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Nature, Purpose, and Norm: A Program in American Philosophy

ABSTRACT: *For over a century there has been a protracted effort in American philosophy to use Darwinian explanatory resources in order to make certain leading ideas in German idealism naturalistically intelligible. I trace some of the nineteenth and twentieth century contours of this effort. In doing so I outline an understanding of ourselves as norm-laden persons in a natural world. As a consequence, philosophical inquiry—understood in C. S. Peirce's sense as the practice of the 'normative sciences' of aesthetics, logic, and ethics—can be understood as the self-conscious and rational exercise of natural and socially conditioned capacities to sense, think, and act. This leaves us with a project, by no means completed, to frame categories through which to understand the* sociohistorical development *of the notions of beauty, truth, and goodness as a process continuous with the* natural evolution *of the nervous system in its sensory, central, and motor moments.*

KEYWORDS: American pragmatism, German idealism, naturalism, normativity

Introduction

It is part of the etiology of what would come to be called 'analytic philosophy' that at its birth it spurned a tradition that looked to German idealism as a source for inspiration (see, e.g., Hylton [1990]; Redding [2007: introduction]; Rockmore [2005: introduction and ch. 1]; and Soames [2003: vol.1, 94–95 and 127–31]). Despite early twentieth -century opposition to German idealism, however, analytic philosophers during the second half of the past century found more and more opportunities to endorse German idealist positions. By the end of the twentieth century one such endorsement manifested in a reading, particularly of Kant and Hegel, that focused on the role normative notions play in our understanding of cognitive and practical rationality (cf. Brandom 2005 and 2009: ch. 1–3; Korsgaard 1996; McDowell 1996 and 2009; Pinkard 2007a and 2007b; and Pippin 1989 and 2009). This narrative is not without its problems, but as part of the aim of the current paper is to reorganize our view of these issues, for the purposes of exposition it is convenient to assume a fairly conventional exposition

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(for a powerful case against conventional narratives of the history of American philosophy, see Kuklick [1985]). Either way, given the historical origins of analytic philosophy and considering the naturalism and empiricism that have animated so much of that work, it may seem a surprising turn of events to find philosophers within this tradition now drawing on normative and rationalist themes from the German idealists. One might be forgiven for suspecting the cunning of reason was at work here.

Frederick Beiser (2009), however, has argued that these contemporary readings of the German idealists are similar to those developed by the neo-Kantians of southwestern Germany at the turn of the previous century, and he suggests that current projects may suffer the same fate as did that strain of neo-Kantianism. For once we distinguish natural states of affairs or processes from normative or value-laden states of affairs or processes, we are obliged to give some account of their relationship. Beiser convincingly argues that the southwestern neo-Kantians could not make out a coherent position relating nature and norm, fact and value. The recent turn toward a normative reading of Kant and Hegel, Beiser concludes, may succumb to the same problem. Beiser's paper is a historical exegesis, however, and he encourages readers to decide 'just how—and whether—these lessons will benefit contemporary normativity theorists' (Beiser 2009: 25).

In what follows I trace an intellectual lineage within American philosophy, more or less pragmatist in orientation, whose members were versed in German idealism. In doing so I argue that the conceptual and explanatory resources developed within this tradition underwrite a response to Beiser's worry that contemporary work is retreading unstable neo-Kantian ground. While there is a tension between a commitment to (some version of) naturalism and the use of the value-centric resources drawn from this reading of the German idealists, American philosophers at least since the publication of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) have been developing the explanatory background necessary to conceive of human cognition and agency as at once natural and normative phenomena. American pragmatism is a house with many rooms, however, and I will focus almost exclusively on the broadly analytic treatment of pragmatism as it was developed in the work of Wilfrid Sellars (1912–1989), a figure whose commitment to a Kantian understanding of rationality runs throughout his corpus. The main exposition will not touch on other analytically trained pragmatists, such as Robert Brandom, Catherine Legg, and Susan Haack, or on the work of contemporary pragmatists, such as Douglas Anderson, Randall Auxier, and John McDermott. Though in the closing section I will look at some of the larger tradition within which Sellars wrote, the paper focuses on his reworking of a handful of commitments shared among American philosophers before him for generations.

In brief, my contention is that Wilfrid Sellars's interest in dispositional capacities for perceptual takings, inferences, and volitions continues a program in philosophical anthropology undertaken by the classical pragmatist triumvirate of Charles Sanders Peirce (1834–1914), William James (1842–1910), and John Dewey (1859–1952) and carried into the middle of the twentieth century by a number of American philosophers. From its inception this program gives a pivotal explanatory role to sensory, central, and motor reflexive habituation as a basis for

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understanding the origin and character of rational thought and action. Sellars spent much of his career spelling out how to think about these dispositions and their public expression in language-entry transitions ('Lo! Smoke!'), language-language transition ('Where there is smoke, there is fire'), and language exit transitions ('Run!/I shall run!'). In Sellars's work these explanatory resources are put to use in framing an understanding of how rule-following agency of the sort made possible by language-use could result from processes of education that shape linguistic dispositions in the *individual* in a manner analogous to the way evolution by natural selection shapes the reflexive capacities of *species*. Because the plasticity in human linguistic dispositions is a function of natural selection operating on capacities for sensory, central, and motor behavior, and because the actualizations of these capacities as events or processes in the nervous system are fully within the purview of scientific investigation, neo-Kantian worries about an unintelligible divide between nature and the normative do not arise. In contrast, we find ourselves faced with a task of framing a determinate set of categories through which to understand how naturally evolved and socially conditioned habits to sense, think, and act operate as a basis for rational and historical debate concerning the ideas of beauty, truth, and goodness. Or so I will argue.

My effort here is more than a footnote to a debate in philosophical historiography, however. For the explanatory resources developed within this tradition remain viable tools for philosophical inquiry addressed to questions of normativity and naturalism in metaphysics and to questions of rationalism and empiricism in epistemology. What is required is a set of conceptual resources sufficient, so to speak, to think nature and spirit at once: to reconcile the belief that human activity, as with everything else in the world, is to be explained in terms for which questions of right and wrong are out of place (literally category mistakes) with the seeming need to understand thought and agency in normative terms. And so after outlining this program in American philosophy and showing that it does not succumb to the fate of southwestern neo-Kantianism, I will indicate five ways the work discussed here might be carried on going forward.

1. Background

Beiser traces a program in German philosophy beginning with Wilhelm Windelband (1848–1915), carried on by his student Heinrich Rickert (1863–1936), and taken up by Emil Lask (1875–1915), a student of both Windelband and Rickert. These figures were responding to a perceived threat to philosophy elicited by the rise of the empirical sciences, particularly experimental psychology, at the turn of the previous century. If scientific inquiry can be brought to bear on questions of agency and cognition, then what role is there for philosophy as traditionally conceived? The 'return to Kant' movement that took hold in Germany at this time offered a conception of philosophy that distinguished it from empirical psychology. For the southwestern neo-Kantians, philosophy carves a domain for itself against the pressing advance of the sciences by directing itself toward normative questions concerning what *right* or *duty* we have to believe or do various things. The

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empirical sciences, by contrast, address questions of value-neutral fact. But with this distinction, the neo-Kantians were now obliged to give some account of how to understand the relationship between norm and nature, value and fact. Beiser discusses the problem of 'bridg[ing] the gap' between the normative and the natural (2009: 16) or 'hurtling the divide' between values and facts (2009: 22), a problem that resulted in Rickert's conclusion that there is an 'unbridgeable chasm' between the two domains (Beiser 2009: 23). Beiser concludes that Rickert was right—the neo-Kantian program left the relationship between nature and the normative unintelligible.

Whatever the fate of southwestern neo-Kantianism, by the time that project was underway in Germany, the influence of Peirce and James was giving rise to the work of Dewey and the younger members of the first cohort of American pragmatists at Harvard and Chicago. By this point Darwinian thinking had substantially reshaped American philosophy and its role in higher education (cf. Schneider 1963: ch. 30–35 and Kuklick 2001: ch. 6). As James and Peirce were coming of age, the impact of Darwin's theories was beginning to ramify throughout debates across Europe and America. A consistent theme was the use of Darwinian explanatory frameworks for understanding sociohistorical change and human psychology. This effort manifested itself among Americans almost immediately. The *Origin* was published in 1859, and in 1860 a famous exchange between Bishop Samuel Wilberforce (1805–1873) and T. H. Huxley (1825–1895) occurred at a conference at Oxford on evolution during a session that was devoted to a paper by the New York physiologist John William Draper (1811–1882) entitled 'On the Intellectual Development of Europe Considered with Reference to the Views of Mr. Darwin and Others That the Progression of Organisms is Determined by Law'. Darwin himself wrote to Chauncey Wright (1830–1875), an early advocate of Darwin's views in America and a towering figure in the Metaphysical Club that the young James and Peirce attended at Harvard. Darwin asked Wright to apply his (Darwin's) theory to the question of when an activity could be said to be effected by the mind rather than by instinct. As a result, Wright published 'The Evolution of Self-Consciousness' in *The North American Review* in 1873, the year following the final meeting of the Metaphysical Club (cf. Schneider 1963: 304 and Wiener 1949: 48ff.). In consequence of his conversations with Darwin, Wright planned to write a book on 'psychozoölogy', which he characterized as a project that would 'give the requisite subordination (from our point of view) of consciousness in men and animals, to their development and general relations to nature' (Schneider 1963: 305). Wright did not live to see the completion of this work, however, as he died two years after publishing 'The Evolution of Self-Consciousness'. But this interest in rethinking the place of agency and cognition in nature in the light of the new biology remained a theme for generations of American philosophers.

As the disciplines of philosophy and psychology began to be separated in American higher education in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, American philosophers were also increasingly turning to German idealism. This trend was one the pragmatists took part in as well (James is a special case, as he bore little love for Hegel and associated Kantianism with neo-Kantian efforts to divorce psychology

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and philosophy from the sciences—about which more in the closing section). In his 1905 paper 'What Pragmatism Is' Peirce writes of the coining of the term:

> Some of his [i.e., Peirce's] friends wished him to call it *practicism* or *practicalism*.... But for one who had learned philosophy out of Kant, as the writer... had done, and who still thought in Kantian terms most readily, *praktisch* and *pragmatisch* were as far apart as the two poles, the former belonging in a region of thought where no mind of the experimentalist type can ever make sure of solid ground under his feet, the latter expressing relation to some definite human purpose. (1905c: 332–33)

2. On the Influence of Darwinism on American Philosophy

Peirce's invocation of purpose is important, and one way of casting the development of American thought in the second half of the nineteenth century is to see it as an effort to clarify and adapt the conceptual resources of the new biology so as to explain the origin and purposive operation of the rational activities characteristic of human persons. This program rests on a semantic entailment between teleological and normative judgments. To conceive of something as purposive is to license normative evaluations (e.g., judgments of what ought to be done or happen, and of excellence and defect) regarding its states and processes relative to the realization of those purposes. To put the point in an ontological register, in a world with chance and development, effective/ineffective activity and perfective/defective activity come as a package. If the teleology of biological systems can be made naturalistically intelligible, then one might hope to leverage the presence of natural purposes as an explanatory basis for understanding the genesis and operation of norm-laden capacities, such as rational thought and action. The specifics of this naturalized teleology differed among the pragmatists, of course, but a consistent theme running through the work of these philosophers is their commitment to reconceiving the place of value in nature in light of the naturalized purposiveness afforded by Darwinian explanations in biology.

Dewey produced some of the most influential articulations of this idea. In his famous 'The Influence of Darwinism on Philosophy' (1909), first published in *Popular Science Monthly* in 1909, he argues that there were two options for pre-Darwinian treatments of organic activity—one could conceive of organisms either as mechanical and nonteleological, or one could view them as teleological but only by positing a creator responsible for purposefully designing them. The development of Darwinian biology, Dewey argued, entitled philosophers and scientists to think of purpose as present in nature, selected for over the course of the evolution of species, without a need to rely on a design argument. This new account of *natural* purposiveness could then be used as a model to provide a novel understanding of the *intentional* purposiveness characteristic of rational activity: 'The influence of Darwin on philosophy resides in his having conquered the phenomena of life for the principle of transition, and thereby freed the new logic for application to mind and

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morals' (1909: 35). Of course, evolved purposive states and dispositions are not yet sufficient for talk of persons. Though the point of origin of self-consciousness is a vexed question, American philosophers have been sensitive to this question at least since the time of the essay on the evolution of self-consciousness that Wright wrote on Darwin's behalf. And with a space made for the normative evaluation of organic activity in the natural world, whatever subsequent account of the sociohistorical processes that shape us into the sorts of persons we are today will not plot a line of thought that locates an unbridgeable divide between the space of nature and the space of value. Instead, the explicitly rule-governed activities of rational thought and action appear as the self-conscious actualization of capacities that are wholly natural. The task then is to spell out a new understanding of ourselves and the natural world sufficient to fill in the detail of this reconceived domain of reason and agency.

3. Some Early Trends in American Pragmatism

For decades American pragmatists would use the resources of evolutionary theory to characterize human agency and cognition: Peirce advocated a normative account of scientific method so as to insulate epistemic practices from the contingencies of psychological evolution; James thought that we would understand the evolution of cognition only if we understood the purposive character of minded activity, and he and Dewey urged that the study of the mind take place in part through a study of mental events as purposive things. The Hegelian Josiah Royce (1855–1916) viewed evaluations as acts of the will that, being the actualization of physiological capacities, had the status of being facts about the world as much a subject of scientific study as any other fact, and in the opening decades of the twentieth century the work of Dewey, George Herbert Mead (1863–1931), Addison Webster Moore (1866–1930), and others at the University of Chicago saw a younger generation of American philosophers taking up the banner of pragmatism (or instrumentalism), focusing in particular on the logical methods of the sciences and the role of philosophy in addressing social problems. As classical pragmatism gave way in American universities to the neorealism of William Pepperell Montague (1873–1953), Ralph Barton Perry (1876–1957), and Edwin Bissell Holt (1873–1946), and then to the critical realism of Arthur O. Lovejoy (1873–1962) and Roy Wood Sellars (1880–1973), questions about the relation between evolution and mind, nature and the normative, remained at the forefront of discussion (cf. Roy Wood Sellars's *Evolutionary Naturalism*, published in 1922).

Themes from Kant and Hegel continued to remain of interest as well. Ralph Barton Perry and Josiah Royce, the former a student of James, taught influential courses on Kant at Harvard. C. I. Lewis (1883–1964) studied with Royce and Perry at Harvard, and his early work (particularly coming out of his dissertation, *The Place of Intuition in Knowledge* [1910]) was an attempt to resolve conflicts he found between the realism of philosophers like Perry and the idealism of Royce, the latter having directed Lewis's dissertation (see the opening pages of Dayton 1995). Later exposure to the Peirce manuscripts, after his return to Harvard as

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a faculty member in 1920, had an impact on Lewis as well (see Dayton [1995: 261ff.] and the discussion in Misak [2013: ch. 10]). Lewis eventually put forth a Kantian argument that 'leading ideas' in the sciences were regulative principles that structured the conceptual space within which we made descriptive judgments, and his own course on Kant's first *Critique* set the tone for how that work would be taught in the United States (Kuklick 2001: 217). Individuals interested in this period would do well to turn to Misak (2014 and 2013: ch. 10), Hookway (2012: ch. 8), and Kuklick (1977: appendix 2); each of them characterize Lewis as a key figure in American philosophy in the period from late pragmatism and the rise of analytical philosophy to the work of later self-avowing pragmatists such as Quine, Rorty, Goodman, and Putnam.

4. Wilfrid Sellars's Philosophical Background

Wilfrid Sellars was the son of Roy Wood Sellars, the latter a prominent critical realist whose work developed in response to the late pragmatist and new realist positions of the early decades of the twentieth century. According to his 'Autobiographical Reflections' (1975b), the younger Sellars's philosophical views were shaped by an early understanding of Kant in normative terms. When he arrived at Oxford in 1934 on a Rhodes Scholarship, he thought of himself as already having a system, and it was while reading Kant's first *Critique* with H. H. Price (1899–1984) that he 'began to develop in embryo the interpretation which was to become the core of *Science and Metaphysics*' (1975b: 285), a book whose subtitle is 'Variations on Kantian Themes'. Sellars writes of this period in his education:

> The situation was roughly the following. I had already broken with traditional empiricism by my realistic approach to the logical, causal, and deontological modalities. What was needed was a functional theory of concepts which would make their role in reasoning, rather than a supposed origin in experience, their primary feature. The influence of Kant was to play a decisive role. (1975b: 285)

Wilfrid Sellars's relationship to the pragmatists is more complex. Though his 'Autobiographical Reflections' is silent on any influence that classical American pragmatism might have had on him, in the introduction to *Naturalism and Ontology* (given as the John Dewey Lectures at the University of Chicago in 1974) Sellars writes that he first viewed pragmatism, through his father's eyes, as 'shifty, ambiguous, and indecisive' (1974b: 1). He came around to studying Dewey seriously around the time that he was rejecting what he called 'mythical givenness' (which he associates with C. I. Lewis's epistemology), and it was Dewey's idealism that most interested him (1974b: 1). After finding similar themes in Peirce and Royce, he says he was astonished at what he had missed (1974b: 1). Though the intellectual connections between Sellars and the classical pragmatists are occasionally mentioned, they are rarely given much detailed treatment. Portions of Bernstein (2010) and the last four pages of Bernstein (2006) are notable

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exceptions. Various papers by Robert Brandom, Terry Pinkard, and Richard Rorty point to and suggest links between Sellars and the pragmatists as well. Of particular relevance are Brandom (1999, 2004, and 2011: chs.1–3) as well as Pinkard (2007a). There is much work to be done on this front, and by way of framing Sellars's use of Kant in responding to Carnap as a moment in twentieth-century analytic philosophy. In the final section I will discuss some of this larger historical context, but in what follows I focus on Sellars's and the classical pragmatists' understanding of habituated reflexive activity as a basis for rational thought and action.

5. James and Dewey on the Reflex Arc

The notion of a reflex action has a long history in the philosophy of mind and physiological psychology.[1] As early modern scientists began systematically studying animal anatomy, they discovered the role the nervous system plays in mediating environmental stimuli with the experience and behavior of the organism. By the seventeenth century a consensus had been reached that the nervous system was essential to the sensory, cognitive, and motor behavior of the organisms that possessed them (though it was not until the beginning of the nineteenth century that anatomists established that the sensory and motor nerves were physiologically distinct pathways). Sensory or afferent nervous activity carries a signal from a sensory interaction with the environment to processing or cognitive neural structures in the spinal cord and brain, and these central processing nerves in turn induce a signal along motor or efferent nervous structures that leads to some behavioral response. The idea of a reflex *arc* or *action* was the idea of a process or episode in the nervous activity of an organism that was induced in virtue of the organism's evolved and habituated dispositions. Understanding the processes governing the occurrence of these episodes was thought to be crucial for understanding the nature of the organism in whom the occurrences constituted the give-and-take of experience (understood in James's 'double-barreled' sense as both the qualitatively contentful event and the extended process of acting in, reacting to, and learning from the environment—a distinction more or less marked in German by *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*, respectively).

The reflex action was a central point of investigation and debate for physiologists and psychologists in the second half of the nineteenth century. It is in the context of these discussions that James, after cutting his teeth in the new experimental psychology laboratories in Germany, developed his account of reflexive activity in human psychology. In 'The Reflex Action and Theism', first presented at the Unitarian Ministers' Institute at Princeton in 1881 and published in 1897 in *The Will to Believe*, James writes:

1 Fearing (1930) details the development of this idea from the seventeenth century through the first three decades of the twentieth. For a discussion of its historical background and use in James's and Dewey's thought see Phillips (1971).

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> The structural unit of the nervous system is in fact a triad, neither of whose elements has any independent existence. The sensory impression exists only for the sake of awaking the central process of reflection, and the central process of reflection exists only for the sake of calling forth the final act. (1897: 113–14)

With the spread of Darwinian thinking, debates developed concerning the bearing of evolution on the development of more complex nervous dispositions. When Dewey criticized certain accounts of reflex activity in his 1896 'The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology', he enjoined his colleagues not to forget that the evolution of the reflexes posited in these arcs, and so the constraints operative on their actualizations in the lives of individual organisms, depends and has depended upon the organism's (and its ancestors') purposive engagement with the world. Some (e.g., T. H. Huxley) defended a view on which the reflex arc could be studied as a way of replacing talk of psychological states with behavioral responsiveness understood mechanistically. Dewey argued that the arc is better viewed as a circuit whose ends are closed in the world, so that to understand these reflex activities we must interpret stimulus/response coordination in the context of the purposive character of experience.

6. Sellars on Perceptual Takings, Inferences, and Volitions

The idea of evolved and educated reflexive dispositions was to become central to Wilfrid Sellars's work on persons. Building on the Aristotelian notion of an act as the nonagentive actualization of a disposition and thinking of dispositions as processes whose occurrences play a role in individuating their bearers as members of kinds, Sellars argued in a series of papers from the 1950s, 60s, and 70s that certain reflexive human acts—specifically perceptual takings, inferences, and volitions (and the corresponding language-entry, language-language, and language-exit transitions that publicly express them)—are a ground for rule-following actions. While these dispositions are subject to normative assessment concerning how they ought to *be*, their actualizations are not to be assessed as though anyone were *doing* anything as an exercise of rule-following agency (more on this distinction in a moment):

> The linguistic activities which are perceptual takings, inferences, and volitions *never* become *obeyings* of *ought-to-do* rules.... It is the pattern-governed activities of perception, inference, and volition, themselves essentially non-actions, which underlie and make possible the domain of actions, linguistic and non-linguistic. (Sellars 1974a: 88, emphasis in the original)

While to choose to look into a room, to work on a logic problem, or to act on a volition is to (in principle) exercise one's agency, to take there to be a vase on the table, to infer by modus ponens at some step in a proof, or to be inclined to some action is not. It is also clear that Sellars's language transitions were physically

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realized as states of the nervous system. In 'The Identity Approach to the Mind-Body Problem' (1965: 360) Sellars offers this suggestive notion of a 'core person' (cf. the closing paragraphs of Sellars 1960a):

> Let me simply suggest that we think of what we ordinarily call a person as a nervous system clothed in flesh and bones. In view of what we know it makes perfectly good sense to introduce the term 'core person' for the empirical nervous system and to introduce a way of talking according to which raw feels and, for that matter, thoughts are in the first instance states of 'core persons' and only derivatively of the clothed person.

Notice that Sellars here proposes we begin to speak this way, and is not making a claim about what we already believe—this is a project of conceptual critique and revision, not an analysis of preexisting concepts.

Sellars went beyond the classical American pragmatists in developing the conceptual resources needed to make sense of ourselves along these lines. Among his central distinctions is the one between rules of action and rules of criticism (sometimes called 'prescriptions' and 'evaluations'). The former give voice to what a rule-follower ought to *do* and so apply only to creatures with agency and the conceptual capacities needed to act from a representation of a rule and a recognition of its propriety. The latter instead characterize how something ought to *be*, where this is understood as covering nonagentive processes and states of affairs. While as persons we are capable of following rules of action enjoining what we ought to do, that fact depends on our (and our species) having undergone a long process whereby our reflexive dispositions were shaped by forces capable of making them be as they ought (according to some standard, natural or social) without our yet being rule-following agents. Sellars holds that the capacity to frame and obey explicit representations concerning what we ought to do depends upon perceptual, inferential, and volitional capacities that remain reflexive even when exercised in the course of some bit of agency. As a case, consider what it takes to understand the sentence you just read. For well-known problems of regress, that understanding cannot be explained by your, in each case, following a rule enjoining you to do something. Instead, you read and understand what is written as a matter of habit. That such habits can come to be both causally induced in us in virtue of our place in space and time, while their actualizations have the conceptual content they do in virtue of our standing in a linguistic community, depends upon the fact that we are at once evolved creatures shaped by natural selection and educated creatures shaped by social practice:

> The fact that the uniformities (positive and negative) involved in [the] language-entry, intralinguistic and language-departure transitions of a language are governed by specific ought-to-be statements in its meta-linguistic stratum, and these in turn by ought-to-be's and ought-to-do's concerning explanatory coherence, constitutes the Janus-faced character of languagings as belonging to both the causal order and the order of reasons. This way of looking at conceptual activity transposes

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> into more manageable terms traditional problems concerning the place of intentionality in nature. (Sellars 1974b: 110)

According to Sellars, the transition from language-learner to language-user (from being passively shaped by the ought-to-be's that others in the community enforce over us, to being self-governed by the ought-to-do's we frame and follow ourselves) occurs when the individual is capable of self-criticism. Here one is not merely *conforming* to the rules that govern one's behavior, but is in addition able to frame a *representation* of those rules as commanding our obedience:

> [When the language learner begins to think thoughts about language itself, he] has then developed from being the object of training and criticism by others to the stage at which he can train and criticize other language users and even himself. Indeed he has now reached the level at which he can formulate new and sophisticated standards in terms of which to reshape his language and develop new modes of thought. (Sellars 1974a: 86)

This is a theme that recurs both in classical American pragmatism and in German idealism. Like Sellars, Peirce thought that the capacity to issue self-directed commands governing the reinforcement and suppression of one's habits was a key moment in the transition from mere student to a full-fledged member of the community (Peirce 1906b: 278; 1905a: 346). James held a similar view with regard to the role played by voluntary acts of the will in setting up peculiarly *moral* habituations (cf. Pawelski 2007: 53–54). Compare with Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1996: 66, 4:412, emphasis in the original): 'Everything in nature works in accordance with laws. Only a rational being has a capacity to act *in accordance with the representation* of laws, that is, in accordance with principles, or has a *will*'.

This way of construing human agency and cognition is center stage in the closing chapter of *Science and Metaphysics* (Sellars 1967). Just as natural *laws* operate as metalinguistic inference tickets whose use in the object-language makes explicit our understanding of the natural kinds they permit us to think (Sellars 1948), Sellars argues that the practical agreement of a community regarding its ethical constitution—the sharing of a 'we-shall' intention—institutes a system of social *rules* that plays a correlate role in determining our understanding of the normative kinds, particularly persons and their social standings, that exist within that community. This is also an idea one finds in Peirce, as Sellars shares with Peirce the conviction that the rule-governed habits underlying ethical behavior are analogous to those underlying theoretical reasoning (see the last chapter of deVries [2005], which draws Sellars, Peirce, and Kant together on the relationships among theoretical reason, practical reason, and community). At the end of section I of the final chapter of *Science and Metaphysics* Sellars writes:

> A theory of practical reasoning in morals which denies the *in principle* intersubjectivity and truth of the ought-to-be's and ought-to-do's of everyday life must face the challenge of the ought-to-be's and ought-

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> to-do's of theoretical reason.... I think, with Charles Sanders Peirce, that the facing of this challenge is the culmination of the philosophical enterprise. (1967: 176, emphasis in the original)

Compare that with what Peirce said in 'What Pragmatism Is':

> Now, just as conduct controlled by ethical reason tends toward fixing certain habits of conduct, the nature of which (as to illustrate the meaning, peaceable habits and not quarrelsome habits) does not depend upon any accidental circumstances, and *in that sense*, may be said to be *destined*; so, thought, controlled by a rational experimental logic, tends to the fixation of certain opinions, equally destined, the nature of which will be the same in the end. (1905a: 342, emphasis in the original)

7. Alleviating Neo-Kantian Anxiety

While Beiser characterizes Windelband's late turn to a teleological underpinning of normativity and an emphasis on Hegelian notions of historical development as a 'retreat and defeat' of his earlier view (2009: 15), a teleological and social ground for normative evaluation had been a point of departure for American efforts to situate the normative in nature at least since the 1860s. These efforts were mediated by the revolution in biology afforded by Darwinian forms of explanation, a revolution the significance of which was recognized in American intellectual circles almost immediately.

The pragmatists proposed we see our rational activities as etiologically continuous with the natural evolution of organic purposiveness, although enriched by the self-consciousness embodied in the use of a natural language made available by membership in a historical community. In support of this proposal they deployed Darwinian resources to develop a philosophical anthropology meant to explain how creatures capable of the rule-following agency characteristic of the use of a natural language could come to be. Simple neurophysiological systems evolved so as to be disposed toward various reflex actions tracking states of the world and tending toward particular responses to it. In the individual organism these tendencies to take up habits are shaped by the environment over the course of its life, just as the neurological capacities of species are shaped by evolution. In our species the advent of the (initially implicit) rules of criticism that form the foundation of a community's practices of linguistic education allow our reflexive dispositions to be appropriated by a training program that causes them to have the conceptual content they do in virtue of the roles they come to play within the sociolinguistic institutions of our communities. The response of uttering the sentence 'There is a fire' to the visual sensation of a fire comes to *mean* there is a fire because of the role that response plays in a language game. Once language is on the scene, it is possible for human beings to self-consciously frame and follow rules that govern what they do. It also becomes possible for human beings to suggest new rules of action and criticism, and so the possibility of ongoing linguistic

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and cultural development is explained. By constructing an explanatory framework sufficient to understand how rule-following agency could have come into existence in the form it takes in us, this program replaces concern over an 'unbridgeable chasm' (to use Rickert's phrase) between the natural and the normative with an engineering project directed at creating the explanatory resources sufficient to cross that divide. This was, as Dewey put it, the influence of Darwinism on philosophy.

8. Critically Developing Philosophical Naturalism

This is not to say that the understanding of ourselves these philosophers developed has been completed or the divide at all points passable. As this pragmatist genealogy attests, further work may require new ways of thinking about ourselves and the world. In the last few pages I will note five directions for continuing a project of the sort outlined here.

First, an appreciation of the rise of normative conceptions of philosophy in Germany and America at the end of the nineteenth century can be deepened through a consideration of the debates over philosophy's place among the natural and social sciences that took place during this period on both sides of the Atlantic. The institutional forces at work in shaping higher education at the turn of the last century were nontrivially influenced by, and in turn exerted an influence on, philosophers' conceptions of their discipline. Pragmatist and neo-Kantian standpoints on the role of philosophy vis-à-vis the rest of the academy deserve more attention in this context.

A series of exchanges between William James and the neo-Kantians offers a second point of orientation for further research. James had an ongoing debate with some of the neo-Kantians over the question of the relationship between philosophy and the science of psychology, and this debate sheds light on American and German responses to the rise of the sciences. The outlines of the debate are detailed in chapter 1 of Bordogna (2008) concerning a feud between James and the German psychologist Hugo Münsterberg (1863–1916) over the building of Emerson Hall to house the Department of Philosophy at Harvard University. James secured Münsterberg a position at Harvard in the hopes that he would be an ally in the effort to integrate philosophy and psychology with the rest of the sciences in a new 'Science of Man'. But Münsterberg, like the neo-Kantians, conceived of philosophy (and philosophical psychology) as standing at the head of the rest of the academy. James wanted the new building attached to facilities for the experimental sciences, and Münsterberg wanted a separate building devoted to philosophy and philosophical psychology (Münsterberg won, of course, as Emerson Hall stands by itself). Neo-Kantianism came to represent, for James, a sort of rationalism that James took pragmatism to stand in opposition to. If Kuklick (1985) is right that 'the canon [of American philosophy] reflects more Harvard's dominance of the academic world in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the canon was established, than the truth about the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries' (1985: 180), then episodes

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like this may have played an undue influence in shaping American philosophical self-conceptions.

Either way, James's disagreement with the neo-Kantians illustrates some of the divergence between these two conceptions of the relationship between philosophy and the rest of the academy. At the same time, that disagreement is not always as sharp as James sometimes represents it. At the end of the sixth lecture of *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* James considers Rickert's theory of truth (1975: 109–13). He contends that Rickert's definition of truth as 'a name for all those judgments which we find ourselves under obligation to make by a kind of imperative duty' fails to account for the role that the practice of inquiry plays in determining what we are obliged to judge. Nevertheless, in *The Meaning of Truth* (1975, originally published in 1909, three years after the lectures that became *Pragmatism* were first delivered) James writes that insofar as Rickert's view is that primitive epistemic duties are enforced on us by reason in its self-legislating guise, then this brand of rationalism and James's pragmatism are not so far apart: 'if it all reverts to "the will to believe", pragmatists have that privilege as well as their critics' (1975: 309n). Indeed, it was the French neo-Kantian Charles Bernard Renouvier's (1815–1903) insistence that the point of origin for critical philosophy is a free act of the will that was responsible for shaking James out of the deep depression that plagued him during the late 1860s and early '70s, resulting in the view encapsulated in 'The Will to Believe' (cf. Richardson 2006: 120–21 and 146–47). James wrote to Peirce that 'The whole of my essay... is cribbed from [Renouvier]' (Wernham 1987: 87), and he said the essay would have been better titled 'The *Right* to Believe' (Richardson 2006: 361). James's suggestive reading of Rickert as endorsing a 'will to believe' principle, and the origin of this idea in Renouvier, should be considered alongside Peirce's and Sellars's conviction that self-directed imperatives are at the center of the transition from passively rule-governed dispositional responsiveness to actively rule-following self-conscious activity, and this together with the Fichtean thought that at the center of Kant's philosophy there is a primal act of self-legislation.

Branching off this last line of thinking, a third avenue for developing the ideas outlined in this paper looks to issues of freedom of the will and autonomy as understood by eighteenth– and nineteenth-century Americans. Students of Kant's practical philosophy have long noted the puzzling appearance in the second *Critique* of the '*Faktum der Vernunft*' (fact of reason) that in some sense grounds or entitles us to believe in the autonomy of the will. The *Faktum* is a pivot point in Fichte's reading of Kant, and it has been at issue in American philosophical circles at least since the middle of the nineteenth century. Precursors to this issue of human autonomy stretch back to before the founding of the Republic, fostered by the tripartite psychology that philosophers and physiological psychologists were promulgating in America in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Reverend Asa Burton's (1752–1836) division of the mind into faculties for taste, understanding, and the will, for instance, was arrived at on the basis of his reading 'every author who had made the mind the subject of his investigations, which was then in print' (Schneider 1963: 203). In America, the religious and experimentalist background to these ideas is at least as important as these ideas'

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later Kantian analogues. In 1754, Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758), the New England theologian and president of the College of New Jersey (to become Princeton), published an *Inquiry into Freedom of the Will*. By the mid-nineteenth century Edwards's account of human freedom was subject to strenuous criticism by physiological psychologists defending the tripartite psychology, and something like Kant's *Faktum* makes an appearance in these debates. As a Calvinist, Asa Burton rejected freedom of the will. He responded to Edwards by holding that it was taste, our affective response to the world, rather than volition that made us moral agents. And in *An Examination of President Edwards' Inquiry into Freedom of the Will*, published in 1845 by Albert Taylor Bledsoe (1809–1877), an Episcopal priest, mathematics professor, and colonel in the Confederate army, we read the following:

> We are merely conscious of the existence of thought, of feeling, of volition; and we are so made, that we are compelled to believe that there is something which thinks, and feels, and wills. It is thus, by what has been called a fundamental law of belief, that we arrive at the knowledge of the existence of our own minds. In like manner, from the fact of consciousness that we do act, or put forth volitions, we are forced, by a fundamental law of belief, to yield the conviction that we are free. (Quoted in Schneider 1963: 207)

Note again the willingness to treat theoretical and practical rationality as analogues. There remains a story to be told concerning how these ideas developed in the United States in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

A fourth direction for filling in the details of the view outlined here proceeds by critique and extension of these explanatory resources. I have focused on the pragmatist philosophical anthropology Wilfrid Sellars developed for explaining how there came to be animals who use a natural language. This was but one aspect of a larger program rooted in his reading of the history of philosophy. His nominalist approach to metaphysical discourse, conceiving debate in metaphysics as debate about language, was meant to explain certain features of the language games we actually play. Adopting Carnap's view that much of what passes for object-language debate about ontologically bizarre entities, such as properties and universals, is in fact covertly metalinguistic talk concerning how to use linguistic terms, such as predicates and predicate-nominalizations, Sellars spent a good portion of the 1960s and '70s developing an account on which a variety of sentences the metaphysician has historically been worried about could be understood as devices for functionally classifying the linguistic roles of other lexical items (see his core papers 1960b, 1962, 1963, and 1974a; see also the discussion in Loux [1998: 71–79]). Like Carnap, Sellars was interested in supplying the philosopher and scientist with a conceptual scheme sufficient to say much of what we already say, while deflating metaphysical discourse of the representational pretensions its surface grammar brings with it. At the core of the account is the thesis that much of what we seem to be *saying* about the world should be reconceived as the public expression we give to *decisions*, individual and collective, concerning who to be and

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how to talk. Carnapian approaches in contemporary analytic metaphysics indicate there may be some go to that thesis yet (cf. Blatti and Lapointe 2016; Eklund 2013; Hofweber 2009; Ney 2012; Stovall, forthcoming a; and Thomasson 2016). For decisions about what to do and say should not be conceived as representations of the way the world is, and if metaphysical debate takes the shape of covertly reason-guiding decisions, prescriptions, commands, etc., then the practice of metaphysics needs to be rethought.

An examination of the various divisions left in the wake of Sellars's influence suggests one final way forward. It does not do too much disservice to divide those who have been influenced by Sellars along the apparent tension between naturalism and normativity that has been in focus here. Owing to Richard Rorty, for decades Sellars's intellectual progeny have tended to be classified in one of two camps: either as a 'right' Sellarsian emphasizing naturalistic reduction and the replacement or elimination of normative categories in favor of scientifically respectable alternatives (exemplified by Patricia and Paul Churchland, Ruth Garrett Millikan, and Jay Rosenberg) or as a 'left' Sellarsian emphasizing the normative at the expense of naturalistic explanation (as with Robert Brandom, John McDowell, Terry Pinkard, and Robert Pippin). But it is not clear that this division tracks a tension in Sellars's own thought, and much of the more recent work on Sellars does not line up easily along the right/left dichotomy (the work of Paul Coates, Willem DeVries, Danielle MacBeth, Peter Olen, Jim O'Shea, and Kenneth Westphal stands out in this connection). After all, Sellars believed the scientific and manifest images ought to be stereoscopically united in one vision of our place in the world—neither lens was sufficient for giving us a total view on things. Further, Sellars's metalinguistic nominalism went hand in glove with his account of picturing as an isomorphic relation between processes in the central nervous system and processes in the world. While talk of meaning was for most purposes to be spelled out via word-word relations of functional classification within a language game, picturing was a world-world relation (between our brains and the environment) that had little to no role to play in the philosophy of language until such time as our brain science and physics were sufficiently developed that we could say something about what exists on each side of that world-world tether. At that point we would have begun the process of changing our language so as to institute the revised conception of mind and world brought with it (the process of linguistic change on the basis of scientific inquiry is always ongoing, of course, and treating it as having discrete state transitions may be little more than a useful heuristic). The philosopher may be an aid to the scientist in certain ways, but not by kicking up the dust of idle metaphysical disputation. (The themes discussed in this paragraph are treated more extensively in Stovall, forthcoming b).

One hopes that future work on Sellarsian philosophical themes can respect his (and the classical pragmatist's) commitment to a synoptic vision, to unabashedly think nature and spirit at once. While the relation between nature and spirit needed to keep both sides clearly in view is not present at hand (if indeed it is a relation at all, as Sellars's nominalism encourages us to question), the project of critically developing our understanding of ourselves and the world is one that these thinkers encourage us to take up. Doing so requires that the philosopher pay attention to

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the practicing scientist in such a way as to help articulate that understanding. A project like this is central to the work of Sellars:

> Science has already presented us with new and subtle categories. I suspect that newer and still more subtle categories will be needed to solve the problem of the place of persons in the scientific image of the world. The philosopher can attempt to see the future as in a glass darkly, but essentially his role must be the (by no means unfamiliar) one of a midwife. (1975a, Lecture II, §64)

The project was also endorsed by Peirce:

> Modern science... has put us into quite another world..... Some of the old beliefs have no application except in extended senses, and in such extended senses they are sometimes dubitable and subject to just criticism. It is above all the normative sciences, esthetics, ethics, and logic, that men are in dire need of having severely criticized, in their relation to the new world created by science. (1905b: 297, passage dating from ca.1905; see also Peirce 1903 and 1906a)

For now these remarks are the boundary markers of a preliminary survey. But the line of thought developed in this paper points the way toward an intellectual stance from which a philosophical study of the normative dimensions of human thought and action need not be antithetical to a scientific investigation of the same field. If that stance were established on solid ground, we might come to understand the *natural* development of the initially inchoate sensory, cognitive, and behavioral dispositions that have been evolving across species for ages as a process continuous (in some sense the categories of which have yet to be framed) with the *sociohistorical* development of the notions of beauty, truth, and goodness. This would put us in a position to think of philosophical inquiry into the normative sciences of aesthetics, logic, and ethics as the self-conscious engine for the sociohistorical dimension of this development. For philosophy, understood in Peirce's sense as the practice of normative science, would be a kind of rational actualization of latent capacities acquired in us by nature and social conditioning. To possess the kinds of explanation needed to frame the categories of this perspective would be to understand, in detail, how human beings brought off the transition from evolved protocognitive sensory/central/motor activity to philosophical inquiry into the beautiful, the true, and the good—from the 'grunts and groans of the cave to the subtle and polydimensional discourse of the drawing room, the laboratory, and the study' as Sellars writes in closing out the philosophical anthropology of the mythical Jones at the end of *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (1956).

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