constantly run the risk of losing whatever truthfulness we might be capable of possessing, and of thereby losing the sincere attitude to evil and suffering that antitheodicists like Kant and James have found crucially important for an adequately (or even minimally) ethical attitude to suffering. Thus, the Orwellian challenge (or warning) lies right here: is there, or can there be, or can we at least imagine, such evil that makes antitheodicy itself impossible by destroying the very possibility of Kantian *Aufrichtigkeit* (by destroying the truth vs. falsity distinction that is necessary for truthfulness or sincerity)?

This *fragility of antitheodicy*, the fragility of sincerity necessary for antitheodicy, is a dimension of the more general fragility of the moral point of view;[16] we can consider it a *meta-antitheodicy*. By destroying Winston's capacity for sincerily uttering something and still being able to 'put himself back together', O'Brien not only engages in evil that almost (yet not quite) lies beyond description and imagination but also leads us to imagine the possibility of evil that renders (Kantian) antitheodicy itself impossible. This will then collapse the Jamesian antitheodicist approach as well, given that it starts from a kind of pragmatic softening of the notion of objective truth culminating in the 'truth happens to an idea' view characteristic of James's ethically grounded metaphysics.[17]

While James (on my reading) only resisted certain metaphysically realistic forms of metaphysics, especially Hegelian monistic absolute idealism (and corresponding metaphysical realisms), without thereby abandoning metaphysics altogether (see Pihlström 2008a, 2009), Rorty's reading of Orwell is deeply based on his rejection of *all* forms of metaphysics. In his view, Orwell tells us that 'whether our future rulers are more like O'Brien or more like J. S. Mill does not depend […] on deep facts about human nature' or on any 'large necessary truths about human nature and its relation to truth and justice' but on 'a lot of small contingent facts' (Rorty 1989: 187–188). Now, this is hard to deny, at least in a sense; various minor contingent facts have enormous influence on how our world and societies develop. This is also a very important message of Rortyan

*ironism* in general: our firmest moral commitments, our 'final vocabularies', are all historically contingent. But the worry is that if we give up (even pragmatically rearticulated) objective truth entirely, we will end up giving up the very possibility of sincerity, too, and that is something we need for resisting the future of all possible O'Briens' (paradoxically) theodicist newspeak seeking to justify evil, suffering, and torture. It is one thing to accept, reasonably, historical contingency and to reject overblown metaphysics of 'deep facts about human nature'; it is quite another to give up even a minimal pragmatic sense of objective truth required not only for sincerity but for the very possibility of sincerity (and, hence, for the possibility of insincerity as well, because insincerity is possible only insofar as sincerity is possible, and vice versa). This worry ought to be constantly kept in mind by anyone sympathizing with the Jamesian antitheodicist suggestion to apply the notion of pragmatic truth to the acknowledgment of the reality of suffering.

## Acknowledging Rorty

I am not saying that Rorty (or James) is wrong, or has a mistaken conception of truth (or facts, or history, or anything). What I am saying is that *if* Rorty is right (whatever it means to say this, given the disappearance, in Rorty's neopragmatism, of the distinction between being right and being regarded as being right by one's cultural peers), then we may be in a more serious trouble than we may have believed in our attempts to think clearly about the relations between realism, truth, evil, and suffering.[18] Jamesian pragmatism seems to take the correct, indeed vital, antitheodicist step in refusing to philosophically justify evil and suffering, and in constructing the entire pragmatic method on this basis of taking evil seriously. This step was initially made possible by Kant's antitheodicism, especially the concept of sincerity at its core, and Kantian critical philosophy more generally. However, insofar as Jamesian pragmatism develops—rather naturally, it might be suggested—into something like Rorty's neopragmatism, which lets the notion of truth drop out as unimportant, the end result is not only an insightful emphasis on historical contingency (and on the role of literature in showing us fascinating, and dangerous, contingent possibilities) but also the possible fragmentation of sincerity itself, which seems to depend on a relatively robust distinction between truth and falsity. Antitheodicy thus becomes fragmented through that fragmentation.

What this shows is a quasi-Rortyan point: Orwell is more important, and O'Brien more dangerous, than we may have thought. But it also shows that Rorty deprives us of certain linguistic, literary, and philosophical resources that we might see Orwell as having equipped us with. Pragmatism can maintain those resources only by being consistently *critical*—that is, Kantian. Only the critical path is open: this Kantian message should be taken home by all pragmatists, and not only by pragmatists.

CHAPTER 4

# Religious Truth, Acknowledgment, and Diversity

While the previous chapter made a (hopefully relatively smooth) transition from general pragmatist explorations of realism to a (preliminary) pragmatist treatment of the problem of evil and suffering, this chapter takes up the problem of religious pluralism or diversity by focusing on the questions of truth, recognition, and theodicy. A pragmatist approach to truth—again crucially indebted to James's pragmatism—will be argued to yield both a vital philosophical enrichment of the issue and a challenge that must be critically acknowledged. I will draw particular attention to how the question of truth comes into the picture when we need to deal with the *diversity* of religious (and non-religious) responses to human suffering. This is a decisive test case for pragmatist approaches to religious pluralism.[1]

It might be suggested that if we endorse realistic truth and objectivity in a full-blown sense (cf. Chapters 1–2), we will be on the road to *exclusivism* regarding the issue of religious diversity, that is, the view that there is at most only one single true religion and the truth of any one religious outlook would exclude the truth of any other. Pragmatist conceptions of truth can, I will argue, be interpreted as seeking a plausible middle ground option here. As we have seen, pragmatism has, especially since James, been defended as a critical mediator between realism and antirealism as well as evidentialism and fideism, and it can be suggested that it mediates between religious inclusivism and exclusivism, too. This offers an indirect meta-level argument for pragmatism itself (and for pragmatist views on truth applied to religion and theology), because it seems that pragmatism is uniquely able to deal with the problem of combining (humanly speaking) realistic objective truth with a (moderately) inclusivist account of religious diversity.

The later sections of this chapter deal more explicitly with the relations between truth, realism, and theodicy. We may see pragmatists, among others, as arguing against what they take to be an illusionary metaphysically realist view postulating allegedly objective (absolute, God's-Eye View) reasons for the reality of suffering. This yields another ethical argument for pragmatism and against metaphysical realism. I will try to show how pragmatism can be enriched by recognition-theoretical considerations that are highly relevant to

the pursuit of religious inclusivism in the debate over religious and theological diversity, though this relevance will inevitably remain somewhat implicit in this inquiry. While I will defend a pragmatic approach to truth and religious diversity affirming a close link between the concepts of (objective) truth and individual, existential truthfulness, antitheodicism also needs the concept of objective, realistic truth. Pragmatism, as was noted in the previous chapter, runs the risk of opening a slippery slope from James toward Rorty and even Orwell's O'Brien, which is particularly problematic in our age of 'post-truth' and 'post-factuality'. Therefore, I do acknowledge the worry that the concept of truth might get messed up in pragmatism in such a way that the very project of responding to religious diversity and the ethical needs of inclusion become threatened. The chapter will pragmatically defend the *value* of (objective) truth and truthfulness. However, it will also be concluded that various tensions remain and that pragmatism is therefore needed at the meta-level, even if ordinary realistic truth is to be defended at the 'first-order' level.

I hence prefer to leave open the possibility that even the pragmatist might need to end up with a defense of objective, realistic truth—*within* pragmatism. When developing a pragmatist approach to the realism debate (in science, religion, and theology—and elsewhere), the genuine differences between all these human practices must be appreciated. This, we might say, is to embrace a 'pragmatic realism' about the realism debate itself. The ways in which this debate is pragmatically committed to employing an objective concept of truth—embedded in a more inclusive concept that also includes truthfulness—needs to be carefully addressed.

## Recognizing diversity

Full-blown realism—at least metaphysical realism operating with the concept of an absolute representation of reality from a 'God's-Eye View'—about religion, theology, and religious truth may easily lead to religious exclusivism. According to such metaphysical realism, there is, in principle, an absolute way the world is independently of the human mind or any human practices, beliefs, perspectives, and theories. Truth is strictly non-epistemic correspondence between true statements and the pieces of the world they are about. The fact that pragmatism seeks a middle ground in the realism debate by rejecting such a strong form of realism without rejecting realism tout court is highly relevant to the diversity issue.

Insofar as pragmatism is indeed philosophically and (arguably) theologically relevant in the various ways indicated in the previous chapters, then it should come as no surprise that pragmatist conceptions on realism and truth bear considerable relevance to the issue of religious diversity and especially the controversy between exclusivism and inclusivism. It is, in short, metaphysical realism with its dream of a 'God's-Eye View' that leads to religious and theological

exclusivism. It is such realism with its non-human—theocentric—pursuit of objectivity (or, rather, 'Objectivity' with a capital 'O') that makes it impossible for us to maintain that different, even apparently conflicting, religious and theological claims and ideas could all be 'true' in a more moderate, perspectival, and practice-embedded—human, pragmatic—sense. We pragmatically *need* such a pragmatism softening the notion of truth into something like humanly valuable pursuit of *truthfulness*, in which ethics and metaphysics are inseparable.

The ways in which pragmatism succeeds in articulating and making sense of a sound version of religious inclusivism—an inclusivism that does not turn into an uncritical relativism rejecting all normative criteria in terms of which truth claims can be critically compared to each other—should be regarded as meta-level pragmatist 'tests' of pragmatism itself. Pragmatism, then, is a self-critically reflective philosophy *par excellence*—and this fact again underlines its relevance to the religious diversity topic.

I have already proposed that pragmatism can be enriched by the theory of recognition. As theorists of recognition in the broadly Hegelian tradition famously developed by Honneth (2005 [1992]) and Taylor (1995), among others, have emphasized, a proper analysis of the concept of recognition, especially in its applications to interpersonal relations, crucially requires an 'as' clause specifying the content of the relevant requests for recognition and the corresponding acts of granting recognition (cf. Saarinen 2014, 2016; Kahlos et al. 2019). In paradigmatic interpersonal (or inter-group) cases, A asks B to recognize it as something specific, say, as X, and then B either grants or refuses to grant such recognition of A as X. (By requesting such recognition, A also recognizes B as a potential recognizer of A as X.) Obviously, we are here dealing with a notion that has huge relevance to discussions concerning religious diversity. It is a continuous challenge to religious groups and orientations in a multicultural society to recognize each other (as religions, as sources of meaning and value for their members, and so on), and the phenomenon of religious diversity itself needs to be adequately recognized in order for us to be able to deal with its ethical, political, and epistemological features.

The details of theories of recognition and the discussion following Honneth's *Kampf um Anerkennung* need not concern us here any more than in earlier chapters.[2] What is important for the present inquiry is that there is an interesting difference between the concepts of recognition and *acknowledgment*. This difference becomes relevant when we employ these concepts in our attempts to understand the ways in which we may and should respond to other human beings' suffering—a major case of (potential) conflicts in a religiously diverse multicultural situation. Hence, this difference needs to be examined when developing a pragmatist account of the kinds of realism and truth that may be at issue in relation to religious diversity, especially the diversity of ways of responding to suffering.[3] Indeed, it turns out that truth is highly central here.

We may say that the concept of recognition inevitably invokes issues of truth, especially regarding the truth of the relevant 'as' clause, that is, whether A *is* X,

or is what s/he/it is recognized as. When we are interested in the recognition of another's suffering, or of the victim of suffering and their unique experiences, we cannot avoid the question of *what* the sufferer or the victim, or their experiences, are to be recognized *as*. However, this already creates a (possibly also politically sensitive) field of power structures (possibly only strengthened in circumstances of religious diversity). The potential recognizer has, at least within certain limits (presumably constrained by the initial request for recognition), the power to determine as what the potential recognizee is to be recognized. This may create ethically difficult issues of proper communication of suffering and its recognition. Even the very act of recognizing someone, or some group, as a 'victim' of some particular evil may be politically problematic, if that person or group does not wish to be categorized as a victim, or if their wish to be so characterized plays a controversial political role.[4] At least the potentially problematic aspects of 'victimization' (either by oneself or by others) have to be taken into consideration whenever a question about recognizing someone or some group as a victim is raised.

Philosophical theorization on recognition should also appreciate the fact that empirical research—for instance, results drawn from history or the social sciences—may be fundamentally important, and also philosophically highly relevant, to filling in the various 'as' clauses in our recognizing others' suffering. In a sense, historical and social-scientific studies of evil and suffering offer us 'naturalized' and empirically diverse yet philosophically significant approaches to these phenomena, thus considerably expanding the traditional philosophical ways of dealing with evil and suffering (such as the aprioristic and speculative theodicy discourse, to which pragmatists like James have been strongly opposed). Such empirical enrichment enables us to more effectively communicate our religious and/or theological (or fully secular) attitudes to others' suffering—much better than a mere abstract philosophical theory of suffering, for instance, let alone a theodicy allegedly justifying innocent suffering, or excusing God (if one believes in God) for allowing it to take place. Here one's communicative interest may be inextricably intertwined with a philosophical interest in deeper understanding of the true nature of evil and suffering.[5]

However, no matter how substantially empirically enriched philosophy of evil and suffering may fill in the relevant 'as' clauses in our analyses of relations of recognition, we arguably also need a more purely philosophical (though not for that matter entirely non-empirical) notion of acknowledgment. It may be suggested that acknowledgment differs from recognition in *not* requiring, or not even allowing, the same kind of 'as' clause as recognition. Thus, the *truth* about the 'as' of recognition, the truth about, say, A's really being X in our schematic formulation, does not necessarily come to the picture, either. This does *not* mean that truth would be irrelevant to relations of acknowledgment, however. On the contrary, one may argue that a deeper, more dynamic concept of truth—something we may derive from James's pragmatism—plays a fundamental role here. What we need is a broader, richer, and more clearly non-

foundationalist—that is, preferably (but perhaps not necessarily) pragmatist—notion of truth in order to communicate suffering, and our acknowledgment of others' suffering, in an ethically appropriate way across diverse religious, theological, and secular outlooks. It should be easy to see that this is precisely the issue of truth that comes into the picture when we want to deal with the religious diversity problem in an ethically sensitive way.

This ethical challenge is *ipso facto* a challenge of developing the notion of truth itself in a pragmatist way, in a manner in which the acknowledgment of others' experiences, such as experiences of suffering, particularly in their ethical dimensions—e.g., our future-oriented worry, care, or *Sorge* for the other—is an ineliminable part of the dynamics of truth in adequately responding to otherness, including the others we encounter when encountering religious diversity in our societies. It is this essentially 'worried' future-directedness that the pragmatist conception of truth takes into account better than any other, especially if we also read James's writings on truth (e.g., James 1975 [1907]: Lecture VI) alongside his relational conception of identity based on his radical empiricism, as suggested in José Medina's (2010) interpretation of his theory of truth. It is on these grounds that we may seek to develop a true synthesis of pragmatism and recognition theory (or, rather, the theory of acknowledgment), focusing on the notions of truth and truthfulness, and especially their intimate relation.[6]

It can be argued that James's conception of truth already incorporates important aspects of the concept of truthfulness. Moreover, it can be further argued that it is precisely this broader notion of truth that we need when hoping to reconcile (moderate) religious inclusivism and its recognizing and/or acknowledging attitude to otherness and diversity with the possibility of still continuing to pursue truth and objectivity in theological and religious matters.

The pragmatist theory of truth is far from uncontroversial, as anyone who ever read undergraduate textbooks on truth knows, but we may approach it by referring to the distinction between truth and truthfulness, analyzed, e.g., in Bernard Williams' (2002) important book with that title (see also, e.g., Allen 1995). These are clearly different notions. One may pursue truthfulness without thereby having true beliefs; one can be truthful also when one is mistaken, insofar as one sincerely seeks to believe truths and avoid falsehoods and also honestly seeks to tell the truth whenever possible (and whenever the truth to be told is relevant).[7] Thus, clearly, whatever one's theory of truth is, one should in some way distinguish between truth and truthfulness. On the other hand, certain theories of truth, such as the pragmatist theory, may be more promising in articulating the intimate relation between truth and truthfulness than some other theories.

We might say that this distinction itself is in a way 'softened' in James's pragmatist conception of truth, which rather explicitly turns truth into a value to be pursued in one's (individual and social) life rather than simply a matter of propositional truth corresponding to facts that are independently 'there'. Truth(fulness) in the Jamesian sense is richer and broader than mere proposi-

tional truth. It is a normative property of our thought and inquiries (in a wide sense), not simply a semantic property of statements or beliefs. Its normativity is, we might say, both epistemic and ethical. James's pragmatic truth *incorporates truthfulness*, as truth itself belongs to the ethical field of inter-human relations of dependence and acknowledgment. It also incorporates an acknowledgment of the 'inner truth' of others' experiences, especially experiences of suffering. It is therefore also an account of truth perfectly suited for our needs of living in a situation of religious diversity.

Jamesian pragmatic truth is inextricably entangled with our individual philosophical temperaments and their existential needs; therefore, James's conception of truth is indistinguishable from his general *individualism*, which in this context is also obviously relevant as a Jamesian point of departure to any inquiry into religious pluralism. Religious diversity starts at the individual level. Individuals' responses to existential challenges of life having a religious dimension vary considerably, and any existentially or religiously relevant conception of truth must in some sense appreciate this temperamental variation—without succumbing to the temptations of uncritical subjectivism or relativism, though.[8]

In his discussion of James's theory of truth, which I find highly relevant to these concerns, Medina (2010) defends Jamesian pluralism in a politically relevant manner: in ethics and politics, we can never reach an 'absolute' conception of what is universally best for human beings and societies, but different suggestions, opinions, experiential perspectives, and interests must have their say—or must be recognized or acknowledged (though this is not Medina's own specific terminology). A conception of political solidarity can, then, be grounded in Jamesian ideas concerning truth. James advocated not only pragmatic pluralism and individualism but also (on Medina's reading) a relational conception of individual identities: nothing exists in a self-sustained manner but only as parts of networks of mutual interdependence. Obviously, such a metaphysics of relationality is also hospitable to a pragmatist philosophy emphasizing acknowledgment. While James's pluralism and relationalism are elements of a metaphysical view according to which 'nothing can be understood in and by itself, but rather in relation to other things, in a network of relations', they are irreducibly ethical and political, applying even to the reality of the self: 'to have a sense of self is to have a sense of the dependences that compose one's life' (ibid.: 124). We are, Medina continues, 'diverse and heterogeneous beings […] shaped and reshaped through diverse and heterogeneous networks of interpersonal relations', and the Jamesian self is a bundle of such relations (ibid.: 125).

It is in this context that we should, according to Medina, understand and appreciate James's theory of truth. True beliefs are 'good to live by'; when maintaining a belief, any belief, we are responsible for its consequences in our lives, and in those of others. The pragmatic 'theory' of truth—which presumably should not be called a 'theory', in order to avoid seeing it as a rival to, say, the

'correspondence theory'—invokes not only, say, the agreeable consequences of true beliefs but also ethical ideas such as solidarity and justice. Therefore, we may say that truth (in the pragmatic sense), truthfulness, and acknowledgment are conceptually tied to each other. One cannot really pursue truth in the Jamesian sense unless one also acknowledges, or at least truthfully seeks to acknowledge, others' perspectives on reality—especially those structured by suffering. Therefore, again, something like Jamesian pragmatic truth is what our need to account for religious diversity and inclusivism requires.

Recall James's pronouncements on the significance of the problem of evil and suffering (see Chapter 3 above). We should note how thoroughly those discussions of the diversity of our human responses to such predicament are colored by references to reality and truth. I suggested in Chapter 3 that these occurrences of such philosophical terms ought to be taken seriously as elements of James's theory of truth and reality—and thus as elements of his pragmatism. James, remember, argued that what desperate and suffering human beings experience '*is* Reality' and that idealist, optimistic philosophers 'are dealing in shades, while those who live and feel know truth' (James 1975 [1907]: 21–22). These are as important characterizations of what James means by truth and reality in the pragmatic sense as are his famous pronouncements about truth being 'only the expedient in our way of thinking', truth being satisfactory, etc. Furthermore, theodicism is, for James, part of the 'unreality in all rationalistic systems' of 'religious' philosophy that remain 'out of touch with concrete facts and joys and sorrows' (ibid.: 17).[9]

Such formulations can be seen as philosophically urging us to acknowledge the meaninglessness of suffering, i.e., the fact that in reality there is no harmonious world system or a necessary divine reason for suffering. This is, in a sense, to recognize the sufferer *as* a sufferer. As recognition requires the 'as' clause—B recognizes A as something, as X—the one who employs the concept of recognition here must presuppose that there is something like *the truth about the matter whether A is X, or can be construed as being X*. This can, and in many obvious cases is, a truth created by the act of recognition itself; in our social life many important social facts, statuses, and institutions are created in this way. Thus, the fact (or the factual or propositional truth) that A is X, which enables B to recognize A as X, is either independent of B's recognition act or constituted by it, by B's 'taking' A to be X. However, in *both* cases we are dealing with truths about the (social) world.

Now, it may be argued that the traditional correspondence theory of truth does not serve this situation very well. What we (arguably) need here is a more dynamic pragmatic notion of truth also covering cases where the truth of A's being X is 'made' by us. But even more importantly, we need a pragmatic notion of truth for those cases where there is no 'as' dimension at all—that is, for acknowledgment rather than recognition. This is another kind of ethical truth, truth conceived or reconceived as something like truthfulness. It is a conception of ethical truth compatible with, or perhaps even required by,

James's famous dictum in 'The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life', according to which there can be no 'final truth' in ethics until the 'last man' has had his experience and his say (James 1979 [1891]: 141). Thus, this is precisely the kind of ethical truth we need for a conception of ethics that admits, with James, that 'there is no such thing as an ethical philosophy dogmatically made up in advance' (ibid.).[10]

Acknowledging that there is no such final truth in ethics—or religion—is, we may argue, part of what we can, and should, mean by our being committed to ideals such as truthfulness and sincerity in our acknowledgment of others and their morally relevant perspectives on the world we jointly inhabit, both secularly and in contexts of religious diversity where we feel an inclusivist attitude is needed. There can, then, be something like the pursuit of truth, as well as something like truth itself, in the act of acknowledgment even if there is no narrow propositional sense of truth available regarding the 'as' clause, as required in recognition.[11] This pursuit of truth in a pragmatist sense is essentially the pursuit of a truthful attitude to the other person's suffering (or one's own suffering), which in the end will then lead into, or at least enable, a truthful attitude to experience in general—or the world in general.[12] At this point it should come as no surprise that precisely this kind of pursuit of truth and truthfulness is relevant in an inclusivist understanding of religious diversity. This yields an indirect (and reflexive) argument in favor of pragmatism: its conception of truth (and truthfulness) in the service of acknowledging diverse others and otherernesses, and their diverse experiences of suffering and attempts to communicate those experience to others, pragmatically works.

## Truth, antitheodicy, and the slippery slope

However, things are not as simple as that. While James's pragmatism integrates truth and truthfulness, or incorporates elements of the notion of truthfulness into the pragmatically articulated notion of truth itself, and while (we may say) pragmatism generally is framed by taking evil and suffering seriously in an antitheodicist manner (that is, without succumbing to the temptations of theodicy that would allegedly explain away the reality of meaningless suffering), it can be argued that the notion of truth itself is, in an irreducible way, required by the kind of antitheodicist attitude that James is recommending as a *sine qua non* of a properly ethical acknowledgment of otherness. This is because the notions of truth and truthfulness are needed for antitheodicism itself. It is not implausible, it seems to me, to suggest that James could have sympathized with, or indeed implicitly shared, the Kantian line of antitheodicist thought (based on Job's sincerity, as articulated in Chapter 3 above) in his criticism of theodicies analyzed above, without sharing Kant's moral philosophy more generally, of course. For James, too, there is something fundamentally ethically *insincere* in theodicies.

A basic distinction between truth and falsity is, however, necessary for the concepts of sincerity and truthfulness. The potential slippery slope from James to Rorty and Orwell's O'Brien considered in Chapter 3 is a problem that runs straight through the problem of ethically adequate (or even appropriate) communication of suffering, especially in contexts of religious diversity. How do our philosophical resources of truth and truthfulness, our discourses employing such notions, suffice here?

Rorty, famously, rejects the very idea of our being responsible or answerable to any non-human objective reality—traditionally assumed, he believes, in realist accounts of truth—and emphasizes that we can only be answerable to human audiences.[13] Again, this could be analyzed as a relation of recognition:[14] we recognize human audiences as our potential rational critics in a way we cannot recognize non-human reality. However, part of our response to a (relevant) audience is a response to an audience using the concept of objective reality. We have to recognize the relevance of that concept by recognizing the relevant audience. This is a case of what has been called mediated recognition: we recognize objective reality and truth by recognizing the relevant audience(s) and our responsibility or answerability toward them. We recognize objective reality itself by being answerable, and recognizing ourselves as being answerable, to an audience (or potential rational critics) that might challenge our views on reality. Such challenges could, of course, take place (again) in contexts of religious diversity, and it is for that reason that we need pragmatic truth and truthfulness for a proper acknowledgment of that diversity.

One obvious problem is that the relevant audience could change (randomly) in an Orwellian manner. The *use* and (thus) meaning of the concept of an objective reality could even be destroyed. Then the kind of mediated recognition sketched above would no longer work. In a sense there would no longer *be* an audience we would be responsible to any more. There would then be no views to have on anything any more; rational thought would collapse. In other words, we can recognize each other as using the concept of objective reality (and a related concept of truth), and thereby recognize each other and ourselves as being normatively committed to pursuing objective truth about reality—but only until O'Brien (or some other enemy of facts and truth) gets us. Then that commitment collapses, and so does our recognition of each other as users of the notion of truth—and as communicating agents. So does, then, our commitment to sincerity and truthfulness, which are needed for antitheodicist moral seriousness in communicating suffering. The very possibility of taking religious diversity seriously as a situation of ethical, political, and epistemological argument and reflection would thus also collapse. No pursuit of inclusivist truth in a pragmatist sense would then be possible. In this way, pragmatism might end up in self-reflective incoherence: a Jamesian inclusivist attempt to take individual perspectives and their diversity seriously might lead to a collapse of that very project, as a result of the fragmentation of the concept of truth.

One reason why the Rortyan-cum-Orwellian outcome is so troubling and so deeply threatening is that it threatens to destroy our antitheodicist commitment to the idea that taking evil and suffering seriously in the first place—recognizing its irreducible reality in its sheer meaninglessness—entails viewing the world in general in a different light.[15] This is because the very idea of viewing the world in any way whatsoever, as well as the Jamesian usage of the concepts of 'real' and 'fact', for instance, presupposes some version of the concepts of objectivity and truth, and these are now in a danger of collapsing. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, there is no *viewing* the world at all any more, no rational answerability to anyone regarding how to view it. (The answerability an individual has toward the Party is not rational.)

Can truthfulness (in the sense fundamental to acknowledgment) be maintained even if mere propositional truth (fundamental to recognition, given the central role of the 'as' clause) collapses in the style of Rortyan neopragmatism? Acknowledgment, rather than recognition, can be seen as the key to truthful communications of suffering, just as it is key to a (moderately) inclusivist understanding of religious diversity. This can also be seen as a fundamentally Jamesian view. James, we may again recall, argued against our instinctive 'blindness' and 'deafness' in relation to other human beings and their individual ways of viewing the world (see the introduction above). James may therefore be interpreted as presenting us with a profound, and endless, ethical challenge to acknowledge otherness, especially the other's suffering (as the framing of the entire pragmatist project makes clear).

We are here dealing with the need to acknowledge others' suffering itself as well as others' attempts to communicate suffering, possibly across diverse religious and theological (and non-religious) outlooks. As James maintains in his 1899 lecture 'Human Immortality', encouraging us to acknowledge what he calls our 'half-brutish prehistoric brothers':

> Tis you who are dead, stone-dead and blind and senseless, in your way of looking on. You open your eyes upon a scene of which you miss the whole significance. Each of these grotesque or even repulsive aliens is animated by an inner joy of living as hot or hotter than that which you feel beating in your private breast.' (James 1982 [1898]: 99.)

The same line of thought is strongly present in James's 1899 essay 'On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings'. There James, observing the work of outdoor manual laborers, charges himself, and us, of being 'as blind to the peculiar identity of their [those others'] conditions as they certainly would also have been to the ideality of mine, had they had a peep at my strange indoor academic ways of life'. (James 1983 [1899]: 134; quoted more fully in the introduction above.) It is extremely difficult for us to fully grasp, let alone ethically acknowledge, the diversity of the inner meaningfulness of individuals' very different forms of life—or, conversely, the diversity of individuals' sincere experiences of *meaninglessness* in suffering.

It is this kind of blindness that we have a moral duty to avoid (no matter how natural it is for us), just as we are, according to Emmanuel Levinas (who, of course, comes from a quite different philosophical tradition), invited to appreciate the other's face.[16] It is, moreover, by self-critically countering such instinctive blindness that we may cherish the virtues of acknowledgment and truthfulness—and this, I am suggesting, is part of what it means to develop the notion of truth itself in a pragmatic manner. When developed in this Jamesian way, the notion of truth already has an ethics of truthfulness and acknowledgment built into it and may not be as vulnerable to the Rortyan-Orwellian (O'Brienian) slippery slope as it might seem. Yet, the pragmatist inclusivist should be constantly aware of the danger of sliding down that slippery slope.[17]

## Testimony and martyrdom

The issue of truth and truthfulness in relation to recognition and acknowledgment, especially in the context of communication, should also be linked with the (possibility of) testimony, especially *moral testimony* and *martyrdom*[18]—which, as has sometimes been remarked, were in some sense rendered impossible in the Holocaust, in which people were murdered anonymously, deprived of any reason to die for anything, let alone of the possibility to communicate their experiences of suffering.[19] The witness, especially the moral witness, testifies of something whose actual (factual) propositional truth and its actual historical occurrence is, though not irrelevant, not the most important issue. The *moral truth* of what happened is what really matters in such cases of communicating (the diversity of) suffering—and thus, again, we need to revisit the issue of truth and truthfulness, as this kind of moral truth may have more to do with truthfulness than with the propositional truth of moral statements that philosophers participating in the mainstream metaethical dispute over moral realism and antirealism focus on. Moreover, again, the moral truth (truthfulness) relevant here is a matter of developing a general attitude to the world, not confined to facts about any particular historical event (cf. also Chapter 6 below).

In any case, even then we still need a notion of truth, even if we reach the limits of testimony, or the impossibility of bearing witness—something that Holocaust writers and philosophers investigating the Holocaust have emphasized in diverse ways. Even the non-testifiability and non-martyrdom of the suffering of the Holocaust victims will not destroy the concept of truth. But what if this concept is destroyed in Orwell's, or rather O'Brien's, manner? Then, arguably, not only antitheodicy in the Kantian sense based on the Book of Job or its pragmatic Jamesian version urging us to acknowledge the reality of others' suffering but also the very idea of a moral witness or moral testimony becomes obsolete, or even impossible. This has, again, a direct bearing on the issue of religious diversity and inclusivism. We can fully acknowledge the limits and fragility of testimony and the moral witness only by acknowledging the fundamental inse-

curity and foundationlessness of the (or any) moral truth(s) that we (can, or could) testify about. Acknowledging the seriousness of moral testimony is itself an inherently inclusivist project, as the logical compatibility of (propositional) truth claims is not the central issue here; instead, the diversity of individual ethico-religious outlooks emerging from the need to share experiences of horrible suffering (impossible to be ever fully communicated by any single testimony) is at the core of the very idea of (for instance) Holocaust testimony, and this idea itself needs inclusivist elaboration. But then the notion of truth can never completely disappear from the picture, either.

The impossibility of ever fully acknowledging the 'whole truth and nothing but the truth' about the non-testifiable suffering of the martyr, or of any suffering individual, or any moral witness, is a crucial part of the antitheodicist acknowledgment of others' suffering in general, and of the (related) melancholic worldview of a Jamesian 'sick soul' (cf. James 1958 [1902]). Again, the relevant notion of truth needed here for proper communication of suffering, in this case specifically for the communication of moral witnessing or testimony, viz., a notion of truth incorporating truthfulness, is the broader pragmatic notion, not the more traditional correspondence-theoretical one narrowly restricted to propositional truth.

## Metaphysical realism as the *proton pseudos* of theodicism

The argument of this chapter started out from the discussions of the previous chapters concerning the issue of realism in general and in relation to religion in particular (at various levels), affirming the relevance of this issue to the topic of religious diversity. It is against that background, already covered in the introduction, that I have suggested that inclusivism—which should be seen as morally motivated or even required, though only in a moderate sense that does not collapse into full-blown relativism—makes it necessary for us to reject metaphysical realism. The present chapter has so far focused on the argument that pragmatist accounts of truth and realism along the lines of James might save a plausible kind of inclusivism, while also maintaining an adequate conception of truth. I have suggested (with some qualifications) that pragmatism might be uniquely able to accommodate both moderately objective realistic truth and subjective-existential 'truth' that incorporates truthfulness. In particular, I have distinguished between recognition and acknowledgment, maintaining that the former needs propositional truth while the latter is based on a richer pragmatic view of truth incorporating truthfulness.

I believe we can only conclude that the continuous need to be committed to pursuing truth must be affirmed, however pragmatic our notion of truth becomes in its 'softened' Jamesian versions. Otherwise others' suffering, or the diversity of our religious (and, for that matter, non-religious) responses to suffering, will not be properly ethically acknowledged. Pragmatism may not be

sufficient for dealing with the vast issues surrounding religious diversity, multicultural tolerance, recognition, acknowledgment, and inclusivism, let alone a solution to the problem of evil and suffering, but it may very well be a practical necessity for our attempts to explore these topics in a religiously sensitive and ethically appropriate manner. The fact that pragmatism itself may 'work' in pursuits like this may turn out to be a very important indirect—reflexive—consideration in its favor. There is no non-circular defense of pragmatism available but only a pragmatic argument that self-critically seeks to show that there are ways in which pragmatism does seem to work—if not ideally, at least satisfactorily. This comes close to saying that pragmatism is *pragmatically true* as a response to the problem of religious diversity, though this view also needs to be conjoined with a full recognition of the diversity of pragmatisms.

Now, let me again turn to the view pragmatism is more or less straightforwardly opposed to: metaphysical realism. My key objective in the rest of this chapter is to move on toward an ethical critique of metaphysical realism by analyzing—more explicitly than I have done so far—its inability to acknowledge the perspectival plurality and diversity of others' suffering. Arguing that theodicism typically (though not strictly speaking logically) presupposes metaphysical realism, as both assume the availability of a 'God's-Eye View' theory of why there is evil and suffering (i.e., God's reasons for allowing the world to contain apparently meaningless and unnecessary evil and suffering on the massive scale known to us), I will not only argue against theodicism by criticizing its background assumption but also against metaphysical realism itself by rejecting its (typical) consequence, theodicism. Metaphysical realism and theodicism will then ultimately collapse hand in hand. Thus, I am now turning toward a more explicit critical examination of theodicism and the problem of evil and suffering, which have been with us since the start of this inquiry but will become more central in what follows.

However, we should remember that the argued collapse of metaphysical realism and theodicism does not lead to a rejection of realism *tout court*. Antitheodicism, as we saw, needs a pragmatically realist understanding of humanly speaking objective reality and truth, but it is precisely the human dimension of this need that is not available within metaphysical realism. Moreover, I will make a meta-level point about an *ethical* argument regarding theodicies—especially their tendency to fail to recognize individual experiences and voices of suffering—yielding a *metaphysical* argument against metaphysical realism as their source. Thus, our concern with theodicy and antitheodicy results in a more general reflection on the relation between ethics and metaphysics.

## Theodicism and realism (again): against objectification

As explained earlier, I propose to define theodicies and theodicism simply with reference to the attempt to provide a justification for apparently senseless (mean-

ingless, absurd) suffering. Generally, theodicies seek a justification, legitimation, and/or excusing of an omnipotent, omniscient and absolutely benevolent God's allowing the world (His creation) to contain evil and for allowing humans and other sentient beings to suffer. Classical formulations can be found, for example, in Augustine's and his many followers' appeal to God's having created human beings with the freedom of the will as the reason why there is evil, and in Leibniz's view, formulated in his famous *Théodicée* (1710), according to which God could not have created any better world than the one he, as omnipotent and absolutely good, did create; hence we live in the best possible world, and while there is some evil there, it is necessary for the overall good.

By 'theodicism', furthermore, I have referred to attempts to deal with the problem of evil that regard theodicy as a desideratum of an acceptable theistic position, irrespective of whether they end up defending theism or rejecting it. The theodicist can, then, be an atheist, insofar as s/he concludes that God does not exist (or probably does not exist, or that there is no justification for the belief that God exists) precisely because the theodicist desideratum cannot be fulfilled. Also those who offer a mere 'defense'—instead of a theodicy proper—can be regarded as theodicists in the sense that they also seek to defend God and account for God's justice by arguing that, for all we know, God *could* have ethically acceptable reasons to allow the world to contain evil, even on the massive scale familiar to us. By antitheodicism, in contrast, I mean the rejection of any such, or indeed *any*, theodicies, or better, of the very project of delivering a theodicy or the attitude of encouraging or requiring the engagement in such a project.

Theodicism and evidentialism are closely connected (see the introduction above). As mainstream philosophy of religion today is (albeit with significant exceptions) relatively strongly evidentialist (in a broad sense), it comes as no surprise that it is also often strongly theodicist when dealing with the problem of evil. That is, evil is in most cases seen as an empirical premise challenging the theistic belief in an argumentative exchange searching evidence in support of, or against, the theistic hypothesis. This is so irrespective of whether the problem of evil is regarded as a *logical* or as an *evidential* problem. The theistic goal is to respond to the atheists' 'argument from evil'. Just like theodicism is a normative view according to which any rationally acceptable theism ought to formulate a theodicy (or at least take steps toward the direction of a theodicy by formulating a 'defense'), evidentialism is a normative epistemological view according to which any rationally acceptable theism ought to be defended by means of evidence, or rational considerations more generally. Theodicism is, then, a specific dimension of evidentialism: it tries to tell us how we *should* discuss the problem of evil when evil is regarded as a piece of evidence against theism that the theist needs to deal with. A philosophical critique of theodi*cism* is, therefore, a critique of the entire argument *from* evil and its use in both theistic and atheistic discourse. In this sense, again, our considerations in this chapter will have a metaphilosophical dimension.[20]

While the link between theodicism and evidentialism seems to be relatively clear, the relation between theodicism and realism, especially metaphysical realism, has not been studied in any great detail. I will try to argue that metaphysical realism is the *proton pseudos* of theodicism—just as it is a false start in many other philosophical areas of inquiry, too, including various recent conceptions of the self, of death, and related matters (cf., e.g., Pihlström 2016).[21] What also needs to be noted here is that the distinction between metaphysical realism and its alternatives is itself a practice- and discourse-dependent construct, not an objectified distinction that would itself be based on metaphysical realism.[22]

Let me now briefly consider an example that explicitly refers to the link between realism and theodicism. Peter Byrne argues in his *God and Realism* (2003) that realism is needed in philosophy of religion partly, or even primarily, because responding to the problem of evil by delivering a theodicy presupposes realism. Byrne suggests that theism needs to incorporate a 'generic offer of a theodicy', and this requires a realistic conception of the divinity conjoined with moral teleology and a conception of a 'final good' of human life (ibid.: vii). Byrne's basic characterization of realism says that 'the governing intent behind the concept of God is to refer to an extra-mental, extra-mundane, transcendent entity' (ibid.: 6), and while theodicies may not be explicitly invoked in realism discussions in the philosophy of religion, Byrne seems to maintain that the entire realism debate is largely motivated by the need to provide a theodicy—that is, by theodicism:

> The need or problem is that of finding a response to evil. In particular, [religions] arise out of the human perception that the apparent order of the world around them is not a moral order; it is indifferent to the achievement of human happiness and the realisation of human goodness; it presents itself as blind and indifferent to justice. It is the job of a religion on this account to offer human beings a theodicy. (Ibid.: 17.)

It is prima facie surprising to hear that *religions* should offer us theodicies, as one might think that this is the job of *theology* (or perhaps of the philosophy of religion) rather than religion itself. Be that as it may, Byrne insists that 'a religion is any set of symbols (and associated actions, attitudes, feelings and experiences) providing human beings with a solution to evil by way of a theodicy'; more generally, religion is 'that propensity in human beings (however grounded) to respond to evil by seeking the kind of meaning […] associated with the enterprise of theodicy' (ibid.: 18). Realism is needed for religion, because providing a theodicy invokes a 'moral and providential causality in the world' transcending natural and human powers as well as a relational conception of the human good as 'a matter of living in right relation to the source of the providential, moral order postulated as response to evil' (ibid.). The program of defending realism in the philosophy of religion thus includes, Byrne maintains, a critique of the very coherence of antirealist views of good and evil.[23]

Antitheodicists are usually not only non-evidentialists but also non-realists (at least in the sense of rejecting metaphysical realism), albeit not for that reason necessarily antirealists. This is so whether they start from Wittgensteinianism (e.g., Phillips), pragmatism (e.g., James), or Jewish post-Holocaust ethics (e.g., Levinas). For example, Levinas seems to maintain that the metaphysically realist attempt to occupy a totalizing God's-Eye View on others' suffering is the source of theodicist immorality.[24] Phillips, in turn, regards transcendent theistic accounts of moral goodness as morally corrupting, as they do not acknowledge the 'pointlessness' of evil. Byrne's (ibid.: 132–135) metaphysical moral teleology and his theodicism based on metaphysical realism are thus as far from Phillips's position as anything can be. The bone of contention seems to be that while for Byrne goodness ultimately serves cosmic divine purposes, for Phillips goodness is non-teleological, 'purposeless' (just like evil, analogously, is pointless) (ibid.: 134). Indeed, the very attempt to base moral goodness—or evil—on some external meaning or purpose is problematic (see Chapter 6 below). Metaphysical realism, then, is the key issue here. Similarly, James's criticism of the 'absolute' (and Hegelian monistic idealism, for him the paradigmatic form of metaphysical realism) is also primarily ethical; the metaphysical critique is based on the ethical unacceptability of the absolute yielding an irresolvable theodicy problem.

*Why* exactly is realism such a key issue here? It seems to me that this is because metaphysical realism at least typically *reductively objectifies*—that is, tends to view as mere objects in the world—something that cannot (and ethically ought not to) really be viewed as mere objects among others 'out there' in the mind-, practice-, and discourse-independent world: (i) God (easily, albeit perhaps not inevitably, leading to a kind of simplistic anthropomorphism) as well as (ii) others' suffering (reduced into a mere process in the objective empirical world),[25] and hence also (iii) otherness itself. Such objectifications are in striking contrast with Levinas, in particular, for whom the other is more fundamental than any object-subject structure—but of course they also contrast with pragmatism and pragmatic pluralism, as defended in this book. By thus reductively objectifying things that should remain beyond objectification, theodicism based on metaphysical realism also overlooks the diversity and perspectivalness of both suffering and people's individual (religious or non-religious) responses to suffering. In other words, metaphysical realism and the theodicism based upon it are essentially detached views when it comes to responding to others' suffering; instead of being involved and engaged, the theodicist relies on metaphysical realism in seeking to maintain a 'view from nowhere'.

From a Kantian point of view, in particular, the basic problem with metaphysical realism and its applications in theodicism—and everywhere else—is the tendency to seek a *theocentric* perspective, which is necessarily unavailable to us (or better, not just unavailable but incoherent). It is arguably also unethical to try to reach it precisely because it is ethically problematic to reduce others' experiences of suffering into mere objective processes and events in the

world taken to be independent of the ethical acknowledgment of suffering. A related problem in metaphysical realism is the attempt to make metaphysics prior to ethics, whereas the kind of critique of metaphysical realism advanced here makes a case for the profound entanglement of these two areas of philosophy. Again, however, the entanglement of ethics with metaphysics is not itself an objective fact based on metaphysical realism but a feature of our human lifeworld and its practices.

An antitheodicist ethic of acknowledgment thus cannot be based on any objectifying metaphysical realism, but it must defend a 'realistic spirit' about evil and suffering as well as an ordinary (pragmatic) notion of objective truth needed for the requirement of sincerity fundamental to Kantian antitheodicism (as argued in Chapter 3 above). *Failure of acknowledgment* is *the* crucial ethical failure here; this is the antitheodicist's fundamental charge against theodicism. These thoughts also lead us to appreciate why there should, and indeed can, be no argument *from* evil. This is precisely because arguing *from* evil, or responding to such arguments theodicistically, presupposes metaphysical realism (and evidentialism), objectifying the very experiences of suffering that must not be objectified.[26] The very use of the empirical premise stating the reality of evil in the argument from evil—and theodicist responses to that use—objectifies as well as instrumentalizes suffering.

We should, furthermore, note that *skeptical theism*[27] also problematically presupposes metaphysical realism: God is claimed to have (or possibly have) reasons for allowing suffering that we just do not or cannot know. The divine hiddenness discussion is yet another debate in contemporary philosophy of religion problematically based on metaphysical realism. All these issues concerning the relation between God, human beings, and the world objectify God as well as otherness, presupposing that we could actually adopt a theocentric perspective on these matters (to which there are only finite anthropocentric perspectives available for us, amidst our ethico-religious human practices). Even the skeptical theist assumes that in principle such a theocentric perspective could and should be available, while it merely de facto contingently is not.

When the divine hiddenness issue is raised as a purely intellectual puzzle allegedly external to religious life itself, it differs crucially from the genuinely religious and/or existential anxiety associated with real-life experiences of the hiddenness of God (which may or may not lead to one's losing one's religion). As against the mainstream analytic divine hiddenness discussion, I would suggest that the experience of God's 'hiding', or being unavailable, is *internal* to a religious way of life, challenging the life and thought of a person engaging in religion from within. It could also challenge a non-believer, or an agnostic, as an 'awareness of what is missing'.[28] Indeed, it is possible that this is *the* form of religious experience available to a secular modern person (who might nevertheless be a Jamesian 'sick soul'), an experience possibly arising from a consideration of the problem of evil and suffering: it does not seem like God would be in charge of the world or history.

At the meta-level, a secular yet religiously sensitive (or 'religiously musical') educated person might long for the possibility of (still) being part of the kind of meaningfulness or significance (internally belonging to a religious form of life) that makes possible the *religiously relevant meaninglessness* of a religiously experienced divine hiddenness. This meta-level question of meaningfulness and meaninglessness (which includes the ethical requirement of adequately acknowledging others' experiences of meaninglessness) is presumably the closest that some secular persons today can get to religious experience.

It should be clear at this point that metaphysical realism is seriously inadequate for exploring experiences and possibilities like this. These experiences of divine hiddenness and meaninglessness require a transcendental framework to be adequately addressed, and such a framework is unavailable in metaphysical realism. Our reaction to evil and suffering may therefore lead us to explore the *limits* of religious language use—and of language in general, especially the language of philosophical theorization. We will therefore in the next chapter make a lengthy excursus to an interpretation of Wittgenstein as maintaining that a transcendental investigation of the limits of language focuses on necessities (transcendental conditions) themselves grounded in contingencies, in how we think and act within our (contingent) form of life. Similarly, our rejection of metaphysical realism is not itself based on metaphysical realism (which is *not* false in any metaphysically realistic sense, but rather verges on incoherence); instead, this rejection emerges from our contingent, perspectival practices having an irreducibly ethical dimension.

Thus, the distinction between contingency and necessity is not necessarily drawn in the way we actually draw it—or even if it is, that meta-necessity is (meta-)contingent and depends, reflexively, on our contingent language use and the kinds of human problems, especially ethical ones, we find ourselves living with. Therefore, continuous self-critical attention to our practices of speaking and acting is more fundamental than any metaphysically realistic objectifying theorization. In the next chapter, I will elaborate on this with some references to the issue of the limits of language in Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion (relevant to both pragmatism and antitheodicism).

## Some criticisms and responses

I must, however, next consider some issues that the metaphysical realist or theodicist could be thought to raise against the kind of criticism briefly presented here, trying to counter those criticisms as well as I can.

It could be argued, first, that the claim that the metaphysically realist position amounts to a kind of reductionism that effaces sufferers, treating their suffering as a *mere* process rather than something of profound significance that merits an appropriate ethical and affective response, is ill founded and not supported by argument. It might, in brief, remain unclear why metaphysical realism would

entail anything like that. Here the easy response is that I am not claiming there to be strictly speaking any relation of entailment or implication either way. I am only suggesting a certain kind of relation of association or a paradigmatic link. I think of both theodicism and metaphysical realism as 'family resemblance' views in the sense that quite different specific positions can be found under either rubric, and it is not clear there is any essential defining criterion for either (except perhaps at a highly general level). So what I am suggesting is that typically, or paradigmatically, these two go together, and in *most* cases theodicism is associated with a rather strong metaphysical realism.

This can be seen by taking seriously the *literary* versions of theodicism and antitheodicism that Sari Kivistö and myself study in our joint book, *Kantian Antitheodicy* (Kivistö & Pihlström 2016). In the works by Kafka and Orwell we discuss there (and of course in the Book of Job), there is the assumption of there being a kind of super-perspective (a 'God's-Eye View', as it were) unavailable to the protagonists, a perspective of absoluteness which in a way unethically neglects or reduces away—in any case fails to recognize or acknowledge—the significance of the protagonists' first-person individual (human) perspective(s). So there is a certain clash between the anthropocentric and the theocentric perspectives here, comparable to the way in which critics of metaphysical realism—starting with Kant and extending to recent neopragmatism and Wittgensteinianism—attack the idea of our being able to climb into a divine or pseudo-divine super-perspective. In some other antitheodicist works, such as Beckett's *Godot*, the very existence of such a super-perspective is suggested to be fundamentally illusory. There *is* no perspective of that kind; there is no overall explanation or account of how things are, not even one that would be hidden from us; it is only a human (and perhaps humanly understandable or even unavoidable, as in the case of Kantian transcendental illusions) to suppose there is, or to hope one could achieve such a perspective. So Beckett shows us how human beings struggle—in vain—to find such a perspective which simply is not there to be found. For Kafka and Orwell it might be there while remaining unavailable; for Beckett we are living under an illusion when supposing it to be there in the first place.

Furthermore, I admit it may sound unusual to propose that a philosophical debate that originally emerged in the core areas of theoretical philosophy, especially philosophy of science, i.e., the (metaphysical) realism debate, can be directly applied to the theodicy issue. It has of course been applied to the philosophy of religion more generally (cf. Chapter 1). However, those applications of realism and its alternatives rarely explicitly comment on theodicies. I am then merely pointing toward a tendency in theodicism to assume, explicitly or implicitly, a relatively strong form of realism.

Critics of theodicism from Kant to James, Levinas, and Phillips (and many others) typically also reject metaphysical realism. Such philosophers need not reject realism *as such*, or versions of pragmatic or internal realism (to borrow terminology from the more standard realism debate), but they do typically

reject the kind of realism that supposes that there is something like a God's-Eye View absolute account of reality—an account that would include a final account of the reasons for human suffering, as seen from the divine super-perspective. However, these and other antitheodicists would be equally critical of the kind of atheism that concludes from the argument 'from' evil that there is no God because the absolute perspective is unachievable. Believing in God, even in a 'hidden' God, might be an individual way of responding to suffering in the absence of any such super-perspective.

It could, secondly, be claimed that a metaphysically realist absolute description could (and arguably should) include metaphysically objective facts about suffering, including the suffering of creatures created by God (if one is a theist). However, the very attempt to include such facts about creaturely suffering (or, analogously, flourishing) in the absolute description of reality from a God's-Eye View is what makes theodicism problematic in the ethical sense. It is precisely by 'including' (in the sense of reducing) individuals and their sufferings into this overall interpretation (which 'knows better' why the individuals have to suffer, for instance) that constitutes a failure of ethically appropriately acknowledging the irreducible individual perspective as what it is—as a perspective that, at least potentially, simply cannot attach any meaning or significance to the suffering at issue. It is the very meaninglessness of suffering, or the individual's experience of such meaninglessness, that is not recognized by the metaphysically realistic theodicist. Suffering individuals' experiences of their suffering—while being accounted for in the objectifying metaphysically realist picture—are treated from a third-person or absolute perspective, not from the first-person (or second-person) perspective that makes their meaninglessness strikingly obvious. This is comparable to the way in which strongly objectivist third-personal accounts of death and mortality fail to address the issue of human 'being toward death' from the first-personal existential point of view—or, for that matter, from the Levinasian second-personal point of view focusing on the other person's mortality (see Pihlström 2016).

Thirdly, the theodicist could claim that even the pointlessness or meaninglessness of evil itself could somehow be part of the absolute God's-Eye View description of reality, including the reality of evil and suffering. Now, if this were so, then the 'pointlessness' of evil would be merely apparent in the sense that the fact that there *can* be pointless evil (for example, evil resulting from our free actions, as free will theodicies would suggest) *does* serve the ultimate purpose of having a world with human beings equipped with freedom and responsibility. *That* is then viewed as the supreme value that God finds more important than preventing horrible suffering. The experience of the *utter* meaninglessness of evil and suffering that the antitheodicist urges us to take seriously as an (at least possible) individual experience cannot include even such meta-level instrumentalization of evil and suffering.

Fourthly, it is not only the metaphysical realist or the theodicist who (in a way that, I have claimed, fails to recognize the individual sufferer) weighs or

measures the positive and negative values of human experiences of suffering on some allegedly objective scale. Also any 'moralist' who engages in any even rudimentary activity of moral deliberation must inevitably make such 'calculations' that could be regarded as insensitive to the incommensurability and immeasurability of sufferings. Now, on Levinasian and arguably also Jamesian grounds it is not implausible to maintain that *all* moral agents (and myself in particular) do inevitably fall short of meeting the requirements of morality. We all more or less inevitably engage in the kind of totalizing and non-acknowledging practices that I am criticizing theodicism and metaphysical realism for. This is, ultimately, a kind of Levinasian picture of ethics as involving a commitment to the infinite duty of being responsible to and for the other without ever (per impossibile) objectifying the other into something to which we have primarily cognitive or epistemic access. The Levinasian ethical subject is subordinate to the other in the sense that there is no ethical subject(ivity) at all without the prior ethical relation to the other.[29]

In criticizing theodicism and the metaphysical realism that (typically, paradigmatically) underlies it we should, then, be criticizing *our own* tendencies to distort the morally fundamental nature of our relation to otherness, i.e., our own tendencies to fail to acknowledge otherness in its irreducibility (i.e., its irreducibility to my categorizing the world in terms of some pre-fixed categories, or its irreducibility to my believing the world to be so pre-categorized in the absence of any individual perspectives). The moral criticism of theodicism (and realism) ought to be primarily *self-criticism*, a criticism of our temptation to theodicy (cf. Bernstein 2002)—and to too strong forms of realism.

## Acknowledging reality: the humanism of antitheodicism

Acknowledging reality—whatever we exactly mean by that vague phrase—does not, I believe, require metaphysical realism. On the contrary, metaphysical realism itself fails to acknowledge reality in its diversity, as it reductively objectifies everything into a single total picture.[30] What proper acknowledgment requires is objective truth and truthfulness in a pragmatic sense (as articulated above) and a 'realistic spirit' rather than any overall assumption of metaphysical realism. Therefore the pursuit of not just pragmatism but of a plausible form of pragmatic realism (within pragmatism) is crucial in the philosophy of religion, as already argued in the earlier chapters of this volume.

Theodicies are of course only one specific, albeit ethically highly important, example of a distorted non-acknowledgment of reality (especially of the reality of otherness). Other examples include a quasi-Orwellian (or, perhaps today, 'Trumpist') failure to acknowledge the very significance of truth and facts (as witnessed by the horrifyingly Orwellian pseudo-discourse of 'alternative facts'), as well as popular self-help literature advancing various manipulative pseudo-therapies, self-branding, easy solutions to the complex challenges of human

life, etc. There are profoundly problematic elements of insincerity in such cultural phenomena that are in interesting ways analogous to theodicist narratives with their harmonious total world picture. What we need as a remedy is not metaphysical realism with its imagined super-absolute facts but an ethical acknowledgment of the diversity of humanly constituted and reconstructed reality and objectivity. It is part of this acknowledgment to also acknowledge the essentially contestable nature of any facts we may be committed to as well as the fragility of any meanings and meaningfulness we may find in our world.[31] When Rorty (1989) tells us that if we take care of freedom, truth can take care of itself,[32] he needs to be reminded that this is true only if freedom is not just negative freedom from constraints but positive freedom that includes responsibility and a genuine commitment to acknowledgment, including the acknowledgment of human limits, finitude, and fragility. Rortyan pragmatists also need to be reminded that a pragmatist conception of truth must never entirely give up our ordinary realistic commitment to objective reality and truth.[33]

I have suggested that the realism discussion in the philosophy of religion, while apparently independent of the theodicy discussion, is actually very closely tied to the latter—to the extent that theodicism (typically, paradigmatically) presupposes a problematic form of metaphysical realism and should be criticized along with such realism. The collapse of metaphysical realism hardly directly entails the collapse of theodicism, but the antitheodicist should focus on attacking the metaphysically realist background assumptions of theodicism in addition to focusing on the main task of showing the colossal failure of moral acknowledgment in all attempts to justify others' suffering.[34]

The theodicy vs. antitheodicy issue is often seen as purely metaphysical (as in, say, Leibnizian theodicies and their contemporary variants) or, alternatively, as primarily ethical (as in 'moral antitheodicism' based on, say, Levinasian criticism of the immorality of justifying others' suffering, going beyond ontology). I have tried to argue, at least implicitly, that both are too narrow ways of conceiving the matter. The issue actually exemplifies the deep entanglement of the moral and the metaphysical. The way to see this entanglement at the core of this issue is to note how deeply theodicies are committed to metaphysical realism. Antitheodicism, as has been suggested, is based on the ethical affirmation of the fundamental need to recognize or acknowledge—ontologically as well as ethically—individual sufferers' (or victims' of evil) perspectives in their distinctiveness and irreducibility. This presupposes that we reject metaphysical realism as a non-acknowledging (and therefore at least potentially even morally corrupting) totalizing attempt to view the world as a totality from a God's-Eye View. This rejection is both ethical and metaphysical, with the two aspects inseparably present. Not only are the ethical and the metaphysical entangled here; similarly (and entangled with this entanglement), there is the entanglement of the unintelligibility or incoherence, on the one hand, and the ethical unacceptability, on the other, of the kind of metaphysics invoked by theodicies, based on metaphysical realism. Recall again how James rejected the Hegelian

idealists' absolute as *both* conceptually unintelligible *and* as morally corrupting—with these two criticisms inseparably intertwined.

It could also be suggested that *if* metaphysical realism and thereby theodicism really are incoherent responses to the reality of suffering (or to reality generally), then we could not really be theodicists even if we tried. We would be in 'bad faith'; we would in reality always already have acknowledged the moral status of the other person and thus also the irreducibility and unobjectifiability of their suffering, simply as a (transcendental) necessary precondition for our own moral subjectivity, and therefore the theodicy argumentation could not really get off the ground at all.[35] An engagement in theodicies, or a commitment to theodicism, would thus in a way be a self-denial, a concealment of one's inevitable (transcendental) commitment to moral acknowledgment. We may agree with this suggestion while also maintaining that it is important to emphasize the incoherence of theodicist and metaphysically realist thinking. Kant had to write hundreds of pages in defense of transcendental idealism while also maintaining that in some sense anyone who even so much as has experiences of objects and events must be a transcendental idealist (even against their own will), as transcendental realism is ultimately incoherent.[36]

It should also be re-emphasized that pragmatic pluralism (as opposed to metaphysical realism, to reductive objectification, to what Kant called transcendental realism, and to various forms of reductionism and totalizing) and antitheodicism (acknowledging individual suffering in its perspectival variety, as opposed to theodicist postulations of a totalizing overall perspective) are really two sides of the same coin; they go very well together. These, for our present purposes at least, are fundamentally just aspects of a single thought pattern, or a tendency of thinking, a philosophical temperament in James's sense, a temperament taking seriously individual diversity that cannot be reduced to any totality (and thus a temperament opposed to reductionism in its many other forms as well).

However, we should recognize a reflexive problem here. Am I saying that these are *generally* right or correct views or ideas to embrace? Am I betraying my own defense of pluralism, perspectivalness, and respect for diversity by failing to recognize the philosophical value of monism and reductionism? Am I claiming pragmatism to be 'true' from a God's-Eye View?

I have no final response to provide here. I am tempted to point out that this is like saying that one should, if one is tolerant, also tolerate intolerance; the only possible response to such a criticism in the end is 'no, one should not'. The fact that we have to be reflectively self-critical in our pursuit of antitheodicism (and pragmatism) yields one final comment on what we might call the *humanism* of antitheodicism. We should defend the individual human being's right and duty to take responsibility for creating—or failing to create—moral meaning into her/his life and the world s/he lives in, in the absence of any transcendent, metaphysico-theological or theodicist grand narratives of the meaningfulness or significance of suffering. The human being stands at the center of this ethical

project of constructing meaning; this is her/his existential task which cannot be handed over to any (real or imagined) God. 'Creating moral meaning' does not amount to discovering any ready-made meanings or moral truths (in a metaphysically realistic sense) but to living an open, possibly difficult life fully aware of what Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* called the 'problem of life' (see the next chapter), even aware of the constant possibility of meaninglessness.

This is also a humanism of a 'de-selfing', disappearing subject: the ethically engaged person does not set her-/himself at the center but disappears into the world like the transcendental subject of Wittgenstein's solipsism in the *Tractatus*. Such humanism is very far from the way in which the human being (or more precisely, one's own self) is placed at the center of things in our contemporary 'selfie' culture and popular self-help. The self-critically reflective antitheodicism I am defending contains the requirement of constant vigilance in *not* setting oneself first and thereby failing to recognize others' sufferings. This is why it is important to fight against one's own theodicist temptations—and the related temptation to embrace the only apparently consoling absolute picture of metaphysical realism.

CHAPTER 5

# The Limits of Language and Harmony

Philosophers of religion inspired by Ludwig Wittgenstein typically focus on the 'grammatical' methodology emerging from Wittgenstein's later work.[1] When examining the problem of evil and suffering, they often suggest that the very formulation of this problem, in the traditional form calling for a theodicy, is deeply confused, as it violates the grammar of genuinely religious language use. Similarly, many of them also find the problem of realism confused—to the extent that very few of them would be willing to embrace the kind of pragmatic realism I have defended in the earlier chapters.

This chapter focuses on the theodicy issue rather than the realism issue, but we know already that these two are closely related. Let us begin by observing that philosophers taking their departure from Wittgensteinian grammatical considerations may argue that, religiously speaking, theodicies can be criticized not only as confused but as superstitious or blasphemous. Thus, several Wittgensteinian philosophers maintain that theodicies allegedly justifying 'the ways of God to man'—that is, arguments seeking to make sense of apparently meaningless and absurd evil and suffering within God's overall harmonious plan—amount not only to ethically insensitive use of language disregarding or misrecognizing others' suffering in its pointlessness but also to pseudo-religious and therefore *religiously* confused use of language. It is not only ethically wrong but also meaningless and conceptually confused, i.e., a violation of the meaning-constitutive grammar of religious language games, to claim that others' suffering has a metaphysical or theological meaning, function, or explanation. This is so irrespective of which specific theodicy (such as 'free will theodicy' or 'soul-making theodicy') is postulated. The 'conceptual oddness' of theodicies has been noted not only by D.Z. Phillips, arguably the best-known Wittgensteinian antitheodicist, but also by Ben Tilghman—who uses this very phrase—and by Stephen Mulhall, who explicitly suggests that theodicies end up with blasphemy.[2] In a similar vein, Andrew Gleeson, also writing in a broadly Wittgensteinian tradition, notes that theodicies should be criticized on both moral and conceptual grounds, while Mikel Burley points out that the theodicist is 'so confused as to be unaware of the degree of their own insensitivity' to pain and suffering—with moral as well as logical and conceptual dimensions pertaining to this confusion.[3]

According to these and many other Wittgensteinian philosophers of religion, theodicies thus presuppose a confused and immoral kind of *harmony* in the world and in our attitude to other human beings' sufferings, as already noted in our critical treatment (especially in Chapter 4 above) of the metaphysical harmony postulated by the kind of God's-Eye View realism presupposed by theodicism. Such a harmony is allegedly ethical in postulating not only a perfectly just God but also a balance between moral (or immoral) actions and their reward or punishment, but according to critics of theodicies it is in reality unethical in its disregard for individual human beings' experiences of meaningless suffering.[4] What may be called *Wittgensteinian antitheodicy* resists such a temptation to embrace a metaphysically and theologically harmonious world picture (or a harmonious view of God, for that matter) as a pseudo-religious tendency (cf. Pihlström 2007; 2013a: chapter 5), insisting on the need to take seriously the profound *disharmony* of human lives and sufferings. Here I cannot examine any detailed arguments for Wittgensteinian antitheodicism, but let me offer a few observations on Phillips's approach, setting the stage for the main concerns of this chapter.[5]

The Wittgensteinian method Phillips (along with many other Wittgensteinians) subscribes to carefully looks at the actual use of language in concrete human situations and practices, instead of any a priori rules or principles establishing linguistic meanings. Yet, he also emphasizes the general Wittgensteinian ideas that 'it is only in the context of [religious] language games that belief in God has any meaning' and 'concepts have their life' 'only in practice, in what we do' (Phillips 1993: xi, xiii). In his criticism of theodicies, in particular, Phillips focuses on what goes wrong in the very form of the allegedly moral reasoning the theodicist engages in; he interestingly cites the Book of Job here: 'Job cannot make *sense* of his afflictions in terms of the [theodicist] arguments of his would-be comforters' (ibid.: 157). While those defending theodicies try to calculate what kinds of goods or benefits (such as the general goodness of free will) might outweigh or compensate for the evils and sufferings there are (e.g., those resulting from the misuse of freedom), thus thinking in terms of a kind of divine harmony, the Phillipsian-cum-Wittgensteinian antitheodicist objects to 'the *concept* of calculation in this context, because it excludes *moral* concepts' (ibid.: 158).

Phillips argues that the truly religious reaction to the contingencies and adversities of human life does not seek to 'tidy up' messy human reality or to find explanations and understandings of suffering (see Phillips 1993: 166–168). Rather, properly (genuinely, truly) religious uses of language, when addressing the problem of evil and suffering, recognize the limits of understanding and linguistic expression—not as contingent limitations that could in principle be transcended yet *de facto* cannot be overcome by us, but rather as necessary limits defining the relevant language game and therefore playing a *quasi-transcendental*[6] role in constituting what is meaningful and possible for us (see ibid.: 168), albeit in the end only contextually necessary limits that could in

principle be redrawn as our lives change. A 'transcendental' critique of theodicies, when formulated from a Wittgensteinian perspective along Phillipsian lines, thus crucially focuses on the grammar constitutive of moral and religious language, that is, on the meaning-structuring rules of the relevant language games—rules that might, however, themselves be historically transformed (cf. also, e.g., Phillips 1986). If we take seriously the late-Wittgensteinian view that there can be no meaning without practice-laden, habitual, world-engaging use of expressions within public human ways of acting, or language games—i.e., that 'meaning is use' in the sense of the *Investigations* (cf. PI, I, §23)—then we should also acknowledge the fact that the meanings of such expressions as 'evil', 'suffering', 'God', 'meaning', and 'harmony' (as well as, for that matter, 'reality' and 'truth'), are inextricably entangled with their use in religious (and other) language games and thus in our forms of life. If we do take this seriously, then it is conceptually, morally, and religiously misguided to seek to provide a theodicy—or to require one.

Wittgenstein himself had little to say about this particular topic, even though he famously commented on various other issues in the philosophy of religion on several occasions—to the extent that the entire paradigm of 'Wittgensteinian' philosophy of religion has been based on such remarks. The few references to anything like the problem of evil and suffering in Wittgenstein's own work (as available in diary notes, or as documented by his friends and pupils) include the remarks against any 'moral meaning of suffering' and against any moralistic understanding of God in conversations with Malcolm Drury,[7] and the well-known comments on the 'infinite distress' ('*die höchste Not*') in *Vermischte Bemerkungen* (CV 52, c. 1944). However, while the material is scarce in this regard, the more general tone of Wittgenstein's way of thinking about religion arguably makes it clear that he would have been harshly critical of contemporary analytic philosophers' of religion preoccupation with explanatory and justificatory theodicist discourse, as well as the realistic background assumptions of this preoccupation.

The so-called Wittgensteinian philosophers of religion who (rightly, in my view) reject both theodicies and the theodicistically framed problem of evil and suffering to which theodicies are offered as responses only rarely discuss Wittgenstein's *early* work, however. The early Wittgenstein—the author of *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921), 'A Lecture of Ethics' (1929, reprinted in PO), and of course the early pre-Tractarian *Notebooks 1914–1916*—does have things to say about topics such as happiness and harmony that are worth considering in relation to the late-Wittgensteinian antitheodicist recognition of the ethical need to take seriously a certain kind of disharmony. It is to this task that the first half of the present chapter is devoted. I will begin by going through some (mostly relatively familiar) Wittgensteinian passages on happiness and harmony before moving on to an interpretation of (Wittgensteinian) antitheodicy as an acknowledgment of disharmony. I will then show how this discussion needs to be examined from a *transcendental* point of view—viewing Wittgen-

stein himself as a Kantian thinker as well as the entire antitheodicy approach as an essentially Kantian undertaking—thus raising a reflexive problem that needs attention.[8] The latter half of the chapter will then return to late-Wittgensteinian (and pragmatist) considerations by emphasizing the historical mutability and contingency of any transcendental limits of language that can be taken to constitute and constrain our thinking and discourse. My (quasi-)Wittgensteinian elaborations are thus intended to serve as an example of a certain kind of transcendental pragmatism that I think could be developed further in this context.

An important caveat is in order here. The (anti)theodicy discourse primarily focuses on the acknowledgment of *others'* suffering. Famously, the early Wittgenstein is mostly silent about other subjects and is preoccupied with the first-personal point of view (see also Pihlström 2016). In this sense, the (anti-)theodicy issue seems to be rather far removed from any early-Wittgensteinian considerations. Nevertheless, this hardly prevents us from trying to learn something from the complex interplay of harmony and disharmony we may approach via Wittgenstein's cryptic writings, even if our primary concern is (as it is here) to make a contribution to the antitheodicy discussion rather than historical Wittgenstein scholarship.

We also have to be extremely careful about which views to actually attribute to Wittgenstein—and, indeed, about the question of whether *any* philosophical views or theses can be attributed to him at all. I am of course fully aware of the fact that there is no obvious sense in which any of the early Wittgenstein's pronouncements on harmony or happiness (or related topics) could actually make sense in his own terms. We will briefly revisit this issue in due course, though the focus of the chapter is not on interpreting Wittgenstein's comments on sense and nonsense but on the use some of his ideas may be put into—whether they make sense or not—in the explorations of theodicy and antitheodicy that some 'Wittgensteinians' have been busily contributing to. Indeed, I will read Wittgenstein ultimately as a kind of Kantian as well as a pragmatist, but this should not be taken to mean that I would imagine Wittgenstein himself to have been explicitly committed to those, or any, philosophical positions.

## Happiness and harmony

Wittgenstein's fragmentary remarks on happiness fall into a peculiar place in the development of philosophical reflections on happiness[9] and the good life in Western philosophy. We may recall that Socrates and Plato maintained, as a corollary of the Platonic rationalistic theory of the good life as life guided by reason, that in a sense the good person is necessarily happy—virtue and happiness (the good life) are inextricably entangled—whereas Aristotle, holding a more realistic and commonsensical view, acknowledged the possibility that even the most virtuous person can be unhappy due to various misfortunes, i.e., virtue fails to guarantee happiness.[10] It is a more general classical Greek

idea that happiness and unhappiness concern a person's life as a totality and that, therefore, strictly speaking, a person can really be considered happy or unhappy only after her/his life is over. At any rate, for classical philosophers like Plato and Aristotle, it would have been strange or perhaps even incomprehensible to set the demands of morality and the pursuit of happiness against each other. However, this is exactly what happens two millennia later in Kant's moral philosophy: happiness is irrelevant to moral duty; moreover, our tendency to pursue our own happiness as empirical natural creatures is often in contrast with, and needs to be overcome by, the moral law. Indeed, this is why we human beings (rational yet finite and empirical beings) need the moral law in the first place—unlike, say, angels, whose will would necessarily conform to the demands of morality. We can, according to Kant, seek to be *worthy of happiness* by doing our moral duty out of pure respect for the moral law. However, whether or not our virtuous actions actually make anyone happy is completely irrelevant to the moral status of those actions.

A new chapter in this story of the development of moral thought on happiness is written when Wittgenstein states in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*: '*Die Welt des Glücklichen ist eine andere als die des Unglücklichen*' ('The world of the happy man is a different one from the world of the unhappy man') (TLP 6.43). This peculiar view is based on Wittgenstein's conception of ethics as (only) concerning the subject's (my) relation or attitude to the world as a totality. There is no good or evil (or God, or happiness) *in* the world. Living a right kind of life—with 'life' identifiable with the 'world'—is the fundamental ethical task ultimately identical to the pursuit of happiness. But this, of course, cannot be put to words. There is no way in which any philosophical or ethical theory could advise us how to achieve such happiness.

As far as I can see, the overall picture is roughly the following. Socrates and Plato maintained that goodness entails happiness, i.e., that nothing can really harm the good person. (There are variations of this idea in Christianity, but on the other hand the idea of martyrdom, for instance, does require a sacrifice of empirical happiness; if death were no loss at all, then there would hardly be any significant value in martyrdom.) The history of Western moral philosophy then seems to gradually give up the idea that 'nothing can harm the good man', starting with Aristotle but most strikingly in Kant's account of the irrelevance of happiness to moral duty. However, the original Socratic idea makes a kind of return in Wittgenstein (and philosophers influenced by him), for whom neither goodness nor happiness is anything 'in the world' but a matter of my inner relation to the world: if *I* am happy—if my world is the world of a 'happy man'—then indeed nothing *in* the world can harm me.[11]

This return of the Socratic idea comes with a twist, however. Wittgenstein is clearly interested in *transcendental* happiness, not *empirical* happiness. Even for Kant, happiness remains an empirical concept.[12] The Wittgensteinian move is thus crucial in transforming our picture of the very nature of (morally relevant) happiness. We do not have to force Wittgenstein into the brief historical narra-

tive starting with Plato, but we may see his transcendental remarks on happiness as fundamentally changing that narrative.

Let us now take a somewhat closer look at how Wittgenstein elaborates on his idea of the world of the 'happy man'. The world of the happy person is, the *Notebooks* tell us, a '*happy world*' ('eine glückliche Welt') (NB, July 29, 1916).[13] This requires seeing the world as a *harmonious* totality; as Newton Garver (1994: 89) observes, happiness consists in 'being in harmony with the world'—and thus, in the context of the Tractarian account of the world as a totality of facts (cf. TLP 1.1), not 'with the *substance* of the world, since the substance of this world is the same as the substance of any possible world', but precisely with the *facts* constituting this world, i.e., facts that are independent of my will (Garver 1994: 89; cf. TLP 6.373).

The *Notebooks* remarks on happiness are richer than the very few ones remaining in the *Tractatus*.[14] Beginning his reflections on this topic in July 1916, Wittgenstein finds Dostoevsky to be right in saying that 'the man who is happy is fulfilling the purpose of existence' ('*dass der, welcher glücklich ist, den Zweck des Daseins erfüllt*') (NB, July 6, 1916). In this context, Wittgenstein further reflects: 'I am either happy or unhappy, that is all. It can be said: good or evil do not exist. // A man who is happy must have no fear. Not even in the face of death. // Only a man who lives not in time but in the present is happy' ('*Ich bin entweder glücklich oder unglücklich, das ist alles. Man kann sagen: gut oder böse gibt es nicht. // Wer glücklich ist, der darf keine Furcht haben. Auch nicht vor dem Tode. // Nur wer nicht in Zeit, sondern in der Gegenwart lebt, ist glücklich*').[15] The association of happiness with a kind of metaphysical harmony becomes clear in the entry on the same day when Wittgenstein suggests that I must be 'in agreement' ('*in Übereinstimmung*') with the world in order to live happily; this is what being happy '*means*' ('heisst') (NB, July 8, 1916). Being in agreement with the world can, furthermore, be regarded as doing God's will ('*ich tue den Willen Gottes*')[16]—to the extent that Wittgenstein asks whether one is only happy when one(self) wants or wills nothing ('*Oder ist nur der glücklich, der* nicht *will?*') (NB, July 29, 1916).[17]

Given the identification of happiness with harmony at such a highest possible (cosmic and even divine) level, it is no surprise that 'Live happily!' ('*Lebe glücklich!*') is the highest moral command to which nothing can be added (NB, July 29, 1916). If one asks *why* one should live happily, that is a tautological question: 'the happy life seems to be justified of itself, it seems that it *is* the only right life' ('*es scheint, dass sich das glückliche Leben von selbst rechtfertigt, dass es das einzig richtige Leben* ist') (NB, July 30, 1916). As Gordon Bearn explains, the ethical life, or the happy life, is 'the existential analog of the tautology': 'Violate logical laws and your marks will *make no sense*, violate ethical laws and your life will *make no sense*' (Bearn 1997: 66, 68; cf. 71–72; see also Suter 1989). No wonder that Wittgenstein finds both ethics and logic 'transcendental', related to the meaning or sense (*Sinn*) of the world—either the world conceived as life, or the world conceived as a structure of possible facts isomorphic to the structure of language.[18]

Accordingly, there can be no objective criterion for the happy and harmonious life—nothing that could be described in language or incorporated into a realistic world picture—but only, so to speak, a transcendental criterion (NB, July 30, 1916), as happiness and unhappiness cannot belong to the world ('*Glück und Unglück können nicht zur Welt gehören*') (NB, August 2, 1916).[19] It is for this reason that, as Richard Brockhaus (1991: 329) aptly notes, happiness is not an intellectual achievement based on arguments but needs the kind of first-personal experiences Wittgenstein tries to describe in 'A Lecture on Ethics' (to which we will shortly turn).[20] The lack of any objective or 'outward' criterion of happiness in Wittgenstein's transcendental sense can also be expressed by saying, as Ilham Dilman (1974: 179–180) does, that happiness in this sense is an 'inward' attitude belonging to one's 'inner life'—such as a 'genuine love of the good' which would be better described as something like the state of one's 'soul' rather than as (for example) mere conformity to some objective moral standards.[21]

The conception of happiness as harmony[22] can, hence, be rather interestingly compared to the feeling of 'absolute safety' describe in Wittgenstein's 1929 text, 'A Lecture on Ethics' (PO 37–44)—just like the view that happiness is fundamentally or absolutely 'justified of itself' is readily comparable to the idea of there being nothing more fundamental to ground the ethical demand of living or behaving well, as also elaborated on in 'A Lecture on Ethics'. Both views are important examples highlighting the peculiar character of ethical judgments in the 'Lecture'. Wittgenstein articulates the latter point by comparing moral behavior to playing tennis (PO 38–39). If someone tells me that I play tennis badly, I may answer that I know but I do not want to play any better, in which case my critic can only accept my answer. Playing tennis well, or better, is, then, optional. But ethics is radically different:

> But suppose I had told one of you a preposterous lie and he came up to me and said 'You're behaving like a beast' and then I were to say 'I know I behave badly, but then I don't want to behave any better,' could he then say 'Ah, then that's all right'? Certainly not; he would say 'Well, you *ought* to want to behave better.' Here you have an absolute judgment of value, whereas the first instance was one of a relative judgment. (PO 39.)

In the vocabulary of the *Notebooks* and the *Tractatus*, we might say that it simply makes no sense at all to claim that one does not want to live rightly or be happy (in the transcendental sense sketched in Wittgenstein's remarks). The command, 'Live happily!', is absolute and categorical—or even comparable to a divine command. One's not wanting to do as that command says is simply out of the question—and the sense in which it makes no sense to say that one does not want to be happy is to be distinguished from the nonsensical propositions of the *Tractatus* not making sense in the terms of the *Tractatus* itself, because in those terms ethical judgments or propositions do not make sense anyway (or are not actually judgments or propositions at all). One may certainly utter

the sounds (or write down the letters), 'I do not want to be happy', but by so doing one makes no significant gesture toward anything; one does not even lead a life about which it could be asked whether it is happy or unhappy. Or so, I suppose, we may try to read those remarks in the terms provided in 'A Lecture on Ethics'.[23]

The experience of *feeling absolutely safe* is the other point of contact between the 'Lecture' and the early remarks on happiness I have cited. Wittgenstein's account of 'the experience of feeling *absolutely* safe', by which he means 'the state of mind in which one is inclined to say 'I am safe, nothing can injure me whatever happens' (PO 41), emphasizes the way in which such expressions breach the boundaries of language:

> We all know what it means in ordinary life to be safe. I am safe in my room, when I cannot be run over by an omnibus. I am safe if I have had whooping cough and cannot therefore get it again. To be safe essentially means that it is physically impossible that certain things should happen to me and therefore it's nonsense to say that I am safe *whatever* happens. […] Now I want to impress on you that a certain characteristic misuse of our language runs through *all* ethical and religious expressions. (PO 42.)

This complements the picture of there being no ordinary, outward, objective, or metaphysically realistic criterion for (transcendentally) happy life. There is no more such a criterion than there is any physical, natural, or 'worldly' criterion for absolute safety. There *is* no absolute safety—or God, or happiness, or ethical harmony—to be found *in* the world of facts that can be stated in language. The metaphysical realist's fully objective, totalizing God's-Eye View account of reality (cf. Chapter 4) would not contain anything like that. *Qua* transcendental, happiness is something quite different, as far from being a mere worldly state of affairs as the (imagined) state of absolute safety. It is, rather, a mystical kind of harmony with the world and God, inexpressible and ineffable.

Let me offer one more excursus into Wittgenstein's ethical and existential writings before moving on to a more explicit consideration of the relations between these views and the Wittgensteinian antitheodicy project described above. In the slightly later diary notes from 1930–1932 and 1936–1937, available as *Denkbewegungen*, Wittgenstein interestingly sets madness (*Wahnsinn*) and happiness (*Glück*) against each other. If madness does not come, he maintains, that is certainly happy (or, perhaps better, 'lucky'), but if it does, he says, I must not flee it. This is because madness, *Wahnsinn*, is the highest judge (*Richter*) of whether my life is right or wrong. While these remarks are considerably later than the *Notebooks*, they can be interestingly read along with the early Tractarian view on happiness.[24] Insofar as only the happy life (or world) is 'right', it is ultimately madness that judges whether I am happy at a transcendental level. This is what Wittgenstein says:

> *Du sollst so leben, dass Du vor dem Wahnsinn bestehen kannst, wenn er kommt.* Und den Wahnsinn sollst du nicht fliehen. *Es ist ein Glück, wenn er nicht da ist, aber fliehen sollst Du ihn nicht, so glaube ich mir sagen zu müssen. Denn er ist der strengste Richter (das strengste Gericht) darüber ob mein Leben recht oder unrecht ist; er ist fürchterlich, aber Du sollst ihn dennoch nicht fliehen. Denn Du weisst ja doch nicht, wie Du ihm entkommen kannst, & während Du vor ihm fliehst, benimmst Du Dich ja unwürdig.* (D 185–186, July 20, 1937; original emphasis.)

Many of the themes found in the early texts can be seen at work here again, in a somewhat different context. There is again the fundamental ethico-existential concern with living 'rightly'—an absolute ethical matter for Wittgenstein. Whether or not madness 'comes' is, furthermore, independent of me or my will. It either comes or does not come, depending on whether I have been able to live harmoniously and rightly. If my world is a 'happy' world, I (presumably) will not become mad, but if I do, then this matter is ultimately not up to me but in a way my fate. And the worst thing to do would be to run away from one's life and fate; such a desperate attempt to escape would amount to a disgraceful, 'wrong', and thus deeply unhappy life. One might be left wondering which one is the worst kind of unhappiness: madness itself (assuming it is happy, or lucky, not to be mad) or the wrongful attempt to flee madness if it does come? It would seem to me that the Wittgensteinian answer would be latter one.

## Antitheodicy and disharmony

After this sketch of a Wittgensteinian picture of happiness as a kind of transcendental metaphysical and theological harmony, it is vitally important to keep in mind that Wittgensteinian antitheodicists, in contrast, emphasize the acknowledgment of a certain kind of disharmony as a constitutive feature of genuinely religious language use and of the moral point of view that does not overlook others' suffering. Religious life, according to thinkers like Phillips (1977: 119), recognizes that catastrophes may strike us 'without rhyme or reason'. There is, and can be, no overall harmonious reconciliation with the evil and suffering that characterize human lives in this world. The theodicist search for such metaphysical and theological harmony is immoral—or even itself evil—because it fails to take seriously others' meaningless suffering and the profoundly, irreparably disharmonious world it yields. It is the acknowledgment of disharmony rather than harmony that is a necessary feature of the ethical task of living 'rightly'. In this sense, truly ethical life, and therefore truly religious life, requires antitheodicy rather than theodicy.[25]

It could be protested that this link between theodicy and harmony is not as clear as it seems. The antitheodicist need not simply be opposed to the theodicist's tendency to view the world as 'harmonious' in the sense of some easy

(e.g., utilitarian or more generally consequentialist) moral structure. Rather, the antitheodicist criticism of theodicies charges the theodicist for viewing the world as if it could be evaluated in moral terms at all (at a general metaphysical or theological level). Moreover, the antitheodicist position can itself be claimed to be committed to a kind of harmony precisely in the denial that the world is pre-structured in moral terms independently of the individual's own perspective. It is precisely by rejecting *any* simple harmonious solution that the antitheodicist implicitly if not explicitly claims to be able to find a more genuinely harmonious meta-level position. We should definitely acknowledge this possibility of rephrasing the antitheodicist approach in terms of harmony. Even so, I believe there is—precisely due to this availability of a harmony-postulating interpretation of antitheodicy—a tension right at the heart of the antitheodicist argument, and I want to take some steps toward analyzing this tension.

Now, the Wittgensteinian antitheodicist may reason as follows. Insofar as Wittgenstein's transcendental view of happiness—of the world of the 'happy man'—in its deepest sense pertains to the Kantian question of whether I am *worthy or unworthy of happiness*, it looks like the truly happy person, or the person whose happiness has a truly moral character, must never rest satisfied with a harmonious theodicy picture of the world but must take seriously the disharmony that the irresolvable problem of evil and suffering creates. In brief, others' sufferings and the metaphysical disharmony they bring along with them to the world (to my world) are inevitably a challenge to *my* being able to be happy—a challenge that, presumably, can never be fully and completely resolved. Let us therefore take a look at what Wittgenstein writes in a notebook entry in August 1916:

> *Angenommen, der Mensch könnte seinen Willen nicht betätigen, müsste aber alle Not dieser Welt leiden, was könnte ihn dann glücklich machen?*
> *Wie kann der Mensch überhaupt glücklich sein, da er doch die Not dieser Welt nicht abwehren kann?*
> *Eben durch das Leben der Erkenntnis.*
> *Das gute Gewissen ist das Glück, welches das Leben der Erkenntnis gewährt.*
> *Das Leben der Erkenntnis ist das Leben, welches glücklich ist, der Not der Welt zum Trotz.*
> *Nur das Leben ist glücklich, welches auf die Annehmlichkeiten der Welt verzichten kann.*
> *Ihm sind die Annehmlichkeiten der Welt nur so viele Gnaden des Schicksals.* (NB, August 13, 1916.)

This is, admittedly, puzzling. The 'life of knowledge' (or, perhaps, 'life of cognition')[26] *could* be seen in a theodicist light as a life based on some kind of theoretical knowledge explaining and justifying the fact that there is evil and suffering, or (for religious believers) explaining and justifying the fact that God

allows the world he created to contain so much evil and suffering. But it could also, alternatively, be seen in an antitheodicist light as a life acknowledging (that is, '*anerkennen*' rather than '*erkennen*')[27] the irreducibility of (others') sufferings that have no meaning, function, or justification—experiences of suffering that could 'educate' one to believing in God (CV 97, remark in 1950), but on the other hand might also equally well educate one out of one's belief in God.

Only *such* knowledge (or, rather, acknowledgment) could then bring true happiness with itself—but then such happiness, though transcendental, would only be limited or temporary, available only with the dramatic qualification that there is so much unhappiness around us. Such genuine happiness would therefore, so it seems, immediately have to cancel itself out. One could only be (transcendentally) happy by being (empirically) deeply unhappy about the unhappiness of others. As we might paraphrase Martin Luther King's famous remark on justice and injustice, unhappiness (or suffering) anywhere is a threat to happiness everywhere. The more philosophical variant of this thought is Levinas's insistence on the idea that the only ethically acceptable 'meaning' or 'sense' of suffering lies in my suffering for the suffering of the other; suffering has a sense only in my suffering because the other suffers.[28] And even a single instance of such meaningless suffering would have to make *me*—the only moral subject according to Wittgenstein's demanding first-personal picture of ethics—suffer enormously.[29]

Ilham Dilman suggests a plausible reading of the *Notebooks* passage just quoted. It is, we saw Wittgenstein claiming, only 'through the life of knowledge' that even a person who cannot ward off the misery of the world can be happy. Here, Dilman (1974: 180) says, 'knowledge' is close to what Plato meant by 'knowledge' or 'wisdom', a necessary condition of which is 'detachment', 'renouncing [*verzichten*] the amenities [*Annehmlichkeiten*] of the world'. He continues, in a manner highly relevant to the theodicy vs. antitheodicy discussion:

> This [detachment] does not mean indifference to the pain of others. Quite the contrary. For a man who is immersed in a life of worldliness will be relatively deaf to other people's cries of pain.[30] Detachment is a positive renunciation of such a life which allows the soul to turn to the good, to become sensitive to moral considerations. […] The condition of such renunciation is love—the kind of love that is present in pity for the afflicted, forgiveness of those who wrong one, gratitude for those who help one, and remorse for the wrong one has done to others. It is this love which both Plato and Wittgenstein see as a form of knowledge—this love which for Wittgenstein is an attitude of the will towards the world as a whole.
>
> It may be called love of the good, and the kind of pity which Dostoyevsky portrays in Sonia is a concrete manifestation of it. In that form it […] usually goes under the name 'love of one's neighbour'. The rela-

> tion between such selfless love and the kind of knowledge in question is internal. (Ibid.: 180–181.)

Therefore, Dilman tells us, the kind of happiness Wittgenstein is thinking of in the *Notebooks* is not 'indifferent to the misery of the world, though it is one which that misery need not and even, perhaps, cannot destroy' (ibid.: 182). In any case, Wittgenstein's enigmatic remarks on happiness and harmony should make us reflect on the ways in which, or the degree to which, the antitheodicist perspective is available to the one following the compelling ethical line of thought of Wittgenstein's early philosophy. Is too much emphasis laid on happiness and harmony there? Is the solipsistic detachment of the moral subject too severe, despite Dilman's admittedly consoling interpretation? What kind of antitheodicy can still be maintained if we follow Wittgenstein in regarding 'Live happily!' as the highest ethical command?

Things are not simple, as the basic demand of living 'rightly' or of seeing the world 'aright' should, arguably, be linked to antitheodicy rather than theodicy.[31] It is, above all, the task of being attentive to others' suffering that is necessary for living rightly—and thus for happiness—but it is this same task that, when taken seriously, deprives us from happiness. We may perhaps join Dilman in concluding that the view of happiness of Wittgenstein's *Notebooks* invokes 'a state of soul which contains its own reward' (ibid.).[32] There is nothing external or 'outward' in this transcendental happiness—whether or not it is available to the one pursuing antitheodicy. Such a 'reward' may, however, be a complex one.

Dilman is right, I believe, in perceiving an important link between the internal happiness of a morally engaged soul and the concept of *love*; after all, Wittgenstein himself declares love to be the greatest happiness of a human being (CV 87, remark in 1948).[33] This 'love', however, must presumably be the kind of love that is usually denoted by the Greek word *agape*, instead of *eros*, although Wittgenstein's own words may be deliberately ambiguous here. In any event, this kind of Wittgensteinian transcendental picture of happiness and love (of the good) is in striking contrast with the various banalizing treatments of these notions that surround us in contemporary popular culture. Dostoevsky's Sonia (in *Crime and Punishment*) may indeed be full of love, but she does not boast about her love, or her moral character, in the way our narcissistic culture today may encourage us to do, and hence her love (unlike, perhaps, most real-life individuals') remains genuine and uncorrupted.[34]

## The transcendental perspective—and a reflexive problem

Wittgenstein's transcendental happiness is, of course, very different from Kant's conception of empirical (pursuit of) happiness, which from the Kantian point of view is morally irrelevant.[35] It is, as we have seen, much closer to what Kant calls our worthiness of being happy, because the basic idea of our relation

to our (the) world being 'right' or 'wrong' is built into the notion of the world of the happy (or unhappy) person. This clearly requires a transcendental perspective for the development of any Wittgensteinian account of these matters. Only from a properly transcendental standpoint does the question of how to live 'rightly' or how to see the world 'aright' arise in the sense in which Wittgenstein seeks to deal with these questions in the early writings and the later diary entries, and it is this very standpoint that the later Wittgensteinian paradigm in antitheodicy invokes, even though it often seems that Wittgenstein-inspired antitheodicist philosophers of religion like Phillips are either unaware of their own transcendental tendencies or actively resist any Kantian readings of Wittgenstein.

Now, it should be clear (on the basis of the materials quoted in the two previous sections) that from a transcendental perspective, Wittgensteinian harmony—or happiness—cannot be found *in* the world, any more than the metaphysical (transcendental) subject, or God, or value can. Nor, however, can it be found anywhere outside the world, either, as there *is* no such 'outside' anywhere; we might say that Wittgenstein's philosophy, even his ethics and mystical thought, remains thoroughly this-worldly (cf. Brockhaus 1991). The theodicist confusion, based on a kind of metaphysical realism (see again Chapter 4), is to look for these 'higher' values either in the world or in some imagined supernatural realm beyond the world. As the Wittgensteinian antitheodicist may articulate her/his criticism of theodicy in terms of the kind of early-Wittgensteinian transcendental picture in addition to the (more typical) late-Wittgensteinian account emphasizing the 'grammar' of religious language use, a crucial element of this Wittgenstein-inspired criticism of theodicies should be a criticism of the realistic assumptions that do not take seriously the need to consider these issues transcendentally.

However, we now have to face the further worry already acknowledged above. The antitheodicist her-/himself may at the transcendental meta-level view the world in a 'harmonious' light, thus 'seeing the world aright' (TLP 6.54) precisely when seeing it disharmoniously in its irreducible plurality of meaningless suffering. In this sense, antitheodicism may lead to transcendental (not empirical) happiness. It is precisely the perception that (to paraphrase Martin Luther King again) suffering and unhappiness anywhere are threats to happiness everywhere that may eventually lead us to the *meta-level harmony and happiness* of seeing the world rightly, of taking others' suffering seriously wherever and whenever it occurs. Or at least this is a line of argument we might imagine a Wittgensteinian antitheodicist thinker developing. But then we might become 'too happy' while remaining at the detached meta-level. We might, indeed, be detached in such transcendental happiness without ever really attending to the empirical, first-hand experiences of suffering that we were hoping to acknowledge. Dilman's morally serious detachment associated with a 'love of the good' might just be an ideal we will never achieve. It may even be suggested that the antitheodicist world is *not* the world of the Wittgensteinian 'happy man' but

closer to the world as experienced by the 'sick soul' William James invokes in his *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902).[36] This suggestion can be backed up by appreciating what Leszek Kolakowski says on happiness:

> In short, the word 'happiness' does not seem applicable to divine life. But nor is it applicable to human beings. This is not just because we experience suffering. It is also because, even if we are not suffering at a given moment, even if we are able to experience physical and spiritual pleasure and moments beyond time, in the 'eternal present' of love, we can never forget the existence of evil and the misery of the human condition. We participate in the suffering of others; we cannot eliminate the anticipation of death or the sorrows of life. (Kolakowski 2012: 213–214.)

One can hardly find a more straightforward and appropriate account of the antitheodicist denial of eventual harmony and happiness—a denial that, however, itself takes place at the transcendental level (though this is not Kolakowski's own way of putting the matter). Kolakowski concludes:

> Happiness is something we can imagine but not experience. If we imagine that hell and purgatory are no longer in operation and that all human beings, every single one without exception, have been saved by God and are now enjoying celestial bliss, lacking nothing, perfectly satisfied, without pain or death, then we can imagine that their happiness is real and that the sorrows and suffering of the past have been forgotten. Such a condition can be imagined, but it has never been seen. It has never been seen. (Ibid.: 214–215.)

Now, as compelling as this is, the worry raised above is the following (cf. also Kivistö & Pihlström 2016: 283–284). Insofar as theodicies operate with the idea of a harmonious total world picture—an imagined condition of happiness in which all sufferings will finally be eliminated, at least post mortem[37]—is not the antitheodicist who reminds us that disharmony will be with us to stay also still attempting to offer a meta-level harmonious total picture, albeit an antitheodicist one, that is, her/his own (only different) version of how to see the world aright and how to live rightly and to be happy in the transcendental Wittgensteinian sense? Does not antitheodicy, thus, lead to the very same predicament it found theodicism guilty of, the pretension of happiness and harmony, only at the meta-level?[38]

There is no easy answer to such a self-reflective worry. We just have to keep asking ourselves these questions. *This* is part of our never-ending concern with living rightly—with happiness. A world in which we were able to resolve this matter would indeed be too harmonious for us. One key problem is, then, the following. Is the transcendental move we have taken a betrayal of the antitheodicist pursuit of taking evil and meaningless suffering ethically seriously and of

recognizing the suffering other (who may never be able to reach happiness)? This question returns, preventing any full, complete harmony—even transcendental.

There is also a somewhat disturbing thought that we might pause to consider at this point. Wittgenstein, who in the *Tractatus* had maintained that the 'solution' to the problem of life ('*das Problem des Lebens*') can only be seen in the disappearance of the problem—something that could be seen as a variant of transcendental happiness, of living in harmony—later suggests that 'someone who lives rightly does not experience the problem [of life] as *sorrow*, hence not after all as a problem, but rather as joy, that is so to speak as a bright halo round his life, not a murky background' (CV 31, remark in 1937). If our problem of life has something (anything) to do with our inability to reconcile ourselves with the suffering there is in the world—especially others' suffering—how can we possibly say that, even at a transcendental meta-level, this irreconcilability would take the form of a *joy*? This would be a version of the claim that our seeing the world aright—even when this means seeing it in the full irreducibility of suffering it incorporates—would amount to transcendental happiness. Wittgensteinian antitheodicism would then collapse back to immoral theodicism.

I have not raised these issues in order to resolve them. Rather, I think they are irresolvable.[39] I also believe that appreciating Wittgenstein's remarks—the ones cited and analyzed here, as well as many others—may help us recognize their irresolvability. But this requires that we do not merely seek to interpret Wittgenstein himself but actually attempt to do something with what he wrote, to work on our own problems of life, to engage in philosophy as the kind of 'work on oneself', on 'how one sees things' (CV 24, remark in 1931), that Wittgenstein himself deeply valued. There is no guarantee we can do this. Indeed, one's reading of Wittgenstein may bring one to the point he expressed about his attitude to Shakespeare: 'I could only stare in wonder at Shakespeare; never do anything with him' (CV 95, remark in 1950).

## The limits of language

Having reached a preliminary conclusion regarding the tension between harmony and disharmony in Wittgensteinian transcendental antitheodicism (which inevitably invokes the transcendental notion of a limit), I will, in the remainder of this chapter, more thoroughly examine the *limits of language* from the point of view of Wittgenstein's (and 'Wittgensteinian') philosophy of religion. Hence, I will raise some further fundamental issues characterizing the loose Wittgensteinian tradition in this field from the perspective of the question concerning the limits of language, as it arises in Wittgenstein's work. I do believe that, by contrast to what some Wittgensteinians argue, the notion of a limit of language in Wittgenstein's discussion of religion ought to be taken very seriously—even if we are only aiming at a Wittgenstein-*inspired* illumination of the nature of religious language and religious belief.[40]

There is plenty of evidence for so-called Wittgensteinian philosophers' uneasiness with the limit metaphor. For instance, when Phillips, in his editorial preface to a volume of his teacher's Rush Rhees's writings, acknowledges that the idea of 'the limits of language' was important for Rhees, he continues to note that he (Phillips) himself 'never could get into the simile of 'bumps and bruises' which come from striking one's head against the limits of language—and speaking of the worry or distress which belongs to philosophy in those terms' (Phillips 2006: xx; see also Rhees 2006: 222).[41] More specifically, it seems to me that Wittgensteinian philosophers of religion such as Phillips have not been fully conscious of the way in which the issue concerning the limits of language arises in the philosophy of religion as a Kantian issue, needing a transcendental analysis. Nor have they therefore sufficiently appreciated the ways in which Wittgenstein himself ought to be interpreted as a Kantian thinker presenting something like transcendental arguments investigating the necessary conditions for the possibility of linguistic meaning. Indeed, some of the core arguments characterizing Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion, identifiable in the work of Phillips, among others, can (*pace* Phillips himself) be reinterpreted as transcendental.[42]

Those arguments also, importantly, raise the issue of *relativism* about religion, because it might seem that from the Wittgensteinian perspective one may simply reject scientific (or presumably any external) criticism of religion by pointing out that it does not follow the rules of religious language games that are available only 'from within' the religious use of language itself. As is well known, critics of such relativist views have used pejorative terms like 'Wittgensteinian fideism' to highlight the unwelcome relativistic, fideistic, or even irrationalist consequences of the proposal to simply ground the meanings of religious language in the activities engaged in by people who actually 'play religious language games' or 'engage in a religious form of life'. If such meanings are unavailable to those who do not share such activities, no rational criticism of religious belief seems to be possible at all. In particular, no science-based critique of religion is relevant to the critical assessment of religion, or even strictly speaking possible, because by confusing the grammar of religious language such critique does not even speak about religion in the end. Evaluating the validity of the Wittgensteinians' concerns with relativism (and related views) would require a detailed analysis of what exactly is and ought to be meant by 'relativism'. Instead of entering that discussion, we may directly explore the 'limits of language' issue without taking any final stand on the relativism question.

My main aim in the rest of this chapter is to offer selected insights into the way in which the Wittgensteinian approach in the philosophy of religion differs from other relevant approaches—that is, into what is truly distinctive in it in comparison to mainstream analytic philosophy of religion in particular—by emphasizing the central status of the problem of the limits of (religious) language. I will also suggest that the distinctiveness of the Wittgensteinian approach can be perceived much more clearly if we are willing to read Wittgen-

stein as engaged in transcendental reflection. This does not preclude us from appreciating, for example, Phillips's (and other Wittgensteinians') emphasis on the significance of literary fiction in philosophical attempts to understand religious language use and religious problems, especially in drawing our attention to the particular and personal in religious language use (see, e.g., Phillips 1991). On the contrary, transcendental considerations themselves can be embedded in literature—though this is not a topic for the present chapter.[43]

As an illustration of my general claims, I will toward the end of the chapter briefly return to the problem of evil and suffering, suggesting that Wittgensteinians like Phillips can be taken to have offered transcendental considerations in favor of antitheodicism, refuting theodicies as violations of genuinely religious language use. However, we should first take a look at how the issues concerning the limits and conditions of religious language arise in Wittgenstein's early and late philosophy[44] as well as some 'Wittgensteinian' views based thereupon. That discussion will lead us to an appreciation of what I propose to call 'the contingency of necessity'—something that will turn out to be highly relevant in the theodicy vs. antitheodicy explorations as well.

Let us again consider the way in which the 'early Wittgenstein' formulates his view that religion, analogously to ethics and aesthetics, is something that cannot be put to words but is, rather, 'mystical'. Wittgenstein tells us that God does not make himself manifest *in* the world ('*Gott offenbart sich nicht* in *der Welt*', TLP 6.432), and as the limits of my language designate, famously, the limits of the (or my) world (TLP 5.6), this seems to rather straightforwardly suggest that God cannot be meaningfully spoken about in language; anything we try to say about God falls beyond the limits of language. The realm of ethics and religion simply lies beyond language and the world. The purpose of language is to describe the world, which is a collection of states of affairs ('*Sachverhalte*'), as Wittgenstein tells us already in the opening remarks of the *Tractatus* (TLP 1.1), and clearly God's existence is not among such worldly states of affairs but something entirely different—so different that we should not speak about God's existence at all. Our attempts to say something about God are, rather, attempts to say something about the meaning of life or the world, or perhaps about the 'problem of life' (cf. TLP 6.521). Indeed, Wittgenstein says that the *Sinn* of the world must lie outside or beyond ('*ausserhalb*') it (TLP 6.41) and that propositions ('*Sätze*') cannot express anything 'higher' (TLP 6.42). What is 'mystical' ('*das Mystische*') is not *how* the world is but *that* it is (TLP 6.44).

Thus, according to the early Wittgenstein, religion (along with ethics and aesthetics) seems to be beyond the limits of language in a rather obvious sense. As mystical, religion belongs to the transcendent realm. This transcendence of ethics and religion is also forcefully expressed in the above-cited 'Lecture on Ethics', where Wittgenstein tells us that 'absolute' ethical expressions are nonsensical attempts '*to go beyond* the world and that is to say beyond significant language' (PO 44). The tendency of all attempts to discuss ethics or religion in language is 'to run against the boundaries of language', but this 'running against

the walls of our cage is perfectly, absolutely hopeless' (PO 44). Religion, or God, is something we must pass over into silence (cf. TLP 7).

However, things may be not as simple as that, if we take seriously the Kantian transcendental interpretation of Wittgenstein defended in this chapter.[45] If religion and ethics (and aesthetics) are truly analogous in the *Tractatus*, then we should again pay close attention to the fact that ethics (which is 'one' with aesthetics) is, just like logic, claimed to be *transcendental*—not 'transcendent'. This is highly significant. Insofar as ethics is comparable to logic in providing a kind of (in itself linguistically inexpressible) transcendental structure for the empirical world that we can speak about in language, then religion must in some sense be doing the same thing. That is, for the religious person, religion may play the 'transcendental' role of providing the fundamental framework through which such a person sees, or is able to see, the world in general and everything contained in it. In this sense, religion might, for the religious person, be the framework through which the significance of any worldly fact (all of which are in principle describable in language) can (perhaps only) be ultimately viewed—though this viewing itself cannot be put to words and lies beyond any sensible linguistic expression. God's being manifest not 'in' the world but (as it were) somewhere else would then have to be construed *not* along the lines of God's manifestation anywhere 'outside' the world—Wittgenstein's somewhat unfortunate use of the word '*ausserhalb*' at TLP 6.41 and his tendency to speak about ethics as 'supernatural' in the 'Lecture on Ethics' (e.g., PO 40, 43) notwithstanding—but as God's being somehow 'at the limit', playing a transcendental rather than a transcendent role there. There is no point beyond the linguistically describable world where God could be manifested; there is nothing there. But there is the transcendental limit making the world possible as a world of states of affairs describable in language. For the religious person, God (or, perhaps, one's faith in God, which could simply correspond to one's viewing the world as a limited whole, to a faith that sees some inexpressible—potential—meaning in the fact that there is a world at all) would be a transcendental condition for the possibility of the world itself, somewhat analogously to the way in which the metaphysical (transcendental) subject is claimed by Wittgenstein to be a 'limit' ('*Grenze*') of the world instead of being a 'thing' in the world (TLP 5.632).[46]

In brief, while according to Wittgenstein anything we try to say about religion (or ethics) is bound to be nonsensical in the sense that it cannot describe any states of affairs that could obtain in the world, such futile attempts are indications of something 'higher', of the religious person's attempt to view the world in a certain way, with a kind of fundamental seriousness. While neither ethics nor religion that is supposedly about the ultimate meaning of life or about ultimate value 'can be no science' and 'does not add to our knowledge in any sense', our (futile) attempt to put such things into words 'is a document of a tendency in the human mind which I [he tells us] personally cannot help respecting deeply and I would not for my life ridicule it' (PO 44). From such a perspective, the fundamental flaw in (say) mainstream analytic philosophy

of religion, which tends to operate in terms of realism and evidentialism (in their various versions), is precisely that its representatives believe religion to be a kind of 'science', something that 'adds to our knowledge' something that for example science cannot add. The hopelessness of this view can be exposed by a transcendental critique that reveals the underlying confusion of mixing fundamentally different types of language use.

## The later Wittgenstein and the 'factual dependence' of language games

This brings us to the remarks on religion by the 'later' Wittgenstein—remarks that are available not so much in the main works like the *Investigations* and *On Certainty* but in brief writings and notes such as 'Lectures on Religious Belief' (in LC), 'Remarks on Frazer's *The Golden Bough*' (PO 115–155), and some remarks collected in *Culture and Value*. I will not be able to go through this material in any systematic way here. We should note, however, that one of the central metaphors now is the one of *picture*—rather than the metaphor of a limit suggesting that one might in principle (while one in practice cannot) move across some boundary dividing sense from nonsense.[47] According to Wittgenstein, the religious person 'uses a picture', and '[t]he whole *weight* may be in the picture' (LC 72). Certain pictures—for the religious person, religious ones—may express our basic convictions that are as firm as anything can possibly be for us, something we are absolutely certain of (in the sense of *On Certainty*) and something without which our lives would be entirely different from what they are, and perhaps inconceivable from our present standpoint. Such pictures can (though this is not Wittgenstein's own terminology) be regarded as 'transcendental' precisely in the sense that using them makes a certain world—and a certain way of relating to, or viewing, the world—possible for us. They could act as the enabling conditions without which certain kinds of language use and forms of life would simply not be there, or would be unavailable to us.[48]

Pictures, religious pictures included, are used by real human beings in real-life circumstances, within various contexts of using language and thus within certain forms of life. Hilary Putnam, reflecting on Wittgenstein's 'Lectures on Religious Belief', emphasizes this deep connection between understanding religious discourse and understanding a human being engaging in such a discourse:

> What then is Wittgenstein saying? I believe that what Wittgenstein (in company with Kierkegaard) is saying is this: that religious discourse can be understood in any depth only by understanding the form of life to which it belongs. What characterizes that form of life is not the expressions of belief that accompany it, but a way—a way that includes words and pictures, but is far from consisting in just words and pictures—of living one's life, of regulating all of one's decisions. […] What Kierke-

> gaard and Wittgenstein have in common is the idea that understanding the words of a religious person properly—whether you want to speak of understanding their 'meaning' or not—is inseparable from understanding a religious form of life, and this is not a matter of 'semantic theory', but a matter of understanding a human being. (Putnam 1992: 154.)

At the same time, precisely because we are here concerned with understanding real human beings in their real this-worldly circumstances, religion may be a response to *real* events of life, especially to the deepest despair or torment that individuals may feel—that is, the kind of despair Wittgenstein had in mind in the above-quoted diary remark that the whole world cannot be in a more intense 'distress' than a single lost soul experiencing '*die höchste Not*' (CV 52, c. 1944).[49] Hence, one's use of religious 'pictures' may (potentially) be such a response; indeed, this possibility of using religious pictures or other expressions as indicators of one's ultimate concern regarding suffering, meaning, the loss of meaning, or other such profound existential experiences is itself a transcendental feature of the ways in which the meanings of religious language (and religious symbols more generally) are constituted. *That* religious language *can* make such a response to existential dimensions of human life is, we might say, constitutive of the possibility of genuine religiosity, and for some (religious) people the availability of such responses may be comparable to the availability of the logical form of language as something that is, according to the *Tractatus*, isomorphic to the form of the world. We might put this more clearly by saying that the possibility of religious responses is grounded in a certain 'picture', just as the transcendental logic in the *Tractatus* makes meaningful language possible.[50]

As has often been observed, the Wittgensteinian approach—analogously to some forms of pragmatism—seems to lead to the issue of relativism and perhaps even more problematically to fideism in the philosophy of religion. The fideist maintains that religious faith can be accepted without any epistemological justification or critical examination as a basic conviction underlying all our actions; in particular, no evidential considerations are needed or even possible. Some uncritically (or rather *a*critically) embraced basic convictions are, arguably, needed for us simply to be able to live and act at all. A firm and certain belief (either religious or something else)—a basic conviction—cannot be justified or criticized, since there is nothing more basic, more certain, or more fundamental on the grounds of which it could be justified or criticized. There is, in the end, only the life the believer leads, the rules s/he follows 'blindly' (cf. PI I, §219). It is thus easy to understand why Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* has been a source of inspiration for religious fideists, or has at least been taken to be such a source by their critics (cf., e.g., Nielsen & Phillips 2005). However, the relation between fideism and the very possibility of rational thought remains problematic. Arguably, fideism, at least in its extreme form, stands in an irresolvable conflict with the basic requirement of rationality, according to which we must aim at defending our beliefs against actual or potential criticism in a

process of inquiry aiming at the truth (even though such a defense need not be cashed out in terms of evidential considerations but may, pragmatically, invoke the ways in which religious beliefs 'work' in relation to our existential worries and concerns, including the '*höchste Not*' that individuals could respond to by means of religious pictures). According to the extreme relativist and fideist, there may, however, be no religious truth to be achieved at all, let alone any inquiry pursuing the truth—even existential inquiry—if religion is simply a matter of 'blindly' engaging in, or adopting, a form of life or a set of pictures characterizing that form of life.

Wittgenstein famously points out that the believer and the non-believer, despite the enormous difference between their ways of thinking and living (i.e., between the kinds of pictures they use), need not disagree regarding their conceptions of reality at all (LC 55). This could be taken to be an expression of relativism. The two perspectives on reality are so different that no genuine disagreement is possible; there is no common ground between the two parties to the debate, and therefore no genuine debate at all. This rather radical relativism may seem to be an unwelcome consequence of certain initially plausible Wittgensteinian ways of thinking emphasizing the form-of-life embeddedness of religious language use. Analogously, pragmatism might be taken to lead to a similar relativism about the contextuality of not just the norms of rationality but of all ontological commitments we make (cf. Chapter 2).

While it is certainly naïve to characterize Wittgenstein, or later Wittgensteinian philosophers of religion (or most pragmatists, for that matter), as simple relativists, I do not think there is any straightforward way out of this predicament. Even as insightful a reader of Wittgenstein as Putnam has, in my view, difficulties in maintaining the balance between appreciating the individual use of religious pictures as a ground of one's (religious) forms of life, on the one hand, and keeping the doors open for critical and rational discussion of religion, on the other.

Putnam does not seem to endorse any relativist interpretation of Wittgenstein: 'To say something is true in a language game is to stand outside of that language game and make a comment; that is not what it is to play a language game' (Putnam 1992: 176). So we can 'stand outside' our language games and comment on the truth of the statements made within them. Moreover, the thought that 'everything we believe is, at best, only 'true in our language game' isn't even a coherent thought', Putnam reminds us; as he rhetorically asks, 'is the very existence of our language then only "true in our language game"? So our language game is a fiction?' (ibid.: 177). But then, drawing on the central insight of Wittgenstein's work, Putnam goes on to say that our language—the language by means of which we *can* say that 'some things are true and some things are warranted and some things are reasonable'—rests on 'trust' instead of any metaphysical foundation (ibid.; cf. OC 508–509; see also Hertzberg 1994: chapter 5). Trust sounds like a basic conviction or certainty that cannot be set into doubt through inquiry but functions as the basis of any possible

inquiry that could be pursued in order to confirm or disconfirm any (other) views whatsoever.

An adequate appreciation of the Wittgensteinian approach in the philosophy of religion crucially requires a detailed philosophical reflection on these basic notions, including trust and rationality, instead of any straightforward fideistic declaration of the 'arationality' of religious belief or any easy 'language-game relativism'. The issue of the limits of language is fundamental to this entire discussion and must therefore be taken seriously by anyone inquiring into these matters from a Wittgensteinian perspective (or from a perspective critical of Wittgenstein). In any event, it is highly important to maintain a critically fallibilist attitude to the possible changes in our basic convictions and certainties—something that Wittgenstein himself does in *On Certainty* by acknowledging the historical mutability of our basic certainties. While our basic convictions cannot be rejected or revised because of conflicting evidence, as the availability of any evidence presupposes such basic convictions, they may nevertheless change along with changes in our (forms of) life, including changes that require us to reconsider our responses to existential challenges of life. This is why we should take very seriously what Lars Hertzberg (1994: chapter 2) aptly calls the 'factual dependence' of language games, something he introduces by quoting *On Certainty*:

> Certain events would put me into a position in which I could not go on with the old language-game any further. In which I was torn away from the *sureness* of the game.
>
> Indeed, doesn't it seem obvious that the possibility of a language-game is conditioned by certain facts? (OC 617).

We must not, that is, set up any metaphysical barrier between our language games and the reality in which we live and act and use language; we must not do so even when treating the limits of language as transcendental. That, indeed, would be a misunderstanding of what 'transcendental' means in this context. Instead, we should (following Hertzberg 1994) understand Wittgenstein as suggesting that our ways of speaking and living are inevitably connected with the ways the world around us factually is, though of course those ways are available to us—i.e., we can take the world to be in any way whatsoever—only from the point of view of the language games we play within our forms of life situated in that very same world. Playing language games is not merely a matter of using language itself absolutely independently of any worldly connection. Language games should, borrowing terms used by Jaakko Hintikka in a related though somewhat different context, be considered 'outdoor games' rather than 'indoor games' (cf., e.g., Hintikka 1996: 166).

While *On Certainty* offers us a picture of language (a picture, as we have seen, highly relevant to the philosophy of religion) according to which we must rely on our 'basic convictions' whose possibility of being false we cannot even

conceive of (Hertzberg 1994: 48), i.e., beliefs or fundamental assumptions we just cannot think as mistaken, because they are not based on reasons or evidence at all, nor in need of reasons and evidence—that is, convictions we have simply learned to trust, as we have 'grown into them' (ibid.: 49–50)—there are nevertheless facts 'conditioning' those convictions and the language games based upon them, in the sense that 'certain events' (as Wittgenstein himself says) could force us to reject such convictions (though, again, not in the sense of providing new evidence against them). If something like that happened, then our language game could change into something different. Not the truth of what we claimed when we were playing the 'old' language game, but the very meanings of our expressions—what we can or cannot believe or claim to be true—would then change (cf. ibid.: 52–55). Therefore, the limits of language would change in such situations. Those limits are not fixed once and for all, as they seem to be according to the early Wittgenstein, but they may naturally be redrawn along with rearrangements in our forms of life. It is in this sense that, as Hertzberg puts it, *On Certainty* offers us a 'this-worldly' picture of language: 'our language-games are tied to the actual world we live in' (ibid.: 59).

In the case of religion, in particular, when such changes do take place, they are beyond any common standards regarding stable meanings or epistemic assessment. Hertzberg notes that there is a kind of 'metaphysical insecurity' we have to live with when subscribing to the Wittgensteinian conception he is articulating:

> [W]e have no guarantees that the world will go on being comprehensible to us. In this regard, the insecurity of our language is a feature it shares with our ways of acting. Our ability to go on acting in this world is dependent on certain facts about ourselves, our bodies, and our environment remaining unchanged. (Ibid.: 60.)

Now, I am tempted to suggest that the fact that some of us play religious language games and engage in religious forms of life (whatever that exactly comes down to in the last analysis) to a certain degree reflects the need to live with such metaphysical insecurity, the permanent possibility of experiencing '*die höchste Not*', of finding one's soul threatened. The world could turn out to be incomprehensible to us, and it occasionally does. For instance, when faced by extreme evil and cruelty, and unspeakable sufferings, whether in our own case or in our neighbors', we might find the very comprehensibility of the world we live in to be at issue, as has been repeatedly emphasized in the theodicy discussion (cf. Neiman 2002; Pihlström 2014b; Kivistö & Pihlström 2016).

The basic message I want to drive home at this point is that the issues of relativism and fideism invoked by the late-Wittgensteinian conception of language, as applied to the case of religion, are, first, much more complex than any simple account of relativism acknowledges, and secondly, cannot be fruitfully discussed without paying due attention to the problems surrounding the limits

of language. Our need to examine these problems by means of transcendental reflection, moreover, does not entail any simple theological antirealism. This is because we need to acknowledge the 'factual dependence of language games' (in Hertzberg's terminology). It is in and through our living and acting in the world, our natural and social surroundings, that we (can only) give meanings to our religious (or any other) expressions, even though the world we live and act in is structured by us to any humanly meaningful shape precisely by our always already using language to structure it.

Accordingly, the limits of language become relevant as a philosophical problem in the context of this quasi-naturalist or (arguably) pragmatist understanding of religious language and its contextually constrained and historically transforming meanings.[51] In order to highlight the importance of the peculiar kind of contingency that characterizes the transcendentally necessary limits of language, we now need to take a closer look at how these topics emerge in Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion and how they are manifested in the lectures on religious belief Wittgenstein delivered in the early 1930s.

## The contingency of necessity: how the limits of language change

Acknowledging the factual dependence of language games should make us recognize a closely related phenomenon, i.e., what may be called the *contingency of necessity*—adopting an expression that has been occasionally used in recent contributions to metaphysics, philosophical cosmology, and French new realism (e.g., by Quentin Meillassoux) but employed here in a somewhat different, transcendental sense. In brief, what is at issue here is that while the limits of language grounded in the rules and grammar of a language game set conditions for what is possible and impossible for us to express within that language game (i.e., by making 'moves' within it according to its grammatical rules), it seems that, given the contingent historical variability of such rules—or the historical changes in how language games are played—there is a sense in which we have, at least potentially, a variety of different limits of language that are contingently drawn in the ways they are based on the life (with language) we lead. Our contingent form of life determines (albeit not immutably but always in a historically contextualized and therefore potentially changing manner) how we are 'minded' (cf. Lear 1998), or how we draw the limits of expressibility—and this 'we' (our socio-historical transcendental subjectivity, if we want to put it that way) may itself change and be reinterpreted along with such transformations of the structures of the language we use, to the extent that Lear speaks about the 'disappearing "we"' (ibid.: chapter 12).

Let us, instead of continuing a lengthy transcendental exercise at a highly abstract metaphilosophical level, briefly examine some of Wittgenstein's formulations (as they appear in his pupils' notes) in 'Lectures on Religious Belief'. In

those lecture notes from the early 1930s, Wittgenstein is, among other things, concerned with '*[w]hat we call* believing in a Judgement Day or not believing in a Judgement Day' (LC 55, my emphasis). He then says he 'can't contradict' the person who believes. The following passage is crucial:

> In one sense, I understand all he says—the English words 'God', 'separate', etc. I understand. I could say: 'I don't believe in this,' and this would be true, meaning *I haven't got these thoughts or anything that hangs together with them*. But not that I could contradict the thing. […] My normal technique of language leaves me.' (LC 55, my emphasis; see also, e.g., Putnam 2012: 490.)

That is, the thoughts that I (or you) have (or have not) contingently 'got' determine the limits of language for me (or for us), at least regarding this particular matter at the moment. *Necessity is, then, grounded in contingency*. Whether you *can* contradict someone or not (i.e., what your *logic* is like, or what you can do, logically speaking, by using your language) depends on your contingently 'having got' certain thoughts, or your leading a life that 'hangs together with them'. The distinction between modalities (necessity, possibility) and factual contingencies is not necessarily drawn in the way we draw it; it could be drawn in a different way. The ways in which we (contingently) do draw this distinction reflexively influence our understanding of the notions of contingency and modality themselves. Clearly, when we are engaged in a certain language game, the rules governing our operations within that game are necessary, but whenever we take a step out of the game, we realize that our playing the game in the first place is itself contingent. We could play another game and follow rules different from the ones we do follow, and then the division between the necessary and the contingent would be completely (or at least partially) rearranged in our lives.

Consider some analogies raised earlier. The distinction between the *epistemic* and the *non-epistemic* (e.g., regarding the notion of truth) is itself (partly) epistemic, not independent of our epistemic standpoints in drawing the distinction. Our epistemic perspective may have an ineliminable influence on how we view the interplay between epistemic and non-epistemic factors in our concept of truth, i.e., whether we consider truth something radically non-epistemic and potentially recognition transcendent or an idealization of epistemic notions such as rational acceptability or justification. Analogously, we may say that the distinction between the *natural* and the *supernatural* is relative to our concept of nature, and hence to the historical development of science (pretty much like the distinction between science and pseudoscience is itself a historical product of the way our scientific self-understanding of what science is develops). Now, what is crucial here is that it is not out of any absolute metaphysical necessity that the distinction between contingency and necessity is drawn in the way we actually draw it—or even if it were, that meta-necessity would then be (at a yet

higher meta-level) contingent and would depend, reflexively, on our contingent language use. I take this to be a vital (late-)Wittgensteinian point that must not be overlooked in any attempt to understand the grammar of language games, religious language games included.[52]

This is also why we need empirical understanding of contingent religious practices in order to study the philosophical issue of the limits of religious language. Even so, we also vitally need philosophical (even transcendental) analysis and argument focusing on the limits of language—the conditions of what is possible within a religious way of using language—in order to appreciate the *relevance* of such empirical investigations. Theology and empirical (or comparative) religious studies seek to understand the systems and practices within which religiosity is manifested, either from within those systems and practices or from without them.[53] Such investigations are philosophically relevant in order for us to be able to understand the grounding of transcendental necessities in empirical (practical) contingencies. But a philosophical examination of the limits of language issue is, conversely, needed to guide such investigations.[54] Paraphrasing Kant, we might say that mere philosophy of religion focusing on the limits of (religious) language in the absence of any empirical (non-reductively naturalized) understanding of the kinds of practices people contingently engage in within such limits (i.e., the 'systems' or 'worldviews' they live and think within) is *empty*, while mere empirical study of religion in the absence of guiding philosophical questions and analyses is *blind*. This may not be a thoroughly Wittgensteinian understanding of the relation between the philosophical and the empirical, as Wittgenstein certainly wanted to keep philosophy 'pure' from everything empirical, but it is, at least, a pragmatist one.

The lectures on religious belief by Wittgenstein primarily seek to refute the evidentialist view that evidence, or neutral rational argument more generally, is essential to the assessment of religious belief. At the same time, they contain profoundly interesting remarks on the limits of language. Consider, for example, this: 'Whether a thing is a blunder or not—it is a blunder in a particular system. Just as something is a blunder in a particular game and not in another' (LC 59). Wittgenstein's note again invokes transcendental conditions and limits, grounded in the contingent reality of a particular 'system', in the fact that we do operate within that particular system (perhaps comparable to what pragmatists typically prefer to call 'practice'). Our having the life we do makes the necessities that appear as constitutive (grammatical) rules conditioning all possible meanings within that life possible for us.[55]

Another relevant example Wittgenstein discusses is this: '"Seeing a dead friend," again means nothing much to me at all. I don't think in these terms. I don't say to myself: "I shall see so and so again" ever' (LC 63). Again, what is essential here is *whether I contingently think in certain terms* or say to myself certain things (or not). At this point we may return to the famous remark in the *Investigations*: 'If I have exhausted the justifications, I have reached bedrock and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: "This is simply what I

do'" (PI I, §217). What we are able to do—what our grammar and rules enable us to do or say—depends on what we actually do, and it is in this sense that necessities and possibilities are ultimately grounded in contingency. Or so Wittgenstein seems to be arguing.

The asymmetry between the 'I' and the 'we' is, arguably, important here. It may be highly significant that Wittgenstein, in passages like this, does not speak in terms of 'we' (i.e., a shared, public form of life) but in terms of 'I' (i.e., in terms of what I habitually or customarily do). The 'truth' in solipsism (or skepticism)—the significance that I do not 'know' but can only acknowledge that there is, for instance, an external world and other human beings in it—thus becomes relevant in this context (cf. Cavell 1979; see also Putnam 2008: 26; 2012: 489). The way *I* use certain words, or the way *I* think, may be the crucial thing here, no matter what or how others around me think. The transcendental limits of language, and hence transcendental necessities about what can be said or expressed within those limits, may constitutively depend on contingent facts about *my* using words, or having thoughts, in certain ways, comprising networks of words and thoughts hanging together.

The significance of all this for philosophy of religion is enormous, but it is equally important to point out that here we in the end return to the relevance of the 'first-person' quasi-solipsistic picture of language Wittgenstein sketched in the *Tractatus*. The metaphysical subject disappearing into the world (cf. TLP 5.64) corresponds to the social subject of Wittgenstein's later philosophy precisely in its transcendental function. Even a thoroughly pragmatist reading of Wittgenstein cannot therefore get rid of the transcendental predicament of critical philosophy, nor of its conception of transcendental subjectivity (even though that must remain an issue to be explored on another occasion).

## Theodicy vs. antitheodicy revisited

I want to add one more twist to this discussion by again revisiting the problem of evil and suffering. In this context, theodicies, in particular, have, as we have seen, from a Wittgensteinian perspective been regarded as unethical violations of religious language use (even though Wittgenstein himself had little to say about this particular topic). Religiously speaking, theodicies could even be criticized as superstitious or blasphemous (cf. Phillips 1977, 2004). In addition to making this general point, I now wish to suggest, more specifically, that the theodicy vs. antitheodicy issue can interestingly be approached from the point of view of the phenomenon of the contingency of necessity (as briefly characterized above on the basis of Wittgenstein's 'Lectures on Religious Belief'). Contingent historical sufferings may motivate a response (viz., antitheodicy) that may even turn out to be transcendentally necessary by functioning as a necessary condition for the possibility of occupying a serious moral perspective at all in a certain historical (again contingent) situation—such as our post-Holocaust world.

Let us, once again, recall the fact that several Wittgensteinian philosophers have argued that theodicies amount not only to ethically insensitive use of language disregarding or misrecognizing others' suffering in its pointlessness but also to conceptual confusion and pseudo-religious use of language, suggesting that it is not only ethically wrong but in an important sense meaningless and conceptually confused, and thus beyond the meaning-constitutive grammar of religious language games—hence, indeed, a violation of the limits of language—to claim that others' suffering has a metaphysical or theological meaning, function, or explanation. Phillips or other Wittgensteinians would hardly endorse my transcendental reconstruction of the antitheodicist argument (cf. the early sections of this chapter). Certainly they need not embrace the transcendental vocabulary; that particular vocabulary is not forced on anyone developing a Wittgensteinian antitheodicy. I am merely suggesting that their way of attacking theodicies as confused responses leading us out of genuinely religious—and genuinely ethical—ways of using language can be rather naturally rephrased as a transcendental critique drawing attention to the limits of (religious, ethical) language, as long as we keep in mind the fundamental contingency of the way in which those limits, and the structures of necessities and possibilities they constrain, are drawn by us. Phillips and others thus tend to slide toward something like transcendental philosophy.

In many cases, for a genuinely religious person who sincerely attempts to speak about God in a religious way, belief in God's reality is the necessary background of any potential theological or philosophical account of evil and suffering. Any possible argument, including the atheist's argument challenging the theist to provide a theodicy by appealing to the problem of evil, will have to be evaluated against this background. The believer might point out, against both the atheist and the theist seeking to provide a theodicy, that it is strictly speaking nonsensical (i.e., beyond the meanings available in religious language games) for human beings to try to evaluate God's motives morally, or to seek to criticize or justify them. At the moment when the theodicist begins to engage in an argument, *pro* or *contra*, regarding the problem of evil conceived as an atheist challenge, the grammar of the religious language game will already have been violated and the relevant expressions will no longer be used in a genuinely religious meaning. Therefore, the atheist argument starting from the problem of evil does not even get off the ground due to this confusion. But those theists who try to respond to such an argument by producing a theodicy are even more confused, because they do not perceive the atheists' confusion any more than their own. Theodicies should therefore be rejected as transcendentally confused misuses of the language of 'God', 'evil', and 'suffering'. It can be suggested that one comes close to illegitimately transgressing the limits of meaningful discourse—the limits of religious language—simply in examining the problem of evil in terms of the alleged 'argument from evil' and in attempting to respond to such an argument theodicistically. Both the theist and the atheist theodicists fail to use the grammar of religious language religiously and thus breach the limits of language.[56]

It is roughly in this way that I would like to suggest we can reinterpret Phillips's and other Wittgensteinians' perceptive remarks on theodicies being both morally and conceptually (or even logically) confused. The reason why these confusions are so deep is that they are transcendental in the sense of this word that remains available in the later Wittgenstein's thought. This is the pragmatic transcendentality of the constitutive (albeit historically transformable and reinterpretable) features of language games and forms of life. It is only by violating the limits of language that the problem of evil and suffering construed as an atheist argument requiring a theodicy as a response can so much as be formulated. When we realize that such a (mis)formulation is based, precisely, on a violation of grammar, we realize that the entire business of theodicy is misconceived from the start. It is by means of a Wittgensteinian analysis of the limits of language that this point can be brought home—but in this context this is a transcendental analysis that also invokes a pragmatic reflection on what we *do* in our language.[57]

However, as soon as we note all this we should re-emphasize that the grammar and meanings of our expressions may vary historically along with the changes and transformations taking place in our forms of life. The necessity of transcendental rules is based on the contingency of human life (as we saw above). This applies with full force to the problem of evil and suffering. Different reactions to this problem may become possible in different historical circumstances characterizing the forms of life through which the grammar of the relevant language games is established. We may, for instance, find it necessary to examine the problem of evil and suffering after the Holocaust in a way essentially different from its pre-Holocaust articulations.[58] In the contingent historical context in which the Holocaust actually took place and will therefore permanently, ineliminably, irredeemably, be part of our human history, it may seem that certain (new) limits of appropriate religious language have been established. It is no longer possible—morally or conceptually—to approach the problem of evil by providing a theodicy. We now—after the Holocaust—can see this as a striking, violent confusion. Moreover, we can now see—after the Holocaust—that it was *never* possible, even if that was not as clearly perceivable earlier. Historical contingencies may thus ground philosophical, ethical, and conceptual necessities—and this I take to be a fundamental Wittgensteinian message that we may learn from reading not only *On Certainty* but also the lectures on religious belief quoted in the previous section. Historical contingencies may thus also render the early-Wittgensteinian concern with harmony examined earlier in this chapter incoherent, or at least ethically highly problematic, in the antitheodicist context.

I have not in this chapter attempted to determine in any great detail what Wittgenstein himself really thought either about the theodicy issue or about the limits of language in relation to religion and theology. I suppose my discussion is compatible with several different interpretations of Wittgenstein—albeit not, I think, with the extreme 'postmodern' or radically 'new Wittgensteinian'

account according to which Wittgenstein's main point would be a merely ironical one about our being unable to engage in any systematic and argumentative philosophical activity at all. I have basically suggested that it makes sense to approach his thoughts from a Kantian (transcendental) perspective in order to be able to fully appreciate the special character of the kind of thought on religion that some of his most original followers (e.g., Phillips) have developed in their attempts to understand religious belief—and also to understand what it means to lose such belief as believers' forms of life change. At the same time, I want to re-emphasize that Wittgenstein (and Wittgensteinians) come(s) close to pragmatism in the philosophy of religion, as both firmly reject the totalizing project of metaphysical realism (cf. Chapter 4)—and may even lead us to observe a close link between such realism and theodicism.

Let me close this chapter with a brief metaphilosophical suggestion that strengthens the transcendental analysis presented here but perhaps also makes it more controversial. In investigating the limits of language in the context of the philosophy of religion—Wittgenstein's and Wittgensteinian—I have repeatedly emphasized the historical contextuality and mutability (in principle) of the transcendental necessities grounding the meanings possible in any language games we may engage in.[59] This 'factual dependence', this contingency of necessity, can itself at a meta-level be regarded as a transcendental condition for the possibility of the kinds of meanings that can so much as be available to us human beings, given the kind of language-using beings we naturally are. Thus, we would here be dealing with yet another meta-level transcendental necessity that would itself be based on contingent facts about the ways we live our lives—and so on, potentially *ad inifinitum*.

*For us*, no firmer transcendental necessities are possible. Yet, again for us, it is necessary that our contingent forms of life do function as the background for any (contextually) necessary sets of grammatical rules that enable us to say anything definite and meaningful in any concrete circumstances of using language. We can get rid of neither contingency nor necessity—they are, so to speak, co-constitutive or mutually constitutive here—and *this* meta-level necessity (or impossibility) is again itself constitutively part of human life as we contingently know it. This reflexive spiral of co-constitutivity can perhaps be compared to the indefinitely complex reflexivity of pragmatic contextualism explored in Chapter 2 above, and any Wittgensteinian investigation of religious language and its limits should appreciate such an interplay of transcendental necessities and contingencies.

CHAPTER 6

# Beyond the Theory-Practice Dichotomy

Let me begin this final substantial chapter of the book by first recapitulating some familiar points already discussed in the previous chapters. While theodicies have traditionally been proposed as responses to the problem of evil and suffering, which challenges theism by arguing that the empirical reality of apparently meaningless evil and suffering is incompatible with the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, and absolutely benevolent God, or at least poses a severe evidential challenge to the theist who believes in the existence of such a deity,[1] the purpose of this chapter (any more than of this book) is not to review either the historical or contemporary debate over theodicies in any detail. I will now briefly focus on a specific form of moral antitheodicism that is opposed to the very project of theodicies for moral reasons. I have argued throughout this book and already in earlier work (especially Kivistö & Pihlström 2016) that theodicies, seeking to philosophically justify or legitimize God's allowing apparently unnecessary and meaningless evil and suffering—or offering some secular proxy for this traditional theological project—amount to a colossal ethical failure to acknowledge the suffering other and the utter pointlessness of their suffering. Instead of taking others' suffering morally seriously and thus fully recognizing it as what it is, theodicies (as well as the only allegedly more moderate 'defenses') arguably instrumentalize suffering in the service of some postulated or imagined overall good.[2]

An argument for antitheodicism focusing on the ethical need to appropriately recognize the reality of suffering, or to take evil morally (and metaphysically) seriously, can draw from various sources, including James's pragmatism, Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion, as well as post-Holocaust Jewish moral reflection exemplified by Levinas's ethics of otherness, all of which can be interpreted as fundamentally Kantian approaches to theodicism and antitheodicism (ibid.: chapters 3–5). These antitheodicisms are 'Kantian' not because they would necessarily explicitly refer to Kant's own criticism of theodicies but because (i) they can (implicitly) be traced back to Kant's 1791 'Theodicy Essay' and its rejection of theodicies as violations of the limits of human reason, based on the general approach of Kantian critical philosophy (cf. Chapter 3 above), and (ii) they arguably seek to show that theodicies violate the necessary conditions for the possibility of adopting a moral perspective on the world and other human beings.[3]

Here I cannot continue to explore the Kantian nature of antitheodicism (or pragmatism) in any depth, but it should be kept in mind throughout this final discussion that antitheodicism is, even when pragmatically developed, a species of critical philosophy in a sense indebted to, even if not directly derived from, Kant. It is critical not only of theodicies themselves but of the very project we seek to engage in when attempting to deliver a theodicy as a response to the 'argument from evil' challenging theism by referring to apparently unnecessary and meaningless evil and suffering. There is, I have argued in both pragmatist and Wittgensteinian contexts, something seriously wrong in this entire discourse, primarily because its key assumption, i.e., that evil and suffering can in some sense meaningfully be objectively 'measured', quantified, and defined—and that sufferings could therefore be seen as appropriate prices to be paid for some other, comparable goods—as such tends to fail to acknowledge the sufferer who experiences their suffering as meaningless, immeasurable, incomparable, perhaps even undefinable.

## The availability of antitheodicy

In general, the moral antitheodicist claims theodicies to be immoral, confused, or even pseudo-religious and superstitious (see, e.g., Trakakis 2008, 2018; Simpson 2009; Gleeson 2012, 2018; Betenson 2016, 2019; Snellman 2019; cf. also again Kivistö & Pihlström 2016; Pihlström 2013a, 2014b). This is the basic critical picture of theodicism we have reached in the previous chapters through our Kantian, pragmatist, and Wittgensteinian explorations.

However, an important caveat is needed here: we cannot seriously maintain that major historical theologians and philosophers such as Augustine or Thomas Aquinas would have been 'pseudo-religious' thinkers, as their work to a great extent defines the tradition of Western theology (claiming anything like that would surely amount to a *reductio ad absurdum* of any antitheodicism). Generally, medieval philosophers' reactions to the problem of evil seem to have manifested either an *accidental* strategy or an *instrumental* one (Posti 2017): either evil is a mere unintended consequence of good things (i.e., some evil follows from goodness) or God can use evil instrumentally for good purposes (i.e., some good follows from evil). Medieval philosophers concerned with divine providence were thus inevitably theodicists of some kind, though many of them also discussed empathy or compassion (*misericordia*) toward the sufferer as an important virtue—and this, for many of them, may in fact have been a more important context for the discussions of suffering than any metaphysical theorization about theodicy. These concepts have a very interesting history going back to Aristotle, and they are also used in contemporary discussions in a variety of ways. In general, compassion in this tradition involves the emotion of sorrow felt due to another person's misfortune (cf. Knuuttila 2019), and it is in this spirit of compassion—or, more critically, of 'compassionate indignation' (cf. Gleeson

2012) triggered by unjust suffering—that the antitheodicist approaches human miseries, resisting all rationalizing theodicist reconciliation attempts.

In order to avoid anachronistic moralizing judgments on, say, medieval philosophers' theodicist attitudes, we must, in any case, understand the problem of evil and suffering itself as historically contextualized and mutable, drawing serious attention to the fundamental differences among the contexts within which this problem is discussed, and the approaches made possible by those contexts. The problem of evil and suffering is inextricably intertwined with our *practices* of reflecting on experiences of evil and suffering in the historical situations we live in, and those practices evolve along with the changes in our lives and the general human practices we engage in. This is one reason why our topic is inherently related to the historically evolving practices of recognizing other human beings. Furthermore, when construing the other's suffering in a theodicist manner, we not only fail to recognize the suffering victim as what s/he is—a victim of meaningless evil and suffering—but we arguably also *misrecognize* their suffering itself as something that is in some sense meaningful, functional, or measurable, thus forcing a certain ethically and possibly also politically oppressive 'recognizing as' structure into the other's experiences that request a very different kind of acknowledgment (viz., as something immeasurable, as lacking any function or meaning—and as hence in a sense lacking the 'as' structure of recognition).

Now, someone like Thomas Aquinas, for instance, lived and wrote in a world entirely different from ours. His theodicy problem is (was) not ours. Clearly, for him, God's existence is no issue; the theodicy problem is merely how exactly (not whether) his classical version of theism and the reality of evil are compatible. For us modern thinkers, the problem of evil and suffering highlights the general fragility and uncertainty of any permanent and deep values, including our (possible) commitment to God's reality. It is a problem that haunts any attempt to view the world we live in as meaningful, as morally structured, as humanly comprehensible, and so forth—whether those attempts are religious or secular. In this regard, while traditional philosophers of religion like Peter van Inwagen (2006) consider the problem of evil narrowly in terms of the coherence and rationality of theism, broader discussions of this issue such as Susan Neiman's (2002) emphasize the general (in)comprehensibility of the world as a key to the problem.

It is, arguably, only with Kant's critical philosophy that the theodicy issue receives its *existentially* burning form: how should *we* (or *I*) respond ethically to others' suffering and their experiences of its meaninglessness? How, then, does the problem of evil and suffering turn into a truly ethical (and hence practical) problem from the rather purely intellectual and metaphysical form it takes in someone like Leibniz? *Our* problem—especially after the Holocaust—is how to properly, or morally adequately, acknowledge the suffering other (either in a theistic context or in a secular one), and this problem is very different from, say, the scholastics' problem of securing the coherence of Christian theism, or

even from Leibniz's general metaphysical concerns. It is (only) in this context, framed by the ethical task of acknowledging the suffering other (conceived as a Kantian or quasi-Kantian moral obligation), that (arguably) antitheodicy becomes available to us as something like a 'genuine option'—that is, as a forced and 'momentous' choice between two rival hypotheses both of which are 'live' ones for us—in William James's (1979 [1897]: chapter 1) sense. It is such a genuine option for us, especially after the Holocaust, while we may readily admit that it was not available, at least not exactly in the same sense, for (e.g.) medieval Christian thinkers. It gradually emerged, we might say, as a genuine option through the critique of Leibnizian theodicy launched by Voltaire in his *Candide* (satirically referring to the Lisbon Earthquake of 1755) and other Enlightenment critics of religion, soon followed by Kant,[4] and later by James, Jewish post-Holocaust moral thinkers, and the Wittgensteinian antitheodicists of the twentieth century (among many others).

## Theory and practice

A typical response to antitheodicist moral criticisms of theodicies in contemporary mainstream philosophy of religion pursuing theodicies (or 'defenses') starts from a sharp distinction between *theory* and *practice*. Theodicists can easily maintain that at a theoretical level their justifications for evil and suffering (or, more modestly, the defense according to which God might, for all we know, have acceptable moral reasons justifying his allowing the world to contain apparently meaningless evil and suffering) may indeed fail to fully acknowledge the suffering other, or their experiences of meaningless suffering, while also maintaining that such a failure does not matter philosophically or ethically insofar as the theodicist exercise *is*, and remains, merely theoretical, as explicitly announced by the theodicist theoretician. Theodicists can (and arguably should) avoid engaging in their theory construction when actually faced by suffering human beings—by the concrete other invoked by someone like Levinas—and the practical need to comfort them. This practical task of consolation is to be clearly distinguished from the purely theoretical or intellectual task of constructing a theodicy argument or a more moderate 'defense', merely intended to shift the burden of proof to the atheist.

For example, van Inwagen (2006: 12) tells us that his careful analytic examination of the problem of evil is 'purely intellectual' and that his 'defense' is not intended to even hypothetically comfort anyone (ibid.: 108); similar caveats are added by a number of other recent theodicists. Hence, it could be claimed that no failure of acknowledgment is necessarily committed by the theodicist (or the one who seeks to offer a 'defense') at the practical level of engaging with suffering human beings needing consolation (or, in a theological context, pastoral care). Given that the distinction between theory and practice is drawn carefully enough, theodicies and defenses may remain purely metaphysical and

epistemological, i.e., theoretical and intellectual, while comfort and consolation are practical matters to be dealt with separately in an entirely different context.

However, it can be argued—especially from a pragmatist (e.g., Jamesian) point of view—that the very attempt to defend theodicism by drawing such a sharp theory vs. practice dichotomy *itself* (at a meta-level) constitutes a moral failure of acknowledgment. The suffering other ought to be ethically recognized as a sufferer, and their suffering ought to (at least in some cases) be recognized as meaningless, precisely by *not* drawing such a dichotomy—that is, by not engaging in the theoretical argumentative exchange of purely intellectual ideas *pro* and *contra* theodicies at all.[5] The issue, then, concerns the ways in which our practical contexts of responding to suffering may, or should, constrain our theorization about the problem of evil and suffering. The antitheodicist argues that we must not develop or maintain practices that even at an allegedly merely theoretical level encourage mis- or non-recognition. The mere fact that they do so is already a practical feature of those practices, thus subject to moral criticism—analogously to the way in which metaphysical realism was ethically criticized in Chapter 4 above.[6]

This, we may say, is where the *metaphilosophical* relevance of moral antitheodicism for the pursuit of philosophy of religion primarily lies. Again, antitheodicist arguments and positions as diverse as James's pragmatism, Phillips's Wittgensteinianism, and Levinas's insistence on the ethical primacy of the other's face can be regarded as variations on this general theme. James (1975 [1907]: Lecture I) seems to base his entire pragmatic method on an antitheodicist refusal to attach any absolute or abstract God's-Eye View metaphysical significance (either Hegelian or Leibnizian) to individual experiences of concrete sufferings (see Chapter 3 above), while Phillips (2004) warns us against the morally corrupting language of anthropomorphic accounts of the divinity that seem to turn God into an agent calculating the advantages and disadvantages of allowing his creation to suffer. In a different but arguably analogously pragmatic vein, Levinas (2006) maintains that the justification of others' suffering is the foundation of all immorality. In a way, it morally *corrupts* the practice of responding to suffering. According to these very different thinkers, moral antitheodicism, it may be suggested, is necessary for appropriately recognizing other human beings as fully human or sharing a common humanity (cf. Gaita 2000).[7]

We may, thus, formulate a meta-level pragmatic antitheodicism by maintaining that it is already ethically problematic to even *try to* move onto the purely intellectual or theoretical level of theodicy discourse. This amounts to seriously neglecting the practical task of acknowledging the other within our philosophical and theological practices themselves. The question now is *to whom* this duty to avoid the purely intellectual point of view (or, analogously, metaphysical realism) is set as a moral obligation. The pragmatist response is that it is entirely fine to adopt different points of view serving different practical purposes, but we have to carefully—ethically—evaluate those purposes themselves, as well as

our attempts to move between them. The purposes allegedly served by the theodicist intellectualizing perspective can themselves be heavily criticized from the practical point of view as ethically problematic—i.e., non- or misrecognizing. There is no perspective- or standpoint-neutral meta-standpoint for switching the perspectives, but at the meta-level we are always already engaged in practical ethical evaluation. I cannot develop this theme further here, but I would suggest that this *metaphilosophical pragmatism* expresses a constitutive feature of our ethical world engagement.[8]

## Moral criticism

However, as strongly ethically motivated as our antitheodicism may be, it should also acknowledge the 'need for a moral order' that James (1979 [1897], 1975 [1907]) always found an inescapable need in human lives. Theodicies might seem to function as a (misguided, corrupted) exemplification of this need. The morally committed antitheodicist should recognize and appreciate this need itself while seeking to offer a thoroughgoing critique of its theodicist interpretations and manifestations. It is part of the ethical practice of antitheodicist thought to both recognize the need for a moral order that may lead to theodicies and to offer philosophical guidance out of the theodicist predicament.

As I have suggested elsewhere (e.g., Pihlström 2013a, 2014b; Kivistö & Pihlström 2016) and in Chapters 3–4 above, James, in particular, was a pragmatic antitheodicist committed to the philosophical primacy of the ethical acknowledgment of the suffering other, approximately along the lines sketched in the previous section—*contra*, for example, the tendency to prioritize any metaphysics or epistemology of otherness and subjectivity in relation to ethics. In contrast, ethics is what grounds our theoretical pursuits, including metaphysics (cf. also Pihlström 2009), and *this* pragmatic starting-point leads us to also engage in metaphysical argumentation against theodicies. We cannot *first* settle the metaphysical and epistemological issues concerning, say, 'other minds', but we must, for ethical reasons, start our inquiries into the significance of otherness from the ethical (Levinasian) acknowledgment of the suffering other and the pointlessness of their suffering.

However, one might ask whether there is something like a theodicy by other means in James, too, or possibly even in Kant—the arch-antitheodicist—insofar as pragmatism (or, analogously, Kantian ethics and philosophy of religion) amounts to a philosophy of *hope*, leading us toward a philosophical legitimation of theism on pragmatic grounds. James did maintain that we may legitimately hope for the realization of the humanly natural need for an eternal moral order. Now, it is precisely this need for a moral order that grounds, in my view, not only religion in general, pragmatically conceived, but also antitheodicism itself. Theodicism postulates a forced, fixed, rationalizing, and speculative order that is in the end alien to our natural human experience and its practices.

Our active pursuit of the moral order never *justifies* the very real losses and sufferings there are; nor does it explain them away. Thus, it is by no means theodicist (not even 'by other means'). It demands, rather, that we recognize the reality of such losses and their significance for our fellow human beings. Theodicies would, then, violate, instead of responding to, the human need for a moral order James is fully aware of.

It can be further argued that antitheodicism, insisting on *not* explaining away the meaninglessness of suffering, is needed precisely as a necessary condition for the possibility of adequately recognizing the other person as a (potential or actual) sufferer. It can be part of that adequate recognition to acknowledge that there are sufferings that simply cannot be rendered meaningful in any morally acceptable sense. Therefore, there is a sense in which theodicist attitudes to others should *not* themselves be (philosophically, ethically) recognized as ethically appropriate attitudes, or perhaps not even tolerated, and this rejection of theodicism can be articulated in terms of pragmatism that is generally critical of any principled theory-practice dichotomies. We may say that, for pragmatists, theory and practice are inevitably entangled, and the failure to recognize this entanglement again constitutes a failure to adequately engage in the practical task of acknowledging otherness.[9]

One way of pragmatically recognizing the deep interplay and entanglement of theory and practice in this context might be attempted by emphasizing the relevance of the concept of *irony*. Richard Bernstein (2016) suggests that philosophy can be seen both as theory and as a practice or a way of life—and irony particularly highlights this. It is the commitment to the merely theoretical ideal of philosophy that also gives rise to theodicism—and, *mutatis mutandis*, metaphysical realism. (In the context of irony, the dichotomy between theory and practice is, again, part of the problem rather than any solution.) Irony is needed to liberate us from this commitment to the merely speculative and theoretical—as witnessed by Rorty's philosophical development, for instance. Thus, it is only natural that Bernstein has insightfully written both about evil and about irony.

Irony and philosophical sincerity are, then, eminently compatible: irony can be regarded as the full consciousness of our contingency—to put it in Rortyan terms (cf. Rorty 1989)—yet linked with a passionate commitment to recognizing, and alleviating, human suffering in its absurdity and meaninglessness. In addition, irony is obviously an excellent method of revealing situations of non-recognition, or recognition failure—both in fictional literature and in real life. Both irony and sincerity are thus also crucial to antitheodicism as understood in this chapter; this topic, however, would deserve a much more comprehensive discussion. It suffices to note here that the key role played by irony is one reason why the issue of acknowledging otherness needs to be dealt with not only by philosophical argument but by literary means, too; indeed, I will shortly conclude my discussion by taking a slightly more detailed look at a famous literary engagement with the absurd suffering of the Holocaust.

Before turning to that final part of the chapter, however, I would like to suggest a way of investigating further the relations between attitudes such as *recognition* and *toleration*—attitudes that are increasingly perceived to be crucial in the philosophy of religion and theology more generally (cf. again Saarinen 2016; Koskinen 2017, 2019)—by allowing iterations of the attitudinal 'operators' representing these and related attitudes. For example, we may say that a certain kind of recognition or non-recognition act is (or ought to be) tolerated (by someone in a certain context), or that it is not or should not be tolerated. Conversely, we may say that certain attitudes of tolerance or intolerance ought to be recognized (or non-recognized) as appropriate by someone in some context(s), and so forth.

It is easy to see that indefinitely complex cases of 'nested' attitudes of recognition and toleration (or their negations) can be constructed in this manner. This is relevant to our analysis and moral criticism of antitheodicism and the ethical recognition failures of theodicism precisely because a certain kind of failure to recognize others' suffering, a failure ultimately based, as argued above, on an unpragmatic theory vs. practice dichotomy, is criticized (by pragmatist moral antitheodicists in particular) as a morally problematic attitude that in a certain sense should *not* be recognized as enabling a moral perspective to other human beings at all, or perhaps should not even be (ethically) tolerated due to its lack of such a perspective, or its undermining the very conditions for the possibility of occupying such a perspective. The fact that this kind of interplay of pragmatist and recognition-theoretical ideas in the philosophy of religion (cf. the introductory chapter above) seems to be necessary for such a moral antitheodicism to be properly developed suggests that a more wide-ranging and more thoroughgoing integration of pragmatism and the theory of recognition would be vitally needed. The problem of evil and suffering provides an excellent context within which the promises of such an integration can be critically examined. Such an examination should also illuminate the relation between the theoretical and the practical—a topic, as we have seen, fundamental to both Kantian and pragmatist approaches in the philosophy of religion.

## Primo Levi's antitheodicism: acknowledging the 'drowned'

Moving to the final substantial part of this chapter, I want to consider, as a case study of the relation between theory and practice in acknowledging the suffering other, Primo Levi's compelling contributions to our understanding of the Holocaust, focusing on the way in which Levi rejects (without using that term) all theodicist construals of the kind of suffering the Holocaust involved for its victims.[10] From Levi's ethical perspective, we should clearly refuse to even tolerate a theodicy failing to recognize the sufferer's experience. We should, rather, acknowledge the meaninglessness and absurd excess of the victims' suffering, including their shame and guilt caused by the demonic Nazi tendency to

make the victims complicit in the evil brought upon them. Levi's powerful writings on this topic, based on his first-hand experience while carrying a universal human message, have for good reason been standard references also among philosophical commentators of the Nazi horrors.[11]

Levi has repeatedly emphasized that the Holocaust left an irrecoverable injury that 'cannot be healed' and 'would never again be able to be cleansed' (Levi 1988: 12, 66; see also 52; cf., e.g., Alford 2009: 3). He quotes approvingly Jean Améry's statement that anyone who has been tortured 'remains tortured' and, having lost their faith in humanity, 'never again will be able to be at ease in the world' (Levi 1988: 12). One (but presumably not the only) reason for this irrevocability is that the perpetrators of the Holocaust were able to shift the burden of guilt on to the victims, too, destroying not only their lives but their innocence as well by creating a 'grey zone' between the guilty and the innocent (ibid.: chapter 2)—thus in a sense destroying not just their bodies but their souls (ibid.: 37, 42). Moreover, this kind of shame and guilt concern everyone, not just those directly involved; this is 'the shame which the just man experiences when confronted by a crime committed by another, and he feels remorse because of its existence, because of its having been irrevocably introduced into the world of existing things' (ibid.: 54; cf. 65; see also Agamben 2002 [1999]: 87–88; Woolf 2007: 48).[12] Such shame and guilt that even the survivors can never get rid of are readily comparable to the shame that remains after Josef K. at the end of Kafka's *The Trial*.[13]

While Levi offers us little in the way of explicit theorizing about theodicies, he is absolutely clear in his moral rejection—with horror—of any idea of 'Providence', emphasizing, in contrast, the contingency and chance in survival (see Levi 1988: 117; 1996: 157–158; cf. Giuliani 2003: 47–51; Woolf 2007: 41; Alford 2009: 143). After the Holocaust, there is no way we could continue using (without irony) the concept of providence or related concepts. Levi would thus be morally horrified about any attempt to take philosophically or theologically seriously, say, medieval philosophers' (or contemporary Christian thinkers') firm belief in providence and their attempts to solve the problem of evil in that context.[14] Accordingly, the idea that he was somehow 'destined' to survive in order to be able to write his books, for instance, 'seemed monstrous' to him, because those who survived ('the saved') were not at all the best but 'the fittest', in some sense even the worst (ibid.: 62–63; see also Agamben 2002 [1999]: 60)—hence, we may say that *they* were, ironically, not 'the saved', after all, but rather 'the drowned'.

He reflects further: 'My religious friend had told me that I survived so that I could bear witness. I have done so, as best I could, […] but the thought that this testifying of mine could by itself gain for me the privilege of surviving […] troubles me, because I cannot see any proportion between the privilege and its outcome' (Levi 1988: 63; see, however, also 143). This could, I suppose, be rather naturally read in the context of Levinas's (2006: 97) insistence on the sheer disproportionality of Holocaust suffering in comparison to any explicit

or implicit theodicy. There is nothing whatsoever in the entire world that could be so valuable that it would render the Holocaust suffering acceptable or justified in any sense. C. Fred Alford (2009: 101) explicitly argues—in the context of Levi's reading of the Book of Job (see Levi 2005: 61–62)—that, from Levi's point of view, to even ask the theodicy question, 'Why do the innocent suffer if God is all good and all powerful?', amounts to a misunderstanding of 'one's place in the universe'.[15]

Levi rejected not only the theology of providence but religion generally—but not because the Holocaust would have functioned for him as a manifestation of the 'argument from evil' or any other theoretical argument against theism. Rather, because he was not religious when he entered Auschwitz, he felt (he explains) that it would have been wrong for him to 'change the rules of the game at the end of the match' (Levi 1988: 118). When faced with the 'selection' and thus imminent mortal danger, he once felt the temptation to pray but rejected it: 'A prayer under these conditions would have been not only absurd (what rights could I claim? and from whom?) but blasphemous, laden with the greatest impiety of which a non-believer is capable' (ibid). This attitude, one may suggest, was possible for him because he 'took seriously what he didn't believe' (Alford 2009: 146). More generally, serious philosophical antitheodicism, whether religious or non-religious, takes seriously both religious and non-religious ways of responding to human suffering.[16]

An example of what Levi regarded as blasphemous prayer—and thus as a dramatic failure to acknowledge the suffering other—is provided by him in his first book, *If This Is a Man* (1958; also known by the English title, *Survival in Auschwitz*), where he tells us what happened after one particular selection in 1944, after some prisoners had been selected to be murdered in the gas chambers and others to continue their desperate lives in the camp until the next selection. A prisoner called Kuhn had avoided death (this time) and thanked God by praying aloud, while another (much younger) one, Beppo, was lying in the next bunk, knowing he had been chosen to be murdered. Levi's moral condemnation of Kuhn's attitude is harsh: 'Does Kuhn not understand that what happened today is an abomination, which no propitiatory prayer, no pardon, no expiation by the guilty—nothing at all in the power of man to do—can ever heal?' And he adds: 'If I was God, I would spit at Kuhn's prayer' (Levi 1996 [1958]: 129–130).

This passage in Levi's early work has been insightfully discussed not only by Alford (2009: 145–146), whose reading of Levi I have already cited, but also by Jonathan Druker (2009: 32–33), whose reading I will comment on shortly, as well as more recently by Jennifer L. Geddes (2018). She notes how outraged Levi is 'at the theodical logic implicit in Kuhn's prayer' (ibid.: §2). Kuhn fails to see Beppo as a fellow human being—thus failing to acknowledge him. But his failure is much broader: 'By ascribing responsibility to God for not being selected, Kuhn's prayer of thanks implicitly ascribes responsibility to God not only for Beppo's selection, but by extension, for the whole genocidal system of

which it is but one moment', thereby actually liberating the Nazis from their guilt and ignoring the full human responsibility for the horror (ibid.). Accordingly, Kuhn's prayer is, Geddes maintains, blasphemous in obscuring human responsibility and by invoking the idea of divine providence that Levi so forcefully argues against. As 'Levi's critique strikes to the heart of theodicy itself', it can, Geddes shows, be usefully compared to Levinas's account of the uselessness of suffering (ibid.: §§2–3; cf. Levinas 2006). From Levi's perspective, theodicies are thus deeply problematic both ethically and religiously.

Employing the vocabulary of this book, we might suggest that Levi argues against a certain morally reprehensible practice of theodicism manifested by even a merely theoretical commitment to a theodicy (though Kuhn's behavior certainly is not 'merely theoretical'). Above all, what theodicists like Kuhn fail to recognize is another person's experience of the meaninglessness of suffering. Their blasphemous prayers try to fit everything, even the unthinkable, even the murderous selection, into a coherent narrative rendering the world meaningful—even in the 'black hole' (cf. Levi 2005) of sheer meaninglessness.

However, Geddes (2018: §4) also plausibly suggests that just as we should not impose a theodicist claim of meaningfulness on another person's (experiences of) meaningless suffering, we must not violently impose meaninglessness on the suffering of someone who does believe in a theodicy and construes the meaning of their own suffering along theodicist lines. Even if our antitheodicism is strongly morally motivated by the kind of horror that Levi feels at the mis- and non-recognition exemplified by Kuhn's neglect of Beppo in the next bunk, we cannot, for analogous ethical reasons, impose our antitheodicism on the suffering other who does find genuine comfort in theodicies (a point acknowledged, independently of Geddes's work, also in Kivistö & Pihlström 2016: chapter 6). The (Levinasian) 'ban on theodicy' rightly emphasized by Levi cannot thus be absolute or symmetrical. It is, as also suggested in our 2016 book, primarily a moral demand set *for us*, or *for me*, in our relations to others.

Even so, we should maintain the moral right to be horrified at the kind of failure of recognition that is inherent in a theodicist construal of even the most absurd and disproportional suffering as manifesting an imagined providential logic. Such recognition failures should not be (ethically) tolerated, and this is forcefully argued by Levi in his literary work. Nor should, conversely, the forced attempt to 'recognize' meaningfulness in the most meaningless suffering be tolerated. Even our private and theoretical engagements in theodicist thinking—such as our prayers, at least if spoken aloud—do not remain private and theoretical but have practical implications regarding our attitudes to others around us, as the case of Kuhn and Beppo strikingly illustrates. The same goes for our apparently purely theoretical ideas such as metaphysical realism (cf. Chapter 4); they might also have ethically problematic consequences precisely because they enable theodicist appeals to overall meaningfulness, thus implicitly supporting non-acknowledging practices. Or so, I am suggesting, a pragmatist antitheodicist can and should argue.

Thus, the distinction between merely 'first-personal' theodicism and 'second- or third-personal' theodicism intended to be public may in the end collapse. It would be against the pragmatist approach of this book to suggest that at a purely theoretical level we can accept theodicist thinking (or praying) in first-personal cases (allegedly only interpreting our own suffering in a theodicist manner) while having to reject theodicism (only) when it concerns our relations to others. Our moral puzzlement at the face of suffering—others' or our own—cannot be easily removed. How we interpret our own case has implications on how we interpret the world generally. Accordingly, though we should avoid imposing antitheodicism (any more than theodicism) to others, we do have a moral responsibility to be extremely cautious in engaging in theodicist accounts in general, also when they concern our own situation.

Furthermore, an even more disturbing conclusion seems to follow from our taking seriously Levi's ruthless analysis of blasphemous prayer. The Kuhn-Beppo case might even be extrapolated to morally problematize *any* gratitude or thankfulness we are tempted to feel regarding our own fortunate situation—also outside the extreme circumstances of Auschwitz, in ordinary human life, religious and secular life included. If we seriously entertain the idea that our fortunate situation (in comparison to our less fortunate fellow human beings), whether in terms of health, wealth, social relations, professional success, or whatever, is in some sense an indication of divine grace that falls upon us rather than some others (or any secular proxy thereof), are we not in a sense acting like Kuhn in Levi's description? Are we not thanking God (or the world, or life) aloud and thereby disregarding, non-acknowledging, the suffering other? Is gratitude by definition theodicist by implicitly accepting the immoral and unjust logic of a world—divinely or secularly structured—that lets some of us flourish while crushing others?

I have no proper response to offer to this worry that we may end up with upon reading Levi's compelling work (and I am not implying that Levi himself would have intended his writings to be interpreted in such an extreme manner). In any case, the mere possibility of extrapolating the concern with blasphemy in this way perhaps shows how central the responsibility for acknowledging another human being within the context of a shared human life is for Levi, and how vitally important his analysis of the destruction of such responsibility in the Holocaust is.[17]

Another recent commentator discussing Levi's antitheodicism also deserves a brief response here. Jonathan Druker (2009: especially chapters 1 and 4) draws on Levinas and Adorno, among others, in his treatment of Levi as a critic of theodicies who nevertheless problematically remains at least partially stuck within the tradition of humanistic ethics in Western thought. One manifestation of theodicism (though this is not Druker's exact word) is, he argues, the tendency to place everything at the ontological level—something famously criticized by Levinas, in particular. 'The ontological position is repeatedly interrupted by the ethical call of the other', Druker reminds us (ibid.: 75), approv-

ingly citing Levinas's idea that ethics is 'against nature' as it tells me not to 'put my own existence first' (ibid.). Where Druker goes wrong, in my view, is in his move from this legitimate attack on the primacy of ontology (and epistemology) to the allegedly Levinasian rejection of 'Kantian ethics' and humanism more generally (a move that, he claims, Levi does not fully succeed in making). Because the representation of the inhumanity of the Holocaust as an utter limit of humanity leads us beyond reciprocal recognition, Druker seems to maintain that the only way of properly 'acknowledging the other' in our post-Holocaust world is by rejecting, in a 'posthumanist' manner, the humanistic tradition and especially the Kantian ethical subject (see, e.g., ibid.: 85). *Pace* Druker, the Levinasian rejection of all theodicies as 'attempts to justify suffering or find a purpose in it' (ibid.: 86) can be seen as a moral duty precisely for the (humanistic) subject committed to acknowledging the other—and to viewing the world in an appropriately ethical light based on this commitment (as has been argued throughout this book).[18]

I find Druker's reading of Levi—and hence Levi's work itself—extremely valuable for the main goals of this book, namely, the antitheodicist resistance to the kind of 'objectification of humans' (ibid.: 133) that not only makes theodicism possible (cf. Chapter 4 above) but also contributed to making the Holocaust possible (see ibid.). Where I disagree with Druker is in his understanding of (especially Kantian but more generally 'Western' or 'Enlightenment') humanism. I do not think that the 'new Humanism' required by our taking seriously the Levinasian task of acknowledging the other without reducing them to the ontological level of objectification (or, analogously, the famous critique of the Enlightenment in critical theory) leads us to a posthumanist rejection of Kantian critical philosophy. On the contrary, I believe critical philosophy is exactly what we need here. I have tried to argue that the best—or at least a promising—way to preserve what is valuable in critical (transcendental) philosophy while being fully committed to the fundamental antitheodicist moral duty of acknowledgment is by working through a pragmatist articulation of our relation to the world in general. This can, it seems to me, only take place within the broad tradition of the Enlightenment, to which pragmatism also belongs. Critical philosophy itself operates within that overall tradition, examining critically many of its background assumptions, such as the realistic ones concerning truth and objectivity that have been explored in the previous chapters.

Levi has in this section served as an example of an antitheodicist thinker whose work turns out to be highly relevant to this critical task, even though it would of course be misleading to force any artificial link to, say, Jamesian or any other form of pragmatism into Levi's writing. Levi, in any event, draws serious moral attention to our on-going practices of writing and remembering, and therefore his representation of the moral horror of the Holocaust is exemplary precisely in its refusal to operate in terms of the kind of theory vs. practice dichotomy that I argued to be a problematic background assumption in theodicists' reactions to antitheodicist ethical critique. Insofar as this self-reflec-

tive enterprise is part of Enlightenment humanism, as I think it is, then it is Enlightenment humanism itself that needs, via pragmatism, a critical renewal liberating it from metaphysical realism but not from the infinite ethical task of viewing the world 'aright' by acknowledging the other.

## Meaninglessness

As suggested in the early sections of this final chapter, the refusal to draw any principled dichotomy between theory and practice in this area amounts to a pragmatist approach to antitheodicism (at least at the meta-level). In addition, the rather complex ethical attitude I have sketched regarding the rejection of theodicies (a view compatible with the asymmetrical toleration of someone's theodicist thinking when it really is—unlike Kuhn's in Levi's novel—confined to their own suffering and not anyone else's) can also be seen as a corollary of the Kantian imperative of respecting the human person, in others and oneself, as an end in itself, never as a mere means. But (again *pace* Druker 2009) the Kantian nature of the analysis provided in this chapter extends further.

We may note, once again, that Kant is a crucial background figure for this entire discussion, its pragmatist dimensions included, not only because theodicies tend to view human suffering, and the world in general, from a 'God's-Eye View', being thus committed to the kind of metaphysical realism Kant firmly rejected in urging us to adopt the resolutely anthropocentric perspective of critical philosophy (see again Chapters 3–4 above). He is fundamentally important also because theodicism can be claimed to be analogous to the analysis of what Kant called *transcendental illusion* (*Schein*). Human reason inevitably tends to seek to transcend its own limitations, even though that is of course impossible for us (according to Kant's analysis). Theodicies are thus confused more or less in the way in which the arguments regarding the immortal soul, the world as a totality, or God's existence are—as analyzed by Kant (1990 [1781/1787]) in the Paralogisms, the Antinomies, and the Ideal of Pure Reason (respectively). It is the most deeply Kantian task of acknowledgment to learn to acknowledge this kind of limitations of human reason, and to learn this in an ethically sensitive way, moving from the recognition of our human limits to the acknowledgment of others' suffering, especially of its meaninglessness. Moreover, it could be argued to be a dimension of this acknowledgment to refrain from ascribing too much meaning (e.g., in terms of excessive gratitude) for one's own contingent success in avoiding meaningless suffering. Historically, such a move of acknowledgment focusing on our finitude marks the victory of Kant over Hegel as far as the concepts of recognition and acknowledgment are concerned—but the antitheodicist philosopher celebrating such a victory must remain self-critical enough not to overlook Levi's reminder that the intellectual 'tends to follow in Hegel's footsteps' by easily becoming an 'accomplice of Power' (Levi 1988: 117).

It is right here that our moral acknowledgment of the experience of meaninglessness is indistinguishable from an acknowledgment of meaninglessness itself.[19] Only an insensitive theodicist can respond to others' suffering by claiming it to be 'really' meaningful in some hidden sense. It is the task of pragmatic moral antitheodicism to remind us of the necessity of acknowledging otherness also in this sense of recognizing experiences of utter meaninglessness. Unpragmatic dichotomies between theory and practice are, I have argued, hindrances to such adequate recognition. In order to properly acknowledge *this*, we should be prepared to examine both philosophical arguments against theodicies (such as Kant's, Levinas's, Phillips's, or James's, for example) and literary—yet shockingly real—cases, as exemplified by the work of Levi.

Most importantly, we must acknowledge the unending task of responding to suffering with genuine compassion and recognition—without theodicies—as *ours*. As Levinas (2006) powerfully argues, we, or rather I, must be seen as being always more responsible for the other than anyone else.[20] And as Levi (1988: 43) reminds us, 'one is never in another's place', even though, paradoxically, we may be ashamed of being alive 'in place of another', as every one of us 'has usurped his neighbour's place and lived in his stead' (ibid.: 62; cf. Agamben 2002 [1999]: 91; Druker 2009: 103). Therefore, one must always 'answer personally for sins and errors' (Levi 1988: 147)—and this could, essentially, be regarded as a Kantian (again in contrast to Hegelian) affirmation of the irreducibility of moral subjectivity. If my overall argument is on the right track, the very possibility of affirming moral responsibility in such a pregnant Kantian sense requires antitheodicism.

The final reflexive challenge to be met is to acknowledge that my own defense of antitheodicism along these lines derived from Levi and many others may itself be detached, in a problematic way, from the recognizing practice it seeks to defend. We, as wealthy people in a stable society with a safe historical distance from the horrors of the Holocaust (among others), can afford discussing the problem of evil and suffering from a philosophical and literary point of view, advancing a complex articulation and defense of a stance we label 'antitheodicism', a stance affirming the entanglement of theory and practice, as I have tried to do here. This argumentation, as such, does little to practically alleviate any meaningless suffering actually taking place in the world. The kind of antitheodicism defended here is, I have suggested, motivated by a certain kind of compassion (genuine, sincere compassion toward the sufferer and the victim of evil, I hope), but it inevitably remains disengaged from concrete suffering itself even when at the meta-level insisting on the need to overcome any theory vs. practice division itself leading to non- or misrecognition. It is still a theoretical position in the context of philosophical and literary contemplation, available to us in 'philosophy's cool place' (to borrow a phrase from Phillips), and this fact about it must be self-critically recognized as firmly as Levi recognizes the fact that the best did not survive and that true witnessing is impossible.[21]

These self-critical concluding thoughts should also make us aware of the fact that even though the crucial moral failure of theodicies can be captured by the concepts of misrecognition, non-recognition, or recognition failure, the kind of wrong that is done to people who suffer in or from historical atrocities such as the Holocaust cannot be reduced to mere mis- or non-recognition. Their sufferings are a result of something considerably deeper and more sinister, i.e., (deliberate) failures to acknowledge even any common humanity in them (cf. again Gaita 2000; Sparti 2005). Such failures of acknowledgment are, I am tempted to say, 'transcendental' in the sense of violating constitutive conditions of the moral point of view, and hence destroying the human world we live in. Understanding them properly, as failures of this kind, requires that we sharpen our philosophical abilities to 'see the world aright'. This, ultimately, is why I think the problems of realism and evil are thoroughly entangled, as I have tried to show in this book.

# Conclusion: Meaningful and Meaningless Suffering

I would like to begin this brief concluding chapter by summarizing the main argument I have sketched in the pages above. I will then add some further thoughts on the meaninglessness of suffering—as something that needs to be acknowledged in any serious antitheodicist reflection—because at a fundamental level it seems to me that the distinction between meaningfulness and meaninglessness is a key to this entire set of issues.

In the introduction and the first two chapters, I articulated and defended a pragmatist approach to the philosophy of religion generally and to the problem of realism more specifically, formulating a version of pragmatism that takes seriously the potentially indefinitely complex contextuality—both metaphysical and ethical—of our practice-embedded structurings of reality. At that stage, I only hinted at the relevance of these ideas to the debate over evil, suffering, and theodicies, which were not yet in the main focus of Chapters 1–2. This relevance is obvious, however, as soon as we realize that we are responsible for the practice-laden contextualizations within which we categorize our human world—metaphysically as much as ethically. No metaphysical theorizing is absolutely independent of ethical valuation, but conversely, there is no metaphysically neutral place to stand in any discussions of ethics and value; indeed, one of the key arguments the pragmatist may employ here is the observation that the attempt to imagine such a neutral territory of non-contextuality—that is, the metaphysical realist's idea of a 'God's-Eye View' on the world—is, precisely, something merely imagined, nothing that could ever be genuinely available to us as the kind of finite human beings we are. (In this sense, I see my inquiry as being in the end an investigation of what our human form of life is like, hence as something like pragmatist philosophical anthropology: cf. also Pihlström 2016.)

As suggested in Chapter 3, this pragmatist critique of metaphysical realism is most naturally cashed out in Kantian terms, loosely paralleling Kant's transcendental idealism (see also Skowronski & Pihlström 2019): it is Kantian critical philosophy in its pragmatist rearticulation that leads us to appreciate the way in which metaphysical realism is problematic especially in the ethical sense. The totalizing tendency of metaphysical realism (or what Kant called 'transcenden-

tal realism') is a *sine qua non* of both religious exclusivism and theodicism, as argued in Chapter 4. The kind of Kantian pragmatism developed in the third and the fourth chapters takes seriously the individual diversity in the contextualizations that render our world meaningfully structured for us. However, the pragmatist as much as the Kantian needs to remain committed to a serious pursuit of truth, though the very concept of truth can be understood as value-laden and thus inextricably linked (albeit not identified) with the notion of truthfulness. Some attention was therefore directed in Chapters 3–4 to the Jamesian pragmatic conception of truth as well as its possible fragmentation in Rorty's neopragmatism.

In order to open up a constructive comparative dialogue between pragmatism and other philosophical orientations relevant to the theodicy debate and the philosophy of religion more generally, I devoted Chapter 5 to Wittgensteinian considerations. While noting the striking similarities between the kind of pragmatist (and Kantian-inspired) antitheodicism sketched in the earlier chapters and some Wittgensteinian philosophers' criticisms of theodicies, I also examined critically Wittgenstein's own potentially theodicist employment of the concepts of happiness and harmony in his early philosophy. Whatever Wittgenstein's own specific position was, the Kantian pragmatist can freely employ the idea that transcendental necessities are contextualized (embedded) in historically changing uses of language. This meta-level contextualization is itself contingent. The Wittgensteinian twist in the overall argument is important because it shows that this basic view need not be specifically expressed in explicitly pragmatist terms but can receive an equally accurate articulation in the Wittgensteinian vocabulary of language games and forms of life—even though no strictly speaking scholarly interpretation of Wittgenstein's own position, any more than, say, Kant's, has been offered in this book.

Chapter 6 finally turned, after a summarizing account of theodicism as a failure to recognize others' perspectives, especially their experiences of the meaninglessness of their suffering, to a case study on Primo Levi's Holocaust writings, interpreted as an extended ethical argument against theodicism. I suppose it has been implicitly clear throughout my discussion (though this presumably became fully explicit only in the sixth chapter) that the problem of suffering crucially focuses on *meaninglessness*. Meaningful suffering—suffering serving some 'point' or function—is not even nearly as problematic as absurd suffering that cannot be rendered purposeful (see also Samuelson 2018). This issue is more specific than the rather indeterminate problem of the 'meaning of life' (or 'meaning in life'), which philosophers are often in popular discussions expected to respond to, yet obviously highly relevant to the latter problem, too, given the obvious fact that our lives are often full of suffering experienced as meaningless—indeed, suffering that may threaten to make life itself meaningless. It is this kind of suffering that needs to be antitheodicistically acknowledged, as Levi, among others, has urged us to do.

These are topics that need to be pursued not only by philosophical but also by artistic means. Indeed, some philosophers—e.g., John Cottingham and D.Z. Phillips—have compellingly argued that the standard analytic methods of philosophy of religion in particular ought to be enriched by literary reading and interpretation (see again also Kivistö & Pihlström 2016). Accordingly, Levi's work was in Chapter 6 analyzed as developing an essentially ethical argument against theodicies with a philosophical-cum-literary structure. I hope I have been able to shed some light on the problem of meaningless suffering, especially by canvassing a line of argument enabling a moral critique of theodicist attempts to force all suffering into a meaningful pattern. This examination of compelling Holocaust testimony should also lead us to a broader appreciation of the power of imaginative literature in the analysis of evil and suffering. In general, literature may of course deal with types of suffering that are not real but imagined—yet could be real—and hence enhance our abilities to critically reflect on the kind of suffering human beings can inflict on one another. Literary analysis, however, has not played any substantial role in the present inquiry.

However, in Levi's writing, for instance, the suffering represented is, or was, fully real, yet its depiction is literary and thus utilizes not just testimonial memory but also its author's creative capacities of imagination. By writing on not merely imagined but fully real suffering, Levi succeeds in not just imagining but representing the unimaginably horrible, and that is part of his lasting legacy. By so doing, Levi and other antitheodicists succeed in arguing that a transcendent point of view from which we could render suffering as meaningful—the kind of God's-Eye View postulated by metaphysical realism, and hence by theodicism—is itself merely imagined and ought to be rejected as morally unimaginable. Levi is thus one of the sources employed in this study that may show us how the problem of evil and suffering is ultimately a problem of how to view the world, and what kind of language to use in describing reality. The examination of Levi in the final chapter was thus by no means a marginal addition to the discussion focusing on realism but in its own way a culmination of the overall argument of the book: by abandoning theodicism we abandon certain morally distorting ways of categorizing reality.

I have argued both in this book and in earlier work that the key to antitheodicism is the fundamental ethical demand to acknowledge the other, especially other human beings' experiences of the sheer meaninglessness of their suffering. (While I have occasionally used the concept of recognition as well, referring the reader to some recent work on that concept, I have made no detailed formal differentiations between recognition and acknowledgment, for instance, speaking rather loosely of both, hoping that my remarks may be compatible with a wide array of more specific theoretical understandings of recognition.) Such an ethical demand of acknowledgment can be seen to be present, for instance, in Levinas's resolutely antitheodicist moral thought, according to which the justification of the other's suffering is the very beginning of immorality, but it is equally strongly (though perhaps less explicitly) present in William James's

development of the pragmatic method, urging us to get rid of our instinctive blindness to the inner significance (or, *mutatis mutandis,* lack of significance) of others' perspectives on reality.

We have perceived that Levi's writings on the Holocaust are exemplary regarding the acknowledgment of meaninglessness and antitheodicy, yet contributing to our appreciation of the value and meaning of human life in general—that is, refusing to succumb to nihilism, despite the utter meaninglessness of suffering and the 'disproportionality' (to use Levinas's [2006] word) of any theodicist meaning-making in comparison to the concreteness and excess of suffering. As also repeatedly observed in Raimond Gaita's (2000, 2004) work, morally admirable action—rendering life in *some* sense more meaningful—may take place in entirely meaningless circumstances, even at a place like Auschwitz. For example, Gaita (2004) draws attention to Levi's account of the case of a prisoner helping a dying man at the sick ward with no hope of saving that man, and indeed with a major risk for his own life. Just like suffering, goodness can, thus, be meaningless—there is, perhaps, a sense in which it *must* be meaningless—and it may actually suffer from the pursuit of meaningfulness, or from our pursuing any specific meanings, especially if our being good is instrumentalized into the service of the search for meaning in our own lives. Morality obligates us irrespectively of whether it makes our lives meaningful or meaningless—and this is, at least indirectly, an obviously Kantian point. Thus, we may learn from Levi one more extremely important lesson: we should be firmly opposed to the idea of grounding moral motivation in the pursuit of meaningfulness in one's own life; even when it remains fully secular, such a grounding attempt is comparable to 'soul-making' theodicies.[1] Goodness subordinated to meaningfulness self-destructs.

The concept of *critical distance* is, I would like to suggest, fundamental to the implicit (never fully explicit) antitheodicism we find not only in Levi but in many other thinkers commented upon in the preceding chapters.[2] While we ought to be attentive to others' suffering, seeing it as the kind of (meaningless) suffering it is rather than violently imposing artificial meaning upon it, we nevertheless should not naively claim to be able to share that suffering, no matter how much we care for the other. Understanding and acknowledging another human being's suffering as that other person's suffering, not mine, requires an appropriate kind of critical distance, and keeping such a distance also involves a continuous critical (especially self-critical) reflection on whether the kind of distance or detachment we are (or I am) maintaining 'regarding the pain of others' (cf. Sontag 2003) is correct or ethically adequate. Am I too close or too far? That's a question that never disappears. Reflecting seriously on this question concerning appropriate distance itself requires distance (detachment) at the meta-level.[3] This is a never-ending spiral of critical reflection. Asking oneself these critical questions is, again, to *pursue truth*—in a deeper sense than mere propositional correspondence truth, i.e., a sense pragmatically including ethical truthfulness (cf. Chapter 4). Truth itself requires distance, however; truth,

especially the truth about others' suffering, can never be naively 'immersive'.[4] Rather, we must develop our capacities of ethically viewing others' suffering as theirs, and their meaninglessness as theirs, too. The pragmatic project of developing an ethically reflective form of antitheodicy that is both attentive enough and stays at a respectful critical distance cannot fail to take seriously the concept of truth, and we need to examine all the possible resources we might have—drawing from James's *Pragmatism* but also from non-pragmatist theorists of objective, realistic truth—to maintain a critical pragmatic realism that does not sacrifice the objectivity of truth and the sincerity of truth seeking, while at the same time understanding that project as a deeply human value-laden practice.

In this sense, the very project of antitheodicism should be based on the kind of critical philosophy we find not only in Kant but also in pragmatism, emphasizing the continuous *reflexivity* of human inquiry and reason use (see also Chapter 1). The Kantian transcendental self (also in its pragmatist reincarnation) is thoroughly critically self-reflective—never naively immersed—in its own world involvement, and therefore it engages in a continuous reflexive critique of its own capacities as well as limits. This is one of the crucial morals the pragmatist draws from the Kantian legacy of critical (transcendental) philosophy.

This leads me to a further critical comment on Jonathan Druker's (2009) reading of Levi, already briefly discussed in Chapter 6. As we saw, Druker attacks the Enlightenment humanist way of conceptualizing the subject as complicit in the guilt of the Holocaust, partly because the humanist tradition does not leave room for the Levinasian 'humanism of the other'. Levi's work, Druker argues, is ambivalent in this regard: it is antitheodicist, as Levinas's, yet committed to humanism, which Druker proposes to replace by 'posthumanism'. This critique of humanism (comparable to and partly based on not only Levinas's but also, e.g., Adorno's and Agamben's criticisms)[5] in my view severely fails to capture the sense in which the transcendental version of the humanist subject in the Kantian tradition is itself needed for the Levinasian humanism of the other. (And the same, *mutatis mutandis*, goes for pragmatist versions of humanism and posthumanistic critique.) The transcendental subject is continuously self-critically and reflexively aware of the deeply ethically (and hence ontologically) problematic nature of its world-involvement. It is never naively immersed in its world but maintains critical distance also to its own viewing of the world. It is not Levi's homecoming 'Ulysses' (cf. ibid.: chapter 5) but incorporates also the 'Abrahamic' dimension of ethical subjectivity emphasized by Levinas (who, in his own peculiar way not to be further discussed here, is a Kantian philosopher, too).

This book has not examined in any great detail the idea (basically raised only here in the concluding remarks) that philosophy and literature can share the joint pursuit of something like meta-level meaningfulness through sincerely acknowledging meaninglessness in suffering, and thus also meaninglessness in life. However, I have tried to argue at some length that a certain kind of creative synthesis of philosophical traditions, especially the ones of Kantian

critical philosophy and pragmatism, may effectively advance this pursuit by showing us how to 'view the world aright', that is, rejecting the metaphysical realist's postulation of a God's-Eye View as well as the theodicist's imagined narrative of ultimate meaningfulness. Obviously, there would be much more to be said on how exactly the kind of pragmatic realism I have recommended differs from the forms of metaphysical realism that also (as I claimed in Chapter 4) give rise to theodicism. In some respects, this division may be difficult to draw, and further philosophical work, both systematic and historical, is needed for a proper understanding of the relations between pragmatism and realism (something I have been engaged in since the 1990s: see, e.g., Pihlström 2003, 2009, 2014a). While the pragmatist, in my view, ought to firmly reject the metaphysically realist claim that the world possesses 'its own' pre-categorized ontological structure—including the kind of structures of meaningfulness that theodicist arguments could rely on—and to affirm the dependence of any ontological structure that we humans may fruitfully examine and analyze on our own value-laden processes of structuring that always invoke ethical considerations, this definitely does not mean that the pursuit of objective truth about a world that we simply did not make up or create *ex nihilo* would have to drop out as superfluous. Rorty's neopragmatism, emphasizing freedom in contrast to truth (cf. Chapter 3), is too radical in this respect, and it does open the unfortunately slippery slope toward a kind of fragmentation or disappearance of truth, strikingly depicted in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (and perhaps somewhat less dramatically present in our own 'post-truth' or 'post-factual' societies).

I have, hence, tried to argue that responsible (non-Rortyan) pragmatism and Kantian critical philosophy should join forces in leading us out of the predicaments of metaphysical realism and theodicism, yielding a pragmatic realism committed to an enriched conception of truth accommodating ethical truthfulness. I have also argued that Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion comes in certain respects very close to these two traditions, especially in its engagement with the 'contingency of necessity' (cf. Chapter 5), and I have at an intuitive and tentative level suggested how pragmatists might employ the vocabulary of recognition theory (in dialogue with the tradition developed by Axel Honneth and his many followers) and especially the concept of acknowledgment (drawn from Stanley Cavell) in their antitheodicist argumentation. I have thus hopefully been able to indicate some potentially significant philosophical resources that might be valuable for tackling the question concerning the meaningfulness of our ways of viewing the world and our own place in it especially in relation to others that need our attentive response. This is also part of the pragmatist approach to 'viewing the world aright': there is a plurality of conceptual frameworks to employ, no single over-arching absolute standpoint available from which we could settle once and for all how exactly the relations between, say, theodicies, antitheodicies, and various forms of realism are related to each other.

From a pragmatist perspective, metaphysical realism ought to be abandoned not only as the background theory of theodicism but also as a *mystification* of a

certain kind of illusive 'depth' in evil. A (pragmatically speaking) more 'realistic' account of evil—realistic in a more 'humane' sense (cf. Cottingham 2014)—rejects such non-human mystifications, refusing to appeal to any deep underlying structure of evil (which, presumably, would again be available only from the imagined God's-Eye View). There are excellent examples of a more pragmatic realism about evil and suffering available, starting from James's recognition of the 'blindness' in human beings preventing us from acknowledging the significance of others' perspectives, and ranging through Levi's above-analyzed cool and accurate descriptions of what human beings are capable of doing to each other, descriptions based on an almost scientific-like realism about human suffering (Levi, by the way, was a chemist by training), all the way to Hannah Arendt's (1994 [1963]) account of the 'banality of evil', i.e., the observation that evil lacks depth—being never radical but 'only extreme', and often superficial, spreading everywhere like a fungus (while *not* being the mere absence of goodness in the Platonic sense dominating all too many historical treatments of evil in Western philosophy and theology). These examples of (in my terms) pragmatically realistic ways of dealing with the reality of evil and suffering are attempts to view the world in an irreducibly ethical light by acknowledging the suffering other, and it is a crucial part of such analyses of our ethical responsibilities in dealing with others' suffering that no ultimate metaphysical explanation or essentialist theory of the nature of evil is provided.[6] On the contrary, such explanations and theories are critically analyzed as points of departure for theodicies that fail to take that kind of ultimate responsibility in the face of the other.

This, again, is a deeply humanistic project of critical analysis. While this book has not taken up the topic of humanism in any detail (apart from some brief remarks on 'the humanism of antitheodicism'), it can be suggested that a certain kind of humanism runs through the entire pragmatist argumentation based on the ethical thrust of Jamesian antitheodicism and extends to the explorations of what it means to pursue truth in a pragmatist context as an ethically engaged process of truthful acknowledgment. Pragmatist humanism must constantly renew itself, of course, and the challenges presented by various posthumanist and even antihumanist thinkers (such as Druker 2009) need to be taken seriously. But to do so is to be a humanist. Paraphrasing Larry Hickman's quip that Dewey's pragmatism is a form of 'post-postmodernism',[7] we may say that the kind of humanistic pragmatism sketched here amounts to 'post-posthumanism', and thereby to the recognition that we will never get rid of humanism if we seriously try to reflect on what it means to be human in an ethical context. Antihumanisms are just hopeless attempts to deny our basic humanity, and the humanist can acknowledge that it is a most human tendency to try to deny one's humanity (cf. also Putnam 1994).

I am perfectly aware of the limitations of this work. It would require a much more comprehensive study to provide detailed differentiations between the relevant forms of metaphysical realism and pragmatic realism (and other

realisms),[8] or the various sophisticated versions of theodicism that might be argued not to be guilty of failing to acknowledge meaningless suffering, not to speak of the much wider issue of humanism raised only here in the concluding remarks. I have presumably only managed to provide a kind of (possibly somewhat Wittgenstein-inspired) '*übersichtliche Darstellung*'. An overview at a critical distance is, however, a philosophical task *par excellence*. Much more philosophical attention needs to be focused on the details of how, for example, certain specific metaphysically realistic assumptions are made by specific theodicist arguments—either by atheists putting forward an 'argument from evil' or by theists responding to them by means of theodicies or 'defenses'—and how different kinds of meaningfulness and meaninglessness may be present in our (moral and metaphysical) ways of viewing the world.

Now, at the end of this inquiry, a self-critically reflexive thinker finally needs to ask whether all *this* examination—the dialectical and often self-reflective arguments I have tried to go through in the course of my explorations—constitutes a problematic pursuit of meaning, after all. Is there a self-reflective incoherence involved in the very attempt of viewing the world aright, even if that attempt is structured in terms of antitheodicism and remains fully aware of the pragmatic contextuality of meaning? The question arises whether we will eventually move the horizon of meaninglessness out of our sight when engaging in such philosophical construals of meaningfulness. This, again, is one of those questions that self-critical philosophical reflection can never avoid. We are also invited to go on reflecting on the appropriate measure of critical distance to our own fragile attempts to maintain such distance. And so it goes, with no end in sight.

# Notes

## Preface

[1] More specifically, we should be careful to distinguish between *antitheodicism* and *antitheodicies*. By 'antitheodicy' we should mean the critique and refutation (e.g., moral, metaphysical, Kantian, etc.) of theodicies, while by 'antitheodicism' I understand the broader normative view according to which the problem of evil and suffering ought to be examined and approached not by means of providing, or even requiring, a theodicy but rather by seeking to develop an antitheodicy. Accordingly, antitheodicies may be parts of the more general framework of antitheodicism.

[2] On the intimate relation between evil and meaningless suffering, see, e.g., Dalferth (2011).

[3] The distinction between theoretical/intellectual and practical/existential/religious versions of the problem of evil and suffering is discussed in a number of contributions to the topic, including Trakakis's (2018) recent collection of highly useful essays on theodicies and antitheodicies.

[4] While many antitheodicist attacks on theodicies are predominantly ethical (see, e.g., Tilley 1991; Simpson 2009; Betenson 2016; Kivistö & Pihlström 2016), it is of course also worth critically exploring the metaphysical background assumptions of theodicism (see Snellman 2019, 2020, as well as a

response to Snellman in Betenson 2019). We thus need not only moral but also metaphysical antitheodicies. (I am indebted to Lauri Snellman's work here.) This book (like some of my previous work) defends the profound entanglement of ethics and metaphysics—in the specific context of theodicies vs. antitheodicies—but it does not simply claim ethics to be prior to metaphysics, or vice versa. We might say that it pursues moral antitheodicism by exploring some of the crucial background problems concerning realism and truth, in particular. For a representative sample of theodicist approaches that cannot be discussed in detail in this book but that are in my view vulnerable to antitheodicist criticism, see, e.g., Plantinga (1974), Hick (1978 [1966]), Adams (1989, 2013), van Inwagen (2006), and Stump (2010). See also the essays in Sterba (2017).

## Introduction

[1] Larry Hickman's discussion of Dewey as a 'post-postmodernist' is also highly relevant to these topics: see Hickman (2007).

[2] The concepts of objectivity and rationality cannot be defined here with any technical precision. Rather, what I hope to do is to shed some light on how these concepts could be used within a pragmatist philosophy of religion. See further Chapter 1. For a concise overview of pragmatist philosophy of religion, see Zackariasson (2015).

[3] It might be objected that, according to pragmatism, religious thought ought to remain *arational* rather than being either rational or irrational. For instance, some of Putnam's views on religion might be understood in this Wittgensteinian fashion: see Putnam (2008). Certainly Wittgensteinians like D.Z. Phillips have often been read in this way. However, it seems to me that the distinction between arationality, on the one hand, and the rationality vs. irrationality dimension, on the other, is itself based on a prior non-pragmatist understanding of rationality (and, hence, irrationality). If we do not begin from such a non-pragmatist (purely theoretical) conception of rationality but, rather, view rationality itself as practice involving and practice embedded all the way from the start, I do not think that we need to resort to the account of religion as 'arational'. On the contrary, we can understand religious responses to reality as potentially rational—and, therefore, also potentially irrational—in terms of the broader, practice-sensitive account of rationality that pragmatism cherishes.

[4] This book is obviously indebted to my earlier articulations of antitheodicism jointly with Sari Kivistö (cf. Kivistö & Pihlström 2016, 2017; see also Pihlström 2013a, 2014b). Hence, instead of providing any detailed catalogue of the different antitheodicisms available, I will simply refer the reader to those previous publications for such details, focusing here primarily on the relations between antitheodicism, realism, and pragmatism. It might be noted that even though there are, increasingly, antithe-

odicist contributions available in the literature, such as Betenson (2016) as well as Trakakis's (2018) and Gleeson's (2018) essays in Trakakis's (ed., 2018) in many ways valuable collection, pragmatist antitheodicies are still very rarely recognized—either by pragmatism scholars or antitheodicist philosophers and theologians. (See, however, also Wright 2006; Knepper 2013.)

[5] I am not saying that evil actions and events (or people) can always be understood; nor am I saying, however, that evil necessarily escapes understanding. I will return to the problem of evil and theodicies more substantially in Chapters 3–6.

[6] I am obviously alluding to Richard Swinburne's ideas here—ideas that for me come close to being a parody of genuine religiosity. But I am doing so only in passing, without any detailed study of either Swinburne's or anyone else's views. For Swinburne's views on theodicy, see his (1998).

[7] In later chapters, especially Chapter 4, I will distinguish between the concepts of recognition and acknowledgment.

[8] For my reading of Dewey within pragmatist philosophy of religion more generally, see Pihlström (2013a: chapter 2).

[9] I take it as obvious that non-religious ethical-political approaches to the problem of evil, such as Card's (2002, 2010) or Dews's (2008), are highly relevant to the theodicy vs. antitheodicy discussion in a broad sense.

[10] For a considerably more comprehensive examination of Kant's philosophy of religion, see, e.g., Godlove (2014).

[11] Peirce's late essay, 'A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God' (in Peirce 1992–98, vol. 2), is a *locus classicus* here, examined in great detail by Atkins (2016).

[12] I have used the online version available here: https://www.uky.edu/~eushe2/Pajares/jcertain.html. On theodicies as exhibiting 'moral blindness', see Betenson (2016: especially 59–60). See also, e.g., Gleeson (2012, 2018). Neither of these contemporary antitheodicists refers to James, though.

[13] As Carl Sachs (2011: 277, 281) reminds us, citing Adorno, Cavell, and Levinas, knowledge and acknowledgment may also run into conflict with each other. In some cases, our ethical acknowledgment of others' suffering may require us to take distance from the project of knowing the reality of suffering that would be 'reducible to scientific knowledge' (ibid.: 281). Cavell's (1979) distinction between knowing and acknowledging is a crucial background for such ideas.

## 1. A Pragmatist Approach to Religious Realism, Objectivity, and Recognition

[1] See, for instance, Niiniluoto (1999) for a very helpful classification of different forms of realism. A major recent collection of articles on various aspects of the realism issue is Westphal (2014).

[2] There has been considerable debate over which dimension is the most important one. Michael Devitt (1991) is famous for the claim that realism is a purely ontological thesis about the mind-independent existence of certain kinds of entities, either about something in general or about specific classes of entities such as the theoretical entities of science. This contrasts with Michael Dummett's (1996) equally well-known view that realism is a semantic issue about whether statements of certain types (e.g., about the past) have truth values that are objectively determined.

[3] I critically discuss Fine's NOA from the point of view of the philosophy of religion in Pihlström (2005b).

[4] Obviously, there are many different varieties of atheism available in the discussion; see, for a detailed and influential investigation, Martin (1990).

[5] In a more careful presentation of religious realism (and antirealism), it would be important to distinguish between *reality* and *existence*. One might, for instance, construe God along the lines of Peirce's 'extreme scholastic realism' as a 'real general', arguing that God does not exist in the way in which particular objects, such as stones or galaxies, exist but is nevertheless real in the way in which general tendencies, habits, or modalities (e.g., laws of nature) are. Accordingly, God would be something like a general world-process instead of being a mere individual entity existing in the world. On Peirce's realism about generality, see a number of influential essays collected in Peirce (1992–98), including the famous 1871 'Berkeley Review' (in vol. 1) and several later essays on pragmatism and pragmaticism (in vol. 2). On Peirce's philosophy of religion, see Atkins (2016), already cited in the introduction.

[6] Theological and religious views and problems may also influence our views on realism in other domains: for example, the problem of evil has typically been discussed presupposing moral realism; it may look quite different if one begins from moral antirealism. T.L. Carson (2007) argues that J.L. Mackie (a famous critic of both moral realism and theism) seems to assume the truth of moral realism in his discussion of the problem of evil (see Mackie 1983), because he assumes that pain or suffering is mind-independently bad or evil.

[7] Does the 'miracle argument', which we owe to philosophers of science such as Hilary Putnam and Richard Boyd, work in theology or religious studies? This further question, though highly interesting, cannot be pursued here. The miracle argument—as analyzed and defended, for instance, in Putnam (1975)—is the argument according to which only realism can adequately explain the fact that science has been enormously successful in its predictions and practical applications, including technology. Unless the theories in advanced sciences were at least approximately true and unless the theoretical terms of those theories (at least approximately) referred to real entities in the world, this success of science would be a 'miracle', an unexplainable cosmic coincidence. The reason why there may be no clear analogy to this argument in either theology or religious studies is that there may be no

clearly identifiable empirical success to be explained. At least the question about the empirical and/or practical success of these disciplines is much less straightforward.

[8] Perhaps one *could*, after all, be a realist about theological doctrines in the sense of claiming that they are objectively true or false, while being an anti-realist about their implementations in actual religious life, viewing such life as a matter of symbols and rituals rather than any propositionally expressible theological commitments.

[9] In the Nordic countries, for instance, theology is usually understood as a non-confessional study of religious beliefs, doctrines, practices, their history, etc. The theologian need not be committed to the doctrines s/he studies, or to any religious ideas. This is the case, for instance, at the University of Helsinki Faculty of Theology in Finland. In some other religious and theological traditions, it may be harder to understand, or even inconceivable, that one could engage in theology while avoiding religious commitments altogether.

[10] For example, the criticism of the 'realist aims' of theology by Wang-Yen Lee (2009) by analogy to *constructive empiricism* starts from the problematic assumptions that theological theories are to be seen as 'scientific', in principle open to similar empirical considerations as scientific theories. I am not sure that 'theological constructive empiricism' even makes any sense (even though constructive empiricism about religious studies *might* make sense, while I would certainly not recommend maintaining that, or any, version of constructive empiricism as an alternative to (pragmatic) scientific realism). For a general treatment of pragmatism as a third option between evidentialism and fideism, as well as realism and antirealism, in the philosophy of religion, see Pihlström (2013a).

[11] See, e.g., Herrmann (1997, 2003). In the 1997 essay, Herrmann draws on Putnam in arguing that sciences and 'views of life' such as religions have different functions and hence different notions of truth. In the latter, being true means not 'to be the case' (as in science) but to be 'true to life' in a qualitative sense, with true expressions being 'adequate expressions of what it means to be a human being' (1997: 92). See also, for an excellent recent contribution to a re-evaluation of the pragmatist perspective on theological and religious realism along broadly Putnamian lines, Brunsveld (2012).

[12] This position is comparable to, albeit not identical with, the "practical realism" Vihalemm (2012) defends in the philosophy of science.

[13] See, e.g., James (1975 [1907]: Lecture VIII). On the distinction between theocentric and anthropocentric perspectives as parallel to the Kantian distinction between transcendental realism and transcendental idealism, see Allison (2004 [1983]). On Putnam's approach to metaphysical issues in the philosophy of religion, see also Putnam (1997a, 1997b, 2008).

[14] I am adopting the phrase 'realistic spirit' from Cora Diamond's Wittgenstein-inspired work; see Diamond (1991). See also Pihlström (2013a).

[15] See Pihlström (2009). Putnam's key work in this area is his (2002).

[16] The 'holistic pragmatism' defended by Morton White, e.g., in White (2002), could at this point be invoked as a systematization of pragmatist philosophy of religion and pragmatist methodology in general. That must remain to be discussed on another occasion, however.

[17] Cf. Honneth (2005 [1992]). For a recent attempt to apply the concept of recognition to theology, see Saarinen (2016); cf. Smith's (2017) analysis, as well as Kahlos et al. (2019).

[18] Arguably, the Kantian idea of a moral community is based on a mutual recognition among autonomous agents necessary for this (and therefore recognition is not only a Hegelian notion). I am grateful to Philip Rossi for a discussion of this point.

[19] I am here helping myself to phrases familiar from Wittgensteinian and Putnamian contexts. Cf., e.g., Putnam (1994).

[20] For an influential contemporary employment of the notion of the space of reasons, which we owe to Wilfrid Sellars, see McDowell (1996).

[21] Cf., e.g., Westphal (2013). According to Westphal, this is a transcendental condition for the possibility of rational judgment. (Hence, this argument leads to a form of Kantian pragmatism.)

[22] The kind of (arguably antirealistic) epistemic concept of truth associated with Putnam's internal-realist-phase theory of truth as idealized rational acceptability, or epistemic justification in ideal conditions, in a way denies (at least strong) recognition transcendence. As is clear in his later writings, Putnam has come to reject such an epistemic theory of truth altogether. See Putnam (2012); in that volume, he avoids connecting these issues with religion and theology, though.

[23] A fundamentally important case of this to be explored in later chapters is the failure to recognize *the world* and our place in it as embedded in the failure to recognize *others' perspectives on the world* (a failure typical of theodicies). Here we come close to the key point of the book, the entanglement of the issues of realism and theodicism—though at this stage this remains mostly implicit.

[24] This comes close to the picture sketched by Dewey (1991 [1934]).

[25] Furthermore, the two interests I have distinguished are not dichotomously separable but, rather, deeply entangled (just like ethics and metaphysics are). The pragmatist philosopher of religion, and the pragmatist philosopher more generally, can and should make distinctions wherever and whenever they serve useful pragmatic purposes; what s/he should avoid is turning those distinctions that really make a difference to our inquiries into essentialistic and ahistorically fixed structures and dichotomies, or dualisms that cannot possibly be bridged. Even so, there are problematic and even deeply wrong ways of entangling the two 'interests' I have spoken about. For instance, when the problem of evil, which I have categorized under the 'existential interest', is seen as a *purely* or even *primarily* epistemic

and/or evidential issue having to do with the rationality of religious faith within an evidentialist context, as it is, e.g., in van Inwagen (2006), things go seriously wrong. The existential interest is then reduced to the epistemic one, and such non-pragmatic reductionism should be resisted. See further Chapters 4–6 below.

[26] James's early essay, 'The Sentiment of Rationality' (1879), in James (1979 [1897]), is highly relevant here. A Levinasian philosopher might claim, however, that speaking of 'ethical perspectives' is unfortunate here, because ethics—or the ethical attitude—can never be a *mere* perspective that could be adopted at will or something that one could refuse to or fail to adopt. It is, transcendentally, always there, structuring our lives and our world. It is omnipresent, ubiquitous. In fact, I do believe that the pragmatists, especially James, are close to Levinas in this respect. (I am indebted to a discussion with Panu-Matti Pöykkö regarding this point.)

[27] This is a Kantian rereading of James I propose in Pihlström (2013a: chapter 1). I must skip the details of this discussion here.

[28] The notion of 'transcendence' is here used in a (broadly) Kantian sense: the transcendent is something that transcends the bounds of experience. It could include the supernatural (which is how the notion is often used in religious and theological contexts), but all Kantian 'transcendental ideas' are transcendent in this sense.

[29] I am, of course, referring to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/1787), the sections on 'The Ideal of Pure Reason' in the 'Transcendental Dialectic'.

[30] The reason I include freedom in this list is of course the Kantian one: these three are Kant's postulates of practical reason. I am not saying that freedom is a religious concept; it is, however, part of the same set of concepts Kant famously saves from the point of view of practical reason after having rejected speculative attempts to ground their objectivity, or objects, in theoretical reason use.

[31] For specific references, see the 6.5's of TLP (Wittgenstein 1974 [1921]), to be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5 below. Also note the striking resemblance to Stoicism in Wittgenstein's comments on the will: freedom, and ethics, is about the subject's attitude to the world, whose facts s/he cannot change; the subject is, famously, a 'limit' of the world.

[32] It is from these remarks that the early Wittgenstein's peculiar form of solipsism emerges. In a sense, for the solipsistic subject of the *Tractatus*, all the objects in the world are 'mine'. But this transcendental solipsism no more sacrifices the objectivity of those objects than the transcendental idealism of Kant's First Critique, which is compatible with empirical realism (see also Pihlström 2016).

[33] While pragmatism and recognition theory have developed rather independently with little mutual contact, the concept of 'pragmatic recognition' is actually employed (in the context of contemporary critical theory) in Decker (2012).

[34] In addition to contemporary classics such as Honneth (2005 [1992]), see, e.g., Ikäheimo & Laitinen (2011), Saarinen (2014, 2016), and Koskinen (2017, 2019). I cannot provide adequate references to this growing literature. I am only using the concept of recognition intuitively here without seeking to make any contribution to the systematic theory of recognition (while believing that it can and should be brought into more explicit dialogue with pragmatism). Toward the end of the book, I will slide into speaking more about acknowledgment than about recognition, for reasons to be sketched in Chapter 4.

[35] See the relevant essays in Pihlström (2015a) for the diversity of the ways in which the concept of inquiry is central to pragmatism.

[36] The most important reference here is Peirce's best-known essay, 'The Fixation of Belief' (1877), available in, e.g., Peirce (1992–98): vol. 1. Also the important anti-Cartesian writings from the late 1860s can be found in the same volume.

[37] This conception of habituality has also been emphasized by pragmatist social theorists: see, e.g., Kilpinen (2000).

[38] 'Real things' in this Peircean sense could also be humanly created objects and structures, as of course is the case in social-scientific inquiry. This is not the place to inquire into the ways in which (Peircean) pragmatism can or cannot embrace scientific realism; cf. Niiniluoto (1999).

[39] It might, for instance, be extremely problematic to apply the Peircean 'final opinion' account of truth to such areas of inquiry. Still we would hardly like to say that they have nothing at all to do with the concept of truth or that truth would simply be irrelevant in such fields. Here as elsewhere, pragmatism generally seeks to offer a balanced middle ground view.

[40] In particular, at the empiricist extreme, the Vienna Circle logical empiricists famously regarded theistic (but also, symmetrically, atheistic) views as *meaningless* because they are neither verifiable nor falsifiable empirically. (Among the very few twentieth-century logical empiricists who also held religious ideas was Richard Braithwaite.) The standard reaction among scientifically and empiricistically oriented believers would be that religious faith is, precisely, beyond evidence and experience and that precisely for this reason it must not be confused with scientific inquiry at all.

[41] I would even go as far as to claim that the metaphysical relations of dependence among human persons are ultimately based on ethical relations of (mutual) recognition, and that metaphysics (especially the metaphysics of selves) is thus grounded in ethics (cf. Pihlström 2009), but that would be a longer story, possibly also defensible along pragmatist lines.

[42] Such as, e.g., Peirce's characterization of the scientific method in 'The Fixation of Belief'.

[43] For novel pragmatist contributions to the ethics of belief discussion, inspired by James, see Rydenfelt & Pihlström (2013).

[44] Furthermore, the challenges posed by 'postmodern' trends in the philosophy of religion—e.g., attempts to 'save' religion from 'onto-theological' doctrines postulating divine reality beyond language—may also be re-examined from this perspective. How does the postmodern project of deliberately blurring all rational, normative, and other boundaries change this problem framework?

[45] Religious believers may also maintain that the scientific and explanatory discourse manifested in, e.g., cognitive study of religion today fails to appreciate yet another kind of limit that must be recognized. This could be called *the limits of scientific explanation*. Religious practices or forms of life, some believers may argue, can only be adequately understood 'from within'; to attempt to explain them causally and with reference to, e.g., evolutionary history from an external non-religious point of view sets a serious limitation for the adequate understanding of religious life *qua* religious. Here the critical discussion of the recently influential cognitive paradigm in religious studies could be connected with the Wittgensteinian orientation in the philosophy of religion, which emphasizes understanding rule-governed practices or forms of life from within them—and comes in that respect close to pragmatism. Again, the limits between these two groups—not identical to the groups of atheists and believers—may be crossed by means of mutual recognition. And again the same kind of questions arise: can, e.g., a cognitive scholar of religion and a Wittgensteinian philosopher emphasizing the fundamental differences between religious forms of life and scientific appeals to reason and evidence even recognize each other as members of the same intellectual community of inquirers committed to shared conceptions of reason, rationality, and science? Is religion a special case here, fundamentally different from science or everyday reasoning? Pragmatism may, by offering its middle path, facilitate such processes of mutual recognition among participants of these and other practices.

## 2. The Pragmatic Contextuality of Scheme (In)Dependence

[1] The fact that I am in this chapter and in this book formulating my problem from the standpoint of pragmatism should not be taken to imply that the realism issue would not be a problem for non-pragmatists. On the contrary, our discussion below will be general enough to be relevant to much of post-Kantian philosophy. 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(s) of realism. Different pragmatists, classical or recent, may be committed to it/them in quite different ways.

[2] Realism in this sense can, of course, be applied to universals or to the mind-independent world as a whole; thus, the first and second dimensions of the realism issue could be formulated as special cases of the third.

[3] The 'error theory' was made famous by Mackie (1977). For a pragmatist discussion of the problem of moral realism in particular, see Pihlström (2005a). It can also be suggested that methodological realism is a species of normative realism, focusing on methodological normativity in (scientific) inquiry.

[4] See Schiller (2008); on relativism in modern philosophy, see, e.g., Baghramian (2004).

[5] Kenneth R. Westphal has argued, in a series of works since his (1989), that Hegel was 'the first pragmatic realist'. While Hegel was a major figure in the realism debate and would arguably deserve a 'milestone' of his own (between my fourth and fifth milestones), I will not further comment on his views in this chapter.

[6] For a now classical antirealistic work, see van Fraassen (1980).

[7] In addition, the debate between semantic realism and antirealism, as conceived by Dummett and his followers, is another twist in this rearticulation of realism in the (late) twentieth century. See, e.g., Dummett (1978).

[8] See, e.g., Kant (1990 [1781/1787]), James (1975 [1907]), Schiller (2008), Dewey (1960 [1929]), Carnap (1950), Wittgenstein (1953), Quine (1980 [1953], 1969), Putnam (1981, 1990), Goodman (1978), Kuhn (1970), Rorty (1979, 1991), and Sellars (1963). However, we must not forget Donald Davidson's famous critique of such forms of relativism and of the implicated distinction between a conceptual scheme and its allegedly scheme-neutral content, or other noteworthy criticisms of conceptual and ontological relativisms. For Davidson's seminal critique of the scheme–content distinction and the resulting conceptual relativism, see his (1984); cf. also, e.g., Niiniluoto's (1999) vigorous attack on cognitive relativism.

[9] As in Chapter 1 above, 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 realists), because it could remain existing even if its maker disappeared from the world. For more detailed discussions of ontological dependence and independence, see Lowe (1998, 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.

[10] Cf. Pihlström (2009). Neither this chapter nor this book argues for the possibility of pragmatist metaphysics but investigates a fundamental problem *within* it (which is also a problem for pragmatist epistemology), not adequately dealt with in my 2009 book.

[11] I will from now on simply speak about *scheme (in)dependence*, instead of, say, mind (in)dependence, practice (in)dependence, language (in)dependence, perspective (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.

[12] On the distinction between a (mere) distinction and a (harmful) dichotomy, see Putnam (2002).

[13] Consider, for instance, the 'problematic situations' (and 'indeterminate situations') Dewey invokes in his account of inquiry and experience. For a classical formulation, see Dewey (1960 [1929]).

[14] 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 a transcendental role, 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 source of experience, etc. (Hanna 2001: 118.) Note, however, that Kant himself does not call these (or anything else) 'transcendental facts'. I am here employing Hanna's in my view useful terminology, without claiming to interpret Kant's original views in any manner whatsoever. 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 (see ibid.: 117–118).

[15] See also Chapter 3 for a more comprehensive discussion of why I think the pragmatist should (especially in the philosophy of religion) adopt a Kantian strategy of analysis and argumentation.

[16] This might also be cashed out by considering the relation between pragmatic pluralism and contextualism, on the one hand, and the traditional conception of ontology as general category theory, on the other. Pragmatic pluralism acknowledges a plurality of categorial structures, or ontologies. The pragmatic pluralisms defended by figures like James, Putnam, or Goodman still employ a set of relatively traditional ontological—albeit epistemologized and to some extent even ethically structured—categories. According to such

thinkers, what the categorial structure(s) of the world is (are) depends on our perspectives and practices, but the set or 'pool' of potential structures is still independent of us, at least in some basic metaphysical sense. Quite independently of us, the world *could* be such that there are, or are not, universals, processes, states of affairs, etc. A more radical pragmatic pluralism would argue that we can construct (a plurality of) novel structures of categories, even previously unheard-of categories, based on the development of our practices, discourses, and/or forms of life. We can *reform* our categorial *possibilities*, not only our postulations of actual categories or structures. An example of this kind of reform would be a revision of the category of divinity in response to the problem of evil. At the meta-level, one might also suggest that the ways of meta-metaphysically determining how to examine the categorial structure of reality (e.g., whether it is epistemic or ethical in addition to being ontological) is itself dependent on our epistemic as well as ethical standpoints. Pragmatism thus prevails at the meta-level. Further developments of these ideas must be left for another occasion, however.

[17] 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., Rorty (1998).

[18] For further reflections on this reflexive structure of naturalized and pragmatic transcendental philosophy, see Pihlström (2003, 2009).

[19] Gava's & Stern's (2016) volume provides a number of scholarly examinations of the relations between pragmatism and Kantian transcendental philosophy, as does the more recent collection Skowronski & Pihlström (2019).

[20] This is also quoted in Slater (2008: 675).

[21] Putnam's reasoning can be reconstructed as a pragmatic transcendental argument (cf. Pihlström 2003: chapter 7). See the brief discussion in the previous section on the possibility of interpreting pragmatism as a (naturalized) form of transcendental philosophy.

[22] For Putnam's rejection of the internal realist (epistemic) theory of truth, see Putnam (1999, 2012). For discussions of Putnam's struggle with realism and pragmatism, see Pihlström (2009).

[23] The Wittgensteinian background of this formulation should be obvious. For some discussion of the possibility of integrating pragmatism and late-Wittgensteinian philosophical methodology, see Pihlström (2006b). 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. See Chapter 5 for a more detailed Wittgensteinian twist to my overall argument.

[24] On the concept of truthmaking in metaphysics, see Armstrong (2004); for a pragmatic critique, see Pihlström (2009: chapter 2).

[25] 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 Wallgren (2006). See also Chapter 5 below.

[26] For an explicitly transcendental formulation of such argumentation, see Taylor (1979).

[27] This is further defended in Pihlström (2003).

[28] For a more detailed discussion of this issue, see Pihlström (2010b).

[29] See again Lowe (2006). 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.

[30] 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 (1999).

## 3. Pragmatism and Critical Philosophy

[1] Compare this to Kant's articulation of the idea of the 'discipline of reason' in the 'Doctrine of Method' (*Methodenlehre*) of the first *Critique*.

[2] In her very interesting analysis of Jamesian pragmatism as a philosophy of eschatological hope, Angela Sager (2017) defends a kind of pragmatist and melioristic theodicism, thus taking a critical stance toward the kind of Jamesian approach I have tried to develop in my earlier work (Pihlström 2013a, 2014b) as well as in this book.

[3] Notebook sheets from 1870, quoted in Perry (1964 [1948]: 120–121). Here James saw that fighting evil—holding that 'though evil slay me, she can't subdue me, or make me worship her' (ibid.: 121)—presupposes the freedom of the will, and was thus connected with the key problem of his spiritual crisis. (Freedom, of course, is necessary, according to James, for any serious ethical philosophy. Perry notes that 'moralism' is just one name for what might be described as James's 'fundamental seriousness'; see ibid.: 388.)

[4] In a strikingly non-Jamesian manner, Trakakis (2018) defends an antitheodicism indebted to Bradley's absolute idealism. While it is easy to agree with Trakakis (see also his introduction to Trakakis [ed.] 2018) that new approaches—including new metaphysical approaches and novel analyses of the divinity—are vitally needed in the stalemate that the philosophical discussion concerning the problem of evil and suffering has reached, and even that Hegelian-cum-Bradleyan absolute idealism may be able to avoid crude anthropomorphisms often presupposed in theodicist conceptions of God, it is less easy to maintain that the absolute idealist's way of

getting rid of the problem of evil would be anything more than a theodicy by other means.

[5] Note also that it is fully compatible with this Jamesian concern with the reality of, and truth about, evil to maintain that evil is real not as a substance of its own, let alone any 'demonic' greatness, but rather in its superficiality and banality, in a kind of emptiness that nevertheless tends to spread like a 'fungus'. See Arendt (1994 [1963]) and Bernstein's (2018: 66–67) analysis of the Arendtian refusal to 'mythologize' evil. For James as much as for Arendt, the reality of evil and suffering is non-mythological. On banality, see also Minnich (2017).

[6] A critical question, to be explored later in this chapter, is whether this rejection of metaphysical realism and its conception of objective truth maintains sufficient grounds for continuing to think in terms of an ordinary notion of truth needed for the kind of sincerity necessary for the antitheodicist project generally, or whether a slippery slope is opened from the Jamesian position toward a Rortyan one (see below).

[7] Positive thinking is possible and meaningful (arguably only) against a melancholic background, against the negativities that a 'sick soul' perceives in her/his world. Positive individual contributions, then, have their legitimate role to play, empirically speaking, provided that a pessimistic position is accepted transcendentally. Only the sick soul sees, profoundly enough, that everything is *not* all right, that the world is, for many of us (at least 'the wounded'), in an important sense a wrong or even evil place, and that therefore pragmatic, even positive, thinking and 'difference-making' is required. Otherwise, no 'positive' approach can be serious enough. On James's views on the 'sick soul', see James (1958 [1902]), as well as the discussion in Kivistö & Pihlström (2016: chapter 6).

[8] According to Quine's famous holism, logical and mathematical beliefs (or sentences) are in principle on a par with empirical scientific beliefs (or sentences). See Quine (1980 [1953]: chapter 2).

[9] For the realistic reading, also directed against Rorty's own pragmatism, see, e.g., van Inwagen (1993: 69) and Mounce (1997: 211–218).

[10] This is followed by the well-known Rortyan one-liner, 'If we take care of freedom, truth can take care of itself'.

[11] Kant (1983b [1791]). The essay was first published in *Berlinische Monatsschrift*, September 1791: 194–225. In referencing, even though I am citing the Cambridge English translation, the standard *Akademie-Ausgabe* numbering will be used. For secondary literature focusing on the theodicy essay, see, e.g., Brachtendorff (2002) and Galbraith (2006). For a more detailed consideration, see Kivistö & Pihlström (2016: chapter 2); cf. also Dahl (2019: chapter 3).

[12] For Bernstein's insightful reading of Kant's theory of radical evil, see Bernstein (2002: chapter 1).

[13] On insincerity and dishonesty in the philosophy of religion, with the problem of evil as an example, see Trakakis (2017).

[14] The Jamesian suggestion that a truthful relation to reality in general necessarily includes as its element a full recognition of individual experiences of suffering in their irreducibility can be compared to the way in which the Party of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, despite the horrible light of the torture rooms and the gaze penetrating everywhere, leaves into the shade precisely such individual experiences. Light everywhere may actually disclose the truth of hidden suffering. A comparison to Hemingway's short story, 'A Clean and Well-Lighted Place', suggests itself but must be left for another occasion. (See also Allen [1995] for related, highly relevant explorations of the relation between truth and truthfulness.)

[15] This is argued in some detail in Kivistö & Pihlström (2016: chapter 5).

[16] It might be suggested, for Levinasian reasons (and here I am again indebted to Panu-Matti Pöykkö), that it is misleading to speak about the moral 'point of view', because such a phrase seems to presuppose that one could either adopt or refuse or fail to adopt such a point of view. In contrast to such assumptions, one might argue that the moral standpoint, or the moral framework, or attitude, is inescapable—or, better, transcendentally present and constitutive of our lives (including our adoption of any points of view whatsoever). I am sticking to this phrase in the interest of brevity and easiness of expression, but I do acknowledge this Levinasian critical point.

[17] Note that I am not claiming that James would be committed to any explicitly Kantian antitheodicy. His antitheodicism, in my view, is Kantian in the broader sense of arguing that it is a necessary condition for the possibility of a moral point of view that evil and suffering are not explained away or justified. He rejects precisely the kind of rationalizing justification that Job's 'friends' paradigmatically offer. My worry is whether this Kantian approach works in the overall context of Jamesian pragmatism, with its softened pragmatic notion of truth applied to the acknowledgment of the reality of suffering (as outlined above).

[18] This criticism of Rorty (which is also, implicitly, a qualified criticism of Jamesian pragmatism, though *not* a proposal to give up that pragmatism but, rather, to carefully rethink its current value, being aware of its potential problems) comes close to James Conant's highly detailed—and devastating—attack on Rorty's reading of Orwell. See Conant (2000) as well as Rorty (2000).

## 4. Religious Truth, Acknowledgment, and Diversity

[1] It could be suggested—though this line of inquiry lies beyond the scope of my discussion—that the diversity and plurality characteristic of the human

condition characterized in terms of Hannah Arendt's notion of *natality*, our ability to initiate things, to always begin something new, is inherently antitheodicist, because it must be opposed to any imagined historical necessity that theodicies also typically invoke. For a lucid discussion, see Bernstein (2018: 88–89, 118–119). The classical reference here is Arendt (1958).

[2] See Honneth (2005 [1992]). For a major recent contribution to the recognition discussion in theology and religious studies, see Saarinen (2016).

[3] See also, for a very different but not unrelated analysis, Rähme's (2018) discussion of religious disagreement as irreducible to explicit disagreement about the truth of 'religious propositions'.

[4] On the topic of 'political evil' more generally, see Wolfe (2011).

[5] I have in mind cases like Hannah Arendt's (1994 [1963]) report on Adolf Eichmann's trial and Timothy Snyder's (2010) thought-provoking historical investigations of Eastern Europe before and during World War II. These are, for philosophers or theologians reflecting on evil and suffering, not merely concrete examples but profoundly philosophical material. I am not saying, of course, that philosophical inquiries into evil and suffering ought to be reduced to empirical studies. However, the empirical material analyzed in this kind of reflections on evil and suffering can play a key role in our philosophical attempts to understand these phenomena. It may, that is, enrich and pragmatically naturalize our reflections on the *constitutive* role played by an antitheodicist approach to evil and suffering—constitutive, above all, for the possibility of the ethical point of view itself (see below). Another kind of enrichment, or pragmatic naturalization, of philosophical views on evil and suffering is the type we find in fictional literature, e.g., Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

[6] One possible way of cashing out the distinction between the concepts of recognition and acknowledgment I am trying to articulate here is by suggesting that acknowledgment operates at a transcendental level in comparison to the empirical acts of recognition directed toward concrete others. Acknowledgment, *qua* transcendental, would thus always be 'realized as' empirical/factual recognition acts. (Think of this through an analogy taken from the philosophy of mind: mental states and acts are realized in physiological, neural, or ultimately physical states.) This intuitive idea needs more systematic development, though.

[7] In some imaginable cases, one's being truthful—or 'true to oneself', or authentic, as one might also phrase it—might require one's not, or not immediately, telling the truth about some particular matter to everyone concerned.

[8] For analyses of James's individualism in relation to his views on religion and truth, see, e.g., Pawelski (2007) and Polke (2018). See also Pihlström (2013a).

[9] On James as a critic of theodicism, see Kivistö & Pihlström (2016: chapter 5).

[10] For a more comprehensive discussion, see Kivistö & Pihlström (2016).

[11] Another way of cashing out the distinction between recognition and acknowledgment might be the following (perhaps indebted to Levinas rather than the pragmatists—and thus I'm here influenced by Panu-Matti Pöykkö's ideas on how to read Levinas in relation to Stanley Cavell). While recognizing others in the real empirical world is always a matter of recognizing 'as', with some specific 'as' clause defining the content of recognition, at a transcendental level we may also speak about acknowledgment without any such specific 'as'. The transcendental recognition (acknowledgment) of the other as such, without any 'as' at all, is like a Kantian *Grenzbegriff*, or—in a way comparable to Wittgenstein's transcendental subject—a 'limit' of the world. Such transcendental acknowledgment always collapses into, or is realized in terms of, some empirical or factual ('real-life') recognition ('as' something). This could be thought of in terms of the concept of realization as it has been used in the philosophy of mind and general metaphysics (e.g., every mental property is realized in some physical system), but here it is important to understand the transcendental character of the issue. See also Pihlström (2016).

[12] This also again leads us to the examination of suffering in the Book of Job, where Job's, unlike his friends', attitude to suffering can be regarded as truthful and sincere. For a recent overview of the problem of evil taking its departure from the Book of Job, see Dahl (2019).

[13] This theme runs through Rorty's entire work, but Rorty's 1989 book containing the Orwell essay is one of its best articulations.

[14] On the concept of mediated recognition, see Koskinen (2017, 2019) and Saarinen (2016). I am crucially indebted to Koskinen for his careful systematic analysis of recognition and other recognition-theoretical notions.

[15] For an articulation of this idea, see Kivistö & Pihlström (2016: chapter 6).

[16] Acknowledging otherness and others' suffering by acknowledging the truthfulness and sincerity of the others' experience (and face, *à la* Levinas) could be seen as a theme integrating the concerns of James and Levinas. Surprisingly, the problem of evil is not really thematized in Megan Craig's (2011) otherwise important study on Levinas and James. This truthfulness or sincerity, again, is to be distinguished from the attitude of Job's so-called friends, who pursue theoretical and theodicist truth—propositional truth—rather than ethically profound and communicative truthfulness. Reading James through Levinas here requires us to read him through Levinas's reading of Kant and the Kantian antitheodicy. For Levinas's antitheodicy, see especially Levinas (2006).

[17] This observation internal to the critical self-examination of pragmatism might be interestingly compared to the kind of commitment to truth in ethics and politics that we find in Hannah Arendt's work, in particular, as analyzed by Bernstein (2018).

[18] As analyzed, e.g., in Margalit (2002).

[19] See, e.g., Primo Levi's works (to be discussed in Chapter 6 below), as well as Agamben (2002 [1999]). Sachs (2011: 290) insightfully analyzes how 'theodicy interferes with our capacity to acknowledge the Holocaust'.

[20] It seems to me—though I cannot defend this view here (but it is defended in Kivistö & Pihlström 2016)—that the most interesting and profound disagreement lies not between theism and atheism or between religious believers and nonbelievers, but between the overall ethical and religious attitudes to suffering (and, hence, to reality generally) adopted by theodicism and antitheodicism.

[21] By metaphysical realism we may here (as earlier in the book) simply mean the view that the world possesses its own fundamental ontological structure independently of our perspectives of conceptualization and inquiry and can, therefore, in principle be truly and completely described from an absolute standpoint (i.e., a 'view from nowhere', or a 'God's-Eye View'). Metaphysical realism is, in fact, a conjunction of various more specific forms of realism, especially ontological, semantic, and epistemological (see especially Chapter 1 above for more details on various realisms).

[22] Consider, again, some analogies raised earlier. The distinction between the epistemic and the non-epistemic (e.g., regarding truth) is itself (partly) epistemic, not independent of our epistemic standpoints in drawing the distinction. The distinction between 'real' and 'virtual' reality is itself neither fully real nor fully virtual; these are interpenetrated and interdependent in the drawing of the distinction (with some form of realism entangled with constructivism). Similarly, the distinction between natural and supernatural is relative to our concept of nature, hence to the historical development of science (more or less like the distinction between science and pseudoscience is). However, none of these distinctions simply reflects something that is 'given' in the fundamental structure of reality as such, or the world as it is in itself. We should keep these analogies in mind when exploring the prospects of realism and its critical alternatives in relation to theodicism.

[23] On the other hand, atheist criticisms of theism, based on the argument *from* evil (e.g., J.L. Mackie's well-known logical argument), have also been attacked precisely because of their commitment to axiological or moral realism, a standard assumption in the theodicy discourse. Consider especially Carson (2007), criticizing Mackie's problematic combination of moral error theory and assumption of moral realism in his formulation of the logical problem of evil. Mackie, a famous critic of moral realism and theism, seems to assume the truth of moral realism in his discussion of the problem of evil, as he assumes that pain and suffering are mind-independently bad or evil. The issue, then, concerns the mutual (in)coherence of Mackie's widely read works such as Mackie (1977, 1983). This argument obviously targets Mackie in an *ad hominem* fashion, but it may teach a more general lesson, though.

[24] I am indebted to Panu-Matti Pöykkö's still mostly unpublished work on this feature of Levinas's thought.

[25] Similarly, metaphysical realism objectifies human death into a mere empirical and factual event in the world, while a more Kantian-oriented transcendental approach to human mortality seeks to understand death as a limit phenomenon and horizon of life without which no worldly events would be humanly possible, cf. Pihlström (2016).

[26] Note, however, that the presupposing relation can be bilateral: according to Byrne realism itself presupposes the project of providing a theodicy (as something that generically and essentially belongs to religions).

[27] Or what Francis Jonbäck calls the 'value agnostic response' to divine hiddenness: see Jonbäck (2016).

[28] See Jürgen Habermas's book with this title: Habermas (2010).

[29] So the supposition that I *could* so much as be a moral subject in the absence of the more fundamental relation to the other, in the absence of taking seriously the ethical demand of taking the other seriously, amounts to merely an attempt to conceal one's fundamental ethically concerned predicament. (I will get back to this formulation, due to Steven Crowell, in the concluding section of this chapter.)

[30] Note that 'reductively' here does not mean, e.g., 'materialistically'; one can be a reductionist by being a monistic idealist or Hegelian, for instance. James's criticism of monism is again relevant here.

[31] It can be suggested that if evil indeed is part of God's good creation, then the theodicy problem does not even arise, as its presuppositions are not fulfilled: it cannot even be coherently posed, because everything, as created by God, is by definition meaningful. (Akeel Bilgrami once formulated a friendly criticism of a related paper of mine in this way.) The antitheodicist criticism of theodicies can also focus on the very availability of the theodicy problem in this sense—and on the assumption that there must be (somewhere) the kind of meaning postulated by theodicies.

[32] See Chapter 3 above for a brief discussion as well as Kivistö & Pihlström (2016: chapter 5) for a more detailed treatment.

[33] Pragmatism can still function as the meta-level position within which realism prevails. Reflexively, then, such meta-level pragmatism 'works' and is therefore pragmatically true.

[34] The fact that metaphysical realism and theodicies seek the objective, absolute, and general *truth*—from a God's-Eye View—about suffering and its reasons by itself incorporates a failure to acknowledge the perspectival diversity of individual suffering, yielding a moral *reductio* of metaphysical realism.

[35] I am here indebted to a suggestion made by Steven Crowell in relation to a paper of mine I presented at a conference on pragmatism and phenomenology in Tübingen in May, 2017. Crowell formulated this as a Levinasian rejoinder to the kinds of worries raised here.

[36] In fact, we might view Kant's transcendental idealism as a presupposition of his antitheodicism. This is suggested explicitly in some hitherto unpub-

lished work by Lauri Snellman (to whose careful analysis of the metaphysical background assumptions of the problem of evil I am greatly indebted). According to Snellman (2019), 'Kant's antitheodicy […] rests on his meta-metaphysical theory of transcendental idealism to show that attempts to unify facts with values through the principle of sufficient reason end up in speculative metaphysics. Thus Kant takes up the need for a critique of speculative metaphysics for a successful antitheodicy'. Snellman has also fully convinced me that antitheodicism needs not only moral but also metaphysical motivation and analysis. See his very comprehensive forthcoming work on the topic (Snellman 2020).

## 5. The Limits of Language and Harmony

[1] In this chapter, I will cite Wittgenstein's well-known works by using the standard abridgments spelled out in the bibliography (e.g., TLP stands for *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, or Wittgenstein 1974 [1921], and so forth).

[2] See Phillips (1977, 2004); Tilghman (1994: 192); and Mulhall (1994: 18–19).

[3] See Gleeson (2012: chapter 1); Burley (2012: §5).

[4] A paradigm case of such insensitive disregard for the sufferer's own perspective is manifested by the 'friends' in the Book of Job, as they come to deliver their allegedly comforting (theodicist) speeches (cf. Kivistö & Pihlström 2016: chapter 2).

[5] Regarding Phillips's philosophical methodology generally, I refer the reader to Koistinen's (2011, 2012) illuminating analysis.

[6] Note that this is my rephrasing of Phillips's view. Wittgensteinian philosophers of religion, including Phillips, usually avoid the Kantian vocabulary of transcendental philosophy.

[7] Cited in Klagge (2011: 210n26).

[8] The basic point of the examination of Kantian antitheodicy in Kivistö & Pihlström (2016) is that antitheodicy is required for transcendental reasons as a necessary condition for the possibility of adopting a moral point of view on the world and other human beings. Apart from this specific 'Kantian' feature of (Wittgensteinian) antitheodicist thought, there is of course the more general question concerning the degree to which Wittgenstein's philosophy, early or late, should be approached from a Kantian transcendental standpoint. My discussion here falls into the Kantian tradition of reading the *Tractatus*, as developed by Stenius (1960), Kannisto (1986), and Appelqvist (2016), among others, but I am also willing to view the later Wittgenstein along analogous lines as well (cf. also Pihlström 2003, 2006a).

[9] While these remarks are indeed fragmentary and in many ways difficult to interpret, I believe it makes sense to focus on this specific concept (along with related ones, especially harmony) rather than the elusive overall picture of Wittgenstein's (early) ethics, invoking notions such as the metaphysical

subject (as a 'limit' of the world), God, the mystical, the limits of language, etc. All these notions belong to the same family of related concepts in terms of which we may try to express the inexpressible—i.e., the ethical—but it is helpful to restrict the discussion to a relatively narrow set of remarks explicitly dealing with happiness in order to highlight the main concern of this chapter, the relation between harmony and theodicy.

[10] Aristotle also famously maintains that only happiness (*eudaimonia*) is pursued only as a goal in itself and never as a means for something else*:* 'Now such a thing happiness, above all else, is held to be; for this we choose always for self and never for the sake of something else, but honour, pleasure, reason, and every virtue we choose indeed for themselves (for if nothing resulted from them we should still choose each of them), but we choose them also for the sake of happiness, judging that by means of them we shall be happy. Happiness, on the other hand, no one chooses for the sake of these, nor, in general, for anything other than itself' (*Nicomachean Ethics*, I, 7).

[11] Peter Winch, one of the best-known Wittgenstein-inspired moral philosophers, writes: 'For to accept [the absolute demand of the moral 'ought'] is to think that, compared with the importance of acting honourably and justly (for instance), nothing else matters. And this *is* to bear the afflictions that life brings patiently—i.e., not to be deflected from acting decently even under the pressure of misfortune. A man who has such an attitude to life sees that as long as afflictions do not thus deflect him, they do not harm him—not in relation to what he regards as really important in his life' (Winch 1972: 206–207; for a comparable discussion, interestingly citing *Antigone*, see Dilman 1974: 182). This is, obviously, also a (qualified) return to Kant's view that there is nothing higher than the moral law or duty itself. What is at issue here is the 'pointlessness' of morality and moral virtue: asking 'why be moral?' (as if there could be some good reason for that) amounts to moving out of morality. The 'point' of morality is not to pursue happiness. The 'point' of morality is that morality does not have any 'point' beyond itself. To take this seriously is to take seriously the view that it is not happiness (especially not one's own happiness) but, rather, others' suffering that should be in the focus of our moral thought and deliberation (cf. again Kivistö & Pihlström 2016). How exactly such a conception of the fundamental significance of the moral point of view can be tied up with Wittgensteinian considerations of happiness needs to be examined in some detail.

[12] It may also be noted that while Kant disconnects moral duty and virtue from happiness in his ethical theory he in a way reconnects happiness and virtue in the concept of the *summum bonum* employed in his argumentation for the postulates of practical reason. As this is not a study on Kant, I will set aside here the question of whether this leads to a theodicy by other means.

[13] A variant of this phrase is available early in the entry on July 29, 1916: '*Und dass die Welt des Glücklichen eine andere ist als die Welt des Unglücklichen,*

*ist auch klar*' (cf. TLP 6.43). However, at the end of the entry, Wittgenstein also rhetorically asks whether there can be a world that is neither happy nor unhappy: '*Kann es also eine Welt geben, die weder glücklich nor unglücklich ist?*' (NB, July 29, 1916).

[14] See especially NB 73-87, i.e., the series of entries starting around July 6, 1916. (My references to NB will provide the dates of the entries; I will mostly cite the original German text.) For relevant discussions of the enigmatic passages on happiness in the *Notebooks* and the *Tractatus*, see, e.g., Mounce (1981: 96–97); Suter (1989); Brockhaus (1991: 327–331); Garver (1994: 99–101); Bearn (1997: 71–73); Klagge (2011: 8–10), with an emphasis on the Schopenhauerian influences of Wittgenstein; and Balaska (2014), rightly emphasizing the 'non-contentful' character of happiness yet unfortunately neglecting the transcendental aspects of Wittgenstein's view. For an extended treatment, with plenty of references to secondary literature, of the peculiar (transcendentally) *solipsistic* character of Wittgenstein's conception of ethics and the self in the *Tractatus*, see Pihlström (2020c).

[15] NB, July 8, 1916. Cf. also NB, July 14, 1916. In addition to being happy (in a sense comparable to the *carpe diem* tradition), the one who lives 'in the present' also, according to Wittgenstein, lives eternally ('*ewig*'), insofar as eternity ('*Ewigkeit*') is understood not as infinite temporal duration but as timelessness or non-temporality ('*Unzeitlichkeit*') (NB, July 8, 1916; cf. TLP 6.4311). On the relevance of the *Tractatus* and Wittgenstein's views generally to the philosophy of death, dying, and mortality, see, e.g., Pihlström (2016).

[16] NB, July 8, 1916; cf. Bearn (1997: 71).

[17] All emphases in the original. At this point, it is natural to read Wittgenstein's references to God, or God's will, as somewhat Stoic articulations of the interdependence of the notions of the world, fate, and God. To be happy is to be in agreement with the world that is independent of my will, which is the same thing as to be in agreement with God's will—or, equivalently, one's ultimate fate—without ever complaining about it or trying to resist it. (Compare, however, also: '*Der Mensch kann sich nicht ohne weiteres glücklich machen*'; NB, July 14, 1916). In later diary entries, published as *Denkbewegungen*, Wittgenstein tends to associate this kind of happiness as being joyous about one's work ('*fröhlich zu sein in meiner Arbeit*'): '*Das Höchste aber, das ich zu erfüllen bereit bin, ist: "fröhlich zu sein in meiner Arbeit". D.h.: nicht unbescheiden, gutmütig, nicht direkt lügnerisch, im Unglück nicht ungeduldig*' (D 167-168, February 13, 1937). The link to the (anti)theodicy discussion is critical here: recall how Job resists and complains about his fate, refusing to accept either the sufferings that he must go through or his friends' theodicist explanations and justifications postulating a kind of divine harmony (cf. Kivistö & Pihlström 2016: chapter 2).

[18] See TLP 6.421. Bearn (1997: 72) helpfully explains: 'The propositions of logic are not fully propositions. The actions that make up a happy life are

not fully actions, for they do not serve the interests of the psychological will. Thus the happy life has no particular satisfaction-conditions in much the way that a tautology has no particular truth conditions. The actions of the happy man are no more easily called actions than the propositions of logic are called propositions. They may be discerned by their differences'. See also ibid.: 176.

[19] Here it is important to perceive (as has been emphasized by Hanne Appelqvist, among others, on several occasions) that while Wittgenstein in the *Notebooks* passage (at the end of the entry on July 30, 1916) claims ethics to be *transcendent*, he says, in the corresponding *locus* of the *Tractatus*, that ethics is *transcendental* (TLP 6.421). While even some highly recognized scholars occasionally tend to confuse transcendence and transcendentality in this context (see, e.g., Dilman 1974: 188–189), this cannot be a mere slip of pen on Wittgenstein's part, given that Wittgenstein was very well familiar with this Kantian vocabulary especially through his well-documented reading of Schopenhauer. Happiness and the related ethico-metaphysical notions (e.g., the metaphysical subject, the world, and life) are, precisely, transcendental in the sense that they do not lie anywhere beyond the world of facts but in a way at the limit of the world, structuring the world into a totality to which we (or I) can have an ethical attitude. See here also Garver (1994: 99–101). At this point, it seems slightly puzzling to me that Wittgenstein speaks about the happy life as in a sense '*more harmonious*' ('harmonischer') than the unhappy life (NB, July 30, 1916); one might suppose harmony in this profound transcendental sense to be an all-or-nothing affair with no comparativity.

[20] Thus, it could be suggested that the mere intellectual acceptance of 'harmony' in a metaphysical or theological sense is only a necessary, not a sufficient condition for happiness, just like living in the present is (see Brockhaus 1991: 327–328).

[21] For an antitheodicist appeal to divine love—instead of any theoretical argument allegedly justifying evil—see Gleeson (2012, 2018); cf. also Betenson (2019). As important as this theological response may be, one might wonder whether it in the end arrives at a theodicy by other means (and one not altogether different from the anthropomorphisms of the kind of analytic theodicies to be rejected). In contrast, it seems to me that Dilman's conception of love is thoroughly ethical, even if it does not preclude theological construals of the notion.

[22] One aspect of the Wittgensteinian conception of harmony is that it is not merely metaphysico-theological (relating to God or fate) and ethical (relating to our duty of living rightly) but also *aesthetic*; beauty, as the aim of art, Wittgenstein tells us, is what makes one happy ('*Und das Schöne ist eben das, was glücklich macht*') (NB, October 21, 1916). He also asks whether the world is from an artistic perspective seen 'with a happy eye': '*Ist das das Wesen der künstlerischen Betrachtungsweise, dass sie die Welt mit glück-*

*lichem Auge betrachtet?*' (NB, October 20, 1916). This is only natural given the famous identification of ethics with aesthetics (see TLP 6.421; NB, July 24, 1916). On the aesthetic dimensions of happiness and harmony in Wittgenstein, see, e.g., Tilghman (1991: 75–77, and chapter 4 *passim*); Balaska (2014); on the Kantian aspects of Wittgenstein's views on aesthetics, see especially Appelqvist (2013).

[23] As noted above, a more general treatment of the vast issue of nonsensicality in (early) Wittgenstein is beyond the concerns of this chapter (though I am grateful to an anonymous referee for raising this issue, along with many others). In an obvious way this entire discussion fails to make sense by the Tractarian standards. Wittgenstein's transcendental pronouncements—about not only mystical ethical matters but of course also about logic and the conditions for the possibility of linguistic meaning—themselves remain nonsensical in their own terms. In the 'Lecture on Ethics' Wittgenstein also speaks about the 'cage' of language whose walls we run against when trying to put ethics into words (see especially PO 44). In the famous metaphor, a book on ethics would, 'with an explosion', destroy all other books (PO 40). Now this lack of self-consistency is a fair worry in any Wittgensteinian investigation, but here we must simply help ourselves to some (admittedly self-referentially inconsistent) Wittgensteinian ideas in order to look and see how they may figure in the theodicy vs. antitheodicy discussion this chapter primarily contributes to. I am happy to leave more detailed treatments of Wittgenstein's views on *Unsinn* to, e.g., those who want to continue the controversy regarding the 'New Wittgenstein' (cf. Crary & Read 2000) and more traditional (e.g., Kantian) interpretations.

[24] It is also worth emphasizing that whenever Wittgenstein has anything to say about happiness, or about life being right or wrong, he is not just making general philosophical remarks but is also deeply concerned about the fate of *his own* soul, so to speak. According to many, his own life must have been 'fiercely unhappy'—as one of his early biographers, Norman Malcolm, puts it (Malcolm 1984: 81). However, as Malcolm and many others remind us, Wittgenstein's last words in April 1951 indicated that he had had a 'wonderful' life—whatever that ultimately means, or meant. See also Klagge (2011: 153–154).

[25] On moral antitheodicism protesting against the illusion of harmony, see, in addition to the Wittgensteinian philosophers' contributions already cited, e.g., Sachs (2011); Verbin (2015); Betenson (2016); as well as (again) Kivistö & Pihlström (2016).

[26] I will not take any stand on the accuracy of different possible translations of Wittgenstein's text, but it should be noted that it is nowadays customary to translate Kant's critical term '*Erkenntnis*' as 'cognition' rather than 'knowledge'.

[27] The crucial distinction between *knowing* and *acknowledging* has been emphasized by Cavell (1979), in particular. See also, e.g., Sachs (2011). See Chapters 1 and 4 for further remarks on recognition and acknowledgment.

[28] See the chapter, 'Useless Suffering' (first published in 1986), in Levinas (2006).

[29] Accordingly, when Wittgenstein in the oft-cited remark in *Culture and Value* speaks about the 'infinite' or 'ultimate' distress ('*die höchste Not*') an individual can experience, maintaining that even the whole world cannot be in a greater distress than an individual soul, a person who feels her-/himself 'lost' (CV 52–53, c. 1944), this could be read as his personal reflection on his own despair but also as a detached reflection on the way in which we should always recognize others' sufferings.

[30] Incidentally, this may be compared to the memorable phrase, 'the cries of the wounded', occurring in James's 1891 essay, 'The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life' (in James 1979 [1897]), arguably highly central in James's pragmatist antitheodicy.

[31] As suggested in Kivistö & Pihlström (2016: chapter 6).

[32] Dilman thus also sees Wittgenstein (as well as, among others, Simone Weil) as returning to the Socratic view that the evil person is necessarily unhappy, while the one who 'dedicates his life to justice' is by necessity happy, 'no matter how the world treats him' (Dilman 1974: 183–184). See the quotation from Peter Winch above.

[33] For some more elaboration on Dilman's views on love, see Pihlström and Kivistö (2019).

[34] Wittgenstein is known for his high appreciation of Dostoevsky (as well as Tolstoy). *The Brothers Karamazov* is, of course, a standard reference in moral antitheodicism protesting against any allegedly harmonious reconciliation with pain and suffering. See, e.g., Gleeson (2012).

[35] Also recall, however, Kant's concept of the *summum bonum* (see above).

[36] See Kivistö & Pihlström (2016: 282–283); cf. James (1958 [1902]). Wittgenstein's high regard for James is also well known and documented (see, e.g., Goodman 2002). It is generally known that Wittgenstein read James's *Varieties* carefully. The ways in which Jamesian ideas may have reached Wittgensteinian philosophers' antitheodicist thought via Wittgenstein himself would still require further historical investigation, however. For a careful recent investigation of Wittgenstein's late views (especially *On Certainty*) in relation to the pragmatist tradition, see Boncompagni (2016).

[37] Cf., e.g., the postmortem compensation theodicy defended by Adams (1989, 2013).

[38] Admittedly, theodicies typically seek harmony *in* the world. A Wittgensteinian refusal to find harmony *in* the world while still seeking to find it in one's transcendental attitude to the world as a whole might thus, despite its pursuit of harmony, be compatible with antitheodicy and its insistence on recognizing worldly disharmony. However, the worry here is that even the meta-level pursuit of harmony might in the end indirectly contribute to the theodicist project—or at least the antitheodicist ought to be aware of this potential risk.

[39] See Kivistö & Pihlström (2016: chapter 6) on the need to see antitheodicism as a criticism of one's own potential tendencies toward theodicism rather than a moralising criticism of others' views.

[40] The 'New Wittgensteinians', in particular, seem to dismiss the 'limit' metaphor rather straightforwardly: '[…] I think the spatial conception, the picture of boundary, is misleading here, in inviting us to take there to be something, the existence of certain limits, that explains the kinds of ways we are distant from each other, and makes possible also an explanation of the conditions for shared understanding' (Diamond 2005: 114). On 'New Wittgensteinianism' generally, see Crary & Read (2000).

[41] Similarly—albeit in a somewhat different tradition of reading Wittgenstein—Hilary Putnam joins Stanley Cavell and James Conant in arguing that when distinguishing between what 'makes sense' and what does not we should not operate in terms of the distinction between what we 'can' and 'cannot' do. See especially Putnam (1994: chapter 12) ('Rethinking Mathematical Necessity'), also reprinted, e.g., in Crary & Read (2000).

[42] Phillips, in particular, has offered numerous arguments in virtually all areas of philosophy of religion at least implicitly invoking the theme of the limits of language—regarding, for example, evidence in relation to religious belief, death and immortality, religious conceptions of the soul and of God, as well as the problem of evil, typically claiming that realist and evidentialist views misconstrue the grammar of religious language, thus resorting to an account of religion that seriously distorts the way in which believers themselves use language. See, e.g., Phillips (1970, 1977, 1986, 1993, 2004); cf. my discussion of the limit between religious and pseudo-religious language use in Pihlström (2007, 2013a). On transcendental arguments in moral philosophy, in particular, see Brune et al. (2017).

[43] One might thus suggest that the kind of particularism emphasized in literary readings and the kind of universalism embedded in Kantian transcendental philosophy are not necessarily incompatible. But I will not be able to argue for this meta-level view here.

[44] I am not assuming any traditional received view on the simple divisibility of Wittgenstein's philosophy into two phases, the early and the late. For example, the 'third Wittgenstein' is to be taken very seriously in this context, and it is equally important to note the significant philosophical and methodological continuities between the 'early' and the 'late' Wittgenstein, perhaps most importantly the transcendental methodology itself. My references to Wittgenstein's 'early' and 'late' writings in the context of the philosophy of religion are thus only intended to keep things relatively clear and simple; no heavy interpretive assumptions should be read into this categorization.

[45] I am here again basically following Hanne Appelqvist's Kantian interpretation of Wittgenstein, which builds upon Stenius's (1960) and Kannisto's (1986) scholarship but emphasizes the role of aesthetics (in relation to Kant) much more strongly. See Appelqvist (2012, 2013, 2016, 2018).

[46] For an examination of the transcendental subject in this Wittgensteinian context (and more broadly), see, e.g., Pihlström (2016).

[47] On the other hand, Wittgenstein (in LC) also maintains that there is a 'gulf' separating the believer from the non-believer.

[48] Note that Wittgenstein talks variously about pictures (mostly using the German word '*Bild*'), similes, patterns, images, metaphors, analogies, and so forth; works such as *Culture and Value* and *Philosophical Occasions* are rich sources of material here. It is worth pointing out that in the 'Lecture on Ethics' he maintains that ethical and religious expressions seem to be 'just *similes*' (PO 42). In ethical and religious language 'we seem constantly to be using similes', he says, but then again 'a simile must be the simile for *something*', which is not the case here: '[…] if I can describe a fact by means of a simile I must also be able to drop the simile and to describe the facts without it. Now in our case as soon as we try to drop the simile and simply to state the facts which stand behind it, we find that there are no such facts. And so, what at first appeared to be a simile now seems to be mere nonsense' (PO 42–43). These reservations—again regarding the limits of language—ought to be kept in mind when we turn to the later Wittgenstein's use of the term 'picture', for instance.

[49] In a related remark in 1950 (CV 97) Wittgenstein suggests that there are experiences of life that may educate or even force us into believing in God, but these are not evidential experiences but for instance sufferings of various kinds. We might suppose that such experiences may also include the kind of experience briefly discussed in 'A Lecture on Ethics', namely, the experience of being absolutely safe and the one of wondering at the existence of the world (cf. above).

[50] I am indebted to Hanne Appelqvist for this formulation—and for many others in this chapter as well.

[51] I have elsewhere argued at some length for a re-reading of Wittgenstein that links his late philosophy of language with both the Kantian transcendental tradition and the pragmatist tradition; see Pihlström (2003). For an attempt to connect broadly Wittgensteinian approaches with pragmatist philosophy of religion more specifically, see Pihlström (2013a).

[52] This also indicates a difference between the early Wittgenstein, for whom necessities are based on a universal and unchanging logical form, and the later Wittgenstein, for whom necessities arise out of the forms of life within which we engage in various language games.

[53] Compare this to methodological controversies related to, e.g., the cognitive study of religion: it seems that such methodological issues might be more fruitfully discussed if the distinction between 'internal' (hermeneutic, understanding) and 'external' (causally explanatory) perspectives were made more clearly.

[54] Even the direction of transcendental argumentation may vary according to our perspective of inquiry, as argued in Kivistö & Pihlström (2016: chapter 6).

[55] Analogously, it could be suggested that even Kant's original transcendental philosophy, despite its formalism and apiorism, fundamentally relies on the 'transcendental fact' that the human cognitive faculty is of a certain kind and has certain specific features—features that it has contingently, not out of any metaphysical necessity. For example, it is, arguably, a contingent (yet transcendental) fact about human beings and their cognition that we do not possess the capacity of intellectual intuition, even though this fact is then an element in the transcendental structure of conditions and limits constitutive of any humanly possible experience and its objects. ('Here one can only *describe* and say: this is what human life is like' [PO 121]). See also Chapter 2.

[56] This is structurally analogous to the critique of metaphysical realism in Chapter 4 above. Note that I am here (as in Kivistö & Pihlström 2016) using the word 'theodicism' broadly to cover not only theistic theodicies but also the requirement that theism ought to provide a theodicy, which is something that atheists typically share when attacking theism by appealing to the 'argument from evil'. (Moreover, theodicism also comes in secular versions.)

[57] Betenson (2019) defends antitheodicism by invoking the moral necessity of rejecting any way of 'reasonably' justifying the Holocaust, suggesting that this 'necessitated response' is comparable to Wittgensteinian 'hinge propositions' and to what Raimond Gaita (e.g., 2000) and other Wittgensteinian philosophers have called 'unthinkabilities'. I am tempted to agree with him here, though I would construe the relevant kind of 'unthinkabilities' in a Kantian-like transcendental fashion (cf. Pihlström 2011a)—and indeed I have argued for a transcendental account of antitheodicism as a constitutive condition for the possibility of the moral point of view (cf. Kivistö & Pihlström 2016: chapter 6). In Betenson's (2019) preferred terms (partly derived from Gaita), this point may of course be rephrased by arguing that rejecting certain moral judgments (e.g., concerning the unacceptability of theodicist justifications of the Holocaust) would amount to rejecting the very practice of making moral judgments. It should be relatively easy to see that there would be both pragmatist and Wittgensteinian ways of cashing this idea out in terms of concepts such as human practice, form of life, and language game.

[58] Consider, for instance, the ways in which Jewish philosophers like Hans Jonas have found it necessary to 'rethink God' after the Holocaust (Jonas 1996; cf. Pihlström 2014b). See also Trakakis (ed., 2018) for attempts to rethink the metaphysics of divinity in the theodicy vs. antitheodicy context.

[59] See also the discussion of contextuality in relation to the realism issue in Chapter 2 above.

## 6. Beyond the Theory-Practice Dichotomy

[1] For some influential papers on these issues, see, e.g., Rowe (2001). See also Trakakis (2018).

[2] Accordingly, as we have seen in earlier chapters, the concept of recognition is central to my concerns in this chapter, and to my defense of antitheodicism more generally, even though I cannot here offer any systematic articulation of that concept (cf. again, e.g., Koskinen 2017, 2019).

[3] For other influential antitheodicist considerations in the contemporary discourse on evil, see Bernstein (2002) and Neiman (2002).

[4] On this relatively complex history, see especially Neiman (2002).

[5] Invoking the recognition vs. acknowledgment distinction (paralleling the distinction between the empirical and the transcendental; cf. Chapter 4), we might say that acts of recognizing the other *as* a sufferer, and of their suffering *as* meaningless (and analogous recognition acts) may partially constitute the (infinitely demanding, always escaping, never fully realized) task of acknowledging (without any specific 'as' clause) the other.

[6] Trakakis (2018: 100) also points out that theodicists usually invoke some version of the distinction between theoretical and practical problems of evil, while antitheodicists question its value and legitimacy.

[7] Gaita's (2000, 2004) work on moral unthinkabilities (see also Pihlström 2011a) is important for Betenson's (2019) antitheodicism.

[8] Cf. further, e.g., Pihlström (2013a). Similarly, for a restricted purpose, defending realism and even correspondence truth might be encouraged within a more inclusive (meta-level) pragmatism (see Chapter 4).

[9] As Simo Knuuttila (2017) notes in his review of *Kantian Antitheodicy*, I do maintain, as I have also briefly explained above, that theodicies are morally untenable. Indeed, some antitheodicists have used rather harsh language in this regard; for example, according to Bernstein (2002), theodicies are 'obscene'. Are we thus trying to deliver a moral judgment about the ethically unacceptable views of (say) a group of contemporary theodicist (and theistic) philosophers of religion (such as Marilyn McCord Adams, Alvin Plantinga, Peter van Inwagen, Eleonore Stump, Richard Swinburne, and many others)? Not primarily, I am tempted to respond. We suggest in our book (Kivistö & Pihlström 2016: especially chapter 6), commenting on all the above-mentioned theodicists along with several others, that the moral criticism of theodicies advocated by the antitheodicist ought to be primarily understood as *moral self-criticism*: we should be constantly wary of the theodicist tendencies in our own ways of thinking and our relations to other human beings, and we should actively resist those tendencies in order to properly acknowledge others in their suffering—even when we realize that it is difficult of perhaps impossible for us to ever genuinely 'perceive the experience of others' (Levi 1988: 128).

[10] In addition to Levi's major works on the Holocaust, especially Levi (1988, 1996), see also Levi (2005) for shorter writings on the topic.

[11] See, e.g., Agamben (2002 [1999]); Gaita (2000); Alford (2009); Druker (2009); cf., however, also Cheyette (2007) for a discussion of some problematic appropriations of Levi's work in various contexts.

[12] Levi is in fact here quoting his own text from his second book, *The Truce* (1963).

[13] For Levi on Kafka, see Levi (2005: 140–141). Kafka's *The Trial* is one of the antitheodicist works of literature analyzed in Kivistö & Pihlström (2016: chapter 3).

[14] Robert Pirro (2017: 129) notes Levi's rejection of providence but argues that even Levi was tempted to see Auschwitz as bringing some kind of purpose into his life, with a 'clearly positive' 'sum total' (ibid.: 122–123, and chapter 6 passim).

[15] In the terms used in this book, such a question fails to be 'true' to our human predicament, and hence any answer to it presupposes an inhuman metaphysical realism, lacking in truthfulness (and thus failing to be true in a pragmatic sense).

[16] Of course it ought to be kept in mind that Levi never develops his antitheodicist views with any philosophical systematicity. I am here reading my own antitheodicism into his writings, but I do believe that this interpretation makes a lot of sense of what he has to say about the senselessness of suffering.

[17] On acknowledgment and sharing a common human form of life as central to Levi's work, and for a highly relevant comparison between Levi and the later Wittgenstein in this regard, see Sparti (2005). Sparti is particularly insightful in emphasizing how Levi's *If This Is a Man* is a 'moral book' precisely in its sensitive description of various 'scenes' of Auschwitz—encounters between people, their experiences, gestures, etc.—without explicitly employing moral vocabulary (see especially ibid.: 456).

[18] Therefore, *pace* Druker (and perhaps even Levi), it could be suggested that it is the humanistic, ethically committed subject who ultimately realizes—after the irrecoverable historical catastrophe of the Holocaust—that they cannot just safely return home (in the manner of Ulysses, a key figure for Levi) but must (like, rather, Abraham) continue the journey to an unknown place from which there is no return. This contrast between Ulysses and Abraham, or between Greek ontology and Hebrew ethics, is central in Levi and Druker's (2009) reading of him. See also the brief remarks on the 'humanism of antitheodicy' in Chapter 4 above.

[19] On 'pointless suffering' as an ineliminable feature of being human, see also Samuelson (2018).

[20] For some discussion, see Kivistö & Pihlström (2016: chapter 3). I again wish to emphasize how much my (here only very briefly formulated) Levinasian overtones have been influenced by Panu-Matti Pöykkö's still largely unpublished work on Levinas's ethics and philosophy of religion.

[21] Cf. here Dilman's (1974) comments on detachment and love, cited in Chapter 5 above.

## Conclusion: Meaningful and Meaningless Suffering

[1] For a famous attempt to revive soul-making theodicies in contemporary philosophy of religion, see Hick (1978 [1966]).

[2] In comparison, one might also take an analogous look at Susan Sontag's impressive small volume, *Regarding the Pain of Others*. In her essay, Sontag discusses, e.g., the problems related to emotionally 'moving' pictures and sentimentality, reminding us that sympathy is in a way too easy (Sontag 2003: 91–92) and warning us that we might become cynical about the possibility of sincerity (ibid.: 99). (This, of course, resonates with Job and Kant's reading of Job, focusing on sincerity.) Sontag emphasizes moral and psychological 'adulthood' requiring continuous critical thinking. 'Perhaps too much value is assigned to memory, not enough to thinking' (ibid.: 103). 'There is nothing wrong with standing back and thinking' (ibid.: 106). This, however, requires 'meditative space' (ibid.: 107)—and thus critical distance. Sontag's own writing implicitly manifests such distance in an insightful way, discussing photographs without including a single photograph.

[3] Interestingly, Druker (2009: 27) describes Levi's style as 'detached' in comparison to Elie Wiesel's and also discusses the 'oddly distanced' plural 'we' subject Levi employs (ibid.: 57). There is also a 'disinterestedness' in Levi that may contribute to a deconstruction of the traditional humanistic subject, Druker claims (ibid.: 116–117). On the other hand, Druker claims Hannah Arendt to be 'detached' when analyzing Eichmann, in contrast to Levi's 'angry and emotional' tone (ibid.: 128).

[4] Compare here Ilman Dilman's (1974) comment on love and detachment cited in Chapter 5.

[5] See the references in Chapter 6.

[6] It also needs to be recognized that philosophers working within the different traditions that have been slightly eclectically utilized here—e.g., pragmatism, analytic philosophy, and 'Continental' philosophy (whatever we ultimately mean by that)—may use some of these key terms, especially 'metaphysics', in somewhat different ways. For my purposes, it has been important to emphasize that the very idea of metaphysics needs to be emancipated from the metaphysically realistic assumption that only the attempt to describe reality from a 'God's-Eye View' amounts to metaphysics. See further Pihlström (2009, 2013a).

[7] See Hickman (2007) for an attempt to argue that Dewey was already far ahead of postmodernists in various ways.

[8] In many of my earlier works listed in the bibliography, I have provided much more detailed characterizations and defenses of pragmatic realism, and more generally of the realism issue in the context of pragmatism.

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# A Note on the Sources of the Chapters

The chapters of the book to some extent build on the following publications of mine. Any copyrighted material is used with permission of the copyright owner.

**Introduction** contains some material from several sources: 'Objectivity in Pragmatist Philosophy of Religion', in Ulf Zackariasson (ed.), *Action, Belief and Inquiry: Pragmatist Perspectives on Science, Society and Religion*, Nordic Studies in Pragmatism, Vol. 3, Helsinki: Nordic Pragmatism Network (2016), www.nordprag.org; 'Rationality, Religion, and Anti-Theodicy: The Promise of Pragmatist Philosophy of Religion', *Pragmatism Today*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (2013), www.pragmatismtoday.eu; and 'A Pragmatist Approach to the Mutual Recognition between Ethico-Political and Theological Discourses on Evil and Suffering', *Political Theology*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (2019) (© Taylor & Francis Group); as well as minor excerpts from my book review of Richard Atkins's *Peirce and the Conduct of Life*, in *Philosophy*, Vol. 92, No. 362 (2017) (© Cambridge University Press).

**Chapter 1** is based on 'Objectivity in Pragmatist Philosophy of Religion' (see above), 'The Emancipatory Potential of Pragmatist Philosophy of Religion', *Pragmatism Today*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (2016), www.pragmatismtoday.eu, as well as 'Pragmatist Perspectives on Theological and Religious Realism', *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (2014).

**Chapter 2** contains some material from 'The Problem of Realism, from a Pragmatic Point of View', in Roberto Frega (ed.), *Pragmatist Epistemologies*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books 2011 (© Rowman & Littlefield).

**Chapter 3** is based on 'Jamesian Pragmatism, Rortyan Ironism, and Kantian Antitheodicy', in Krzysztof Skowronski and Sami Pihlström (eds.), *Pragmatist Kant: Pragmatism, Kant, and Kantianism in the Twenty-first Century*, Nordic Studies in Pragmatism, Vol. 4, Helsinki: Nordic Pragmatism Network 2019, www.nordprag.org.

**Chapter 4** slightly overlaps with 'Comparing Three Twentieth-Century Antitheodicisms', *Humanities*, Vol. 6, 98 (2017), www.mdpi.com/journal/humanities, as well as with my joint work with Sari Kivistö (i.e., sections originally written by myself): 'Theodicies as Failures of Recognition', *Religions*, Vol. 8, 242 (2017), www.mdpi.com/journal/religions, and *Kantian Antitheodicy*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. It also partly builds on 'Truth, Suffering, and Religious Diversity: A Pragmatist Perspective', in Peter Jonkers and Oliver J. Wiertz (eds.), *Religious Truth and Identity in an Age of Plurality*, London: Routledge, 2019 (© Taylor & Francis Group).

**Chapter 5** draws from 'Wittgenstein on Happiness: Harmony, Disharmony, and Antitheodicy', *Philosophical Investigations*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (2019) (© Wiley). It also to some extent builds on my essay, 'The Limits of Language in Wittgensteinian Philosophy of Religion', published in Hanne Appelqvist (ed.), *Wittgenstein and the Limits of Language*, London: Routledge, 2019 (© Taylor & Francis Group).

**Chapter 6** and **Conclusion** slightly overlap with my forthcoming essay, 'Meaningful and Meaningless Suffering', to be published in *Human Affairs* (2020).

# Index

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As a traditional theological issue and in its broader secular varieties, theodicy remains a problem in the philosophy of religion. In this remarkable book, Sami Pihlström provides a novel critical reassessment of the theodicy discourse addressing the problem of evil and suffering. He develops and defends an antitheodicist view, arguing that theodicies seeking to render apparently meaningless suffering meaningful or justified from a 'God's-Eye-View' ultimately rely on metaphysical realism failing to recognize the individual perspective of the sufferer. Pihlström thus shows that a pragmatist approach to the realism issue in the philosophy of religion is a vital starting point for a re-evaluation of the problem of theodicy.

With its strong positions and precise arguments, the volume provides a new approach which is likely to stimulate discussion in the wider academic world of philosophy of religion.

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