ETHICS AND THE SCEPTICAL CHALLENGE: A PRAGMATICIST APPROACH

Ética e o Desafio Cético: Uma Abordagem Pragmaticista

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Abstract: The aim of the paper is to present the specific reasons why a Peircian or pragmaticist approach is best "equipped" not so much as compared with *other* pragmatist attempts, *but as such*, to answer some of the hardest challenges posed by contemporary scepticism, even when it comes to the *ethical* aspects posed by such a challenge. After sketching the major aspects of the sceptical challenge and the most common contemporary answers it gave rise to, an analysis is made of the reasons why the *ethical* aspect of the challenge is specifically acute, and why, then, in many ways, a pragmaticist approach is not fundamentally different from other pragmatist approaches (in particular Peirce's and James'); although finally, some arguments are presented in favour of a more straightforwardly Peircian or pragmaticist attitude as being the most efficient parry to the sceptical challenge, along the following lines: 1) a better account of the distinction to be made between ethical and epistemic justification, 2) a more detailed analysis of the mechanisms of doubt, belief, self-control, reasoning and of the emergence and rationality of norms; 3) a more complete account of the epistemological and metaphysical aspects of the sceptical challenge which, for a pragmatist, should not be disconnected from the ethical aspects.

Key-words: Epistemic justification. Ethical justification. James. Normative rationality. Peirce. Pragmaticism. Pragmatism. Putnam. Sceptical challenge.

Resumo: O objetivo deste trabalho é apresentar as razões específicas de uma abordagem peirceana ou pragmaticista estar mais bem "equipada" – não tanto se comparada com outras tentativas pragmatistas, mas como tal – para responder a alguns dos aspectos postos pelo ceticismo contemporâneo, mesmo quando se refere aos aspectos éticos de tal desafio. Após esboçar os principais aspectos do desafio cético e as respostas contemporâneas mais comuns que ele provocou, é feita uma análise das razões pelas quais o aspecto ético do desafio é especificamente agudo, e por que, então, de muitas maneiras, uma abordagem pragmaticista não é fundamentalmente diferente de outras abordagens pragmatistas (em especial as de Peirce e de James); embora, por fim, alguns argumentos sejam apresentados a favor de uma atitude mais diretamente peirceana ou pragmaticista como defesa mais eficiente para o desafio cético, nas seguintes linhas: 1)

um melhor cômputo da distinção a ser feita entre a justificação ética e epistêmica; 2) uma análise mais detalhada dos mecanismos da dúvida, crença, autocontrole, raciocínio e a emergência e a racionalidade das normas; 3) um cômputo mais completo dos aspectos epistemológicos e metafísicos do desafio cético que, para um pragmatista, não deveriam estar dissociados dos aspectos éticos.

Palavras-chave: Desafio cético. James. Justificação epistêmica. Justificativa ética. Peirce. Pragmaticismo. Pragmatismo. Putnam. Racionalidade normativa.

But to avoid any possible misapprehension, I am bound honestly to declare that I do not hold forth the slightest promise that I have any philosophical wares to offer you which will make you either better men or more successful men (Peirce, CP 1.621, *Philosophy and the conduct of life*)

As is well known, one of the reasons why Putnam views Pragmatism as "a way of thinking […] of lasting importance and an option (or at least an "open question") that should figure in present-day philosophical thought" (1995, xi), is that all pragmatists stressed that notions indispensable for everyday life should be taken seriously, but also knew how to define scientific inquiry as an inquiry submitted to norms and principles, and realized that, "what applies to investigation in general, equally applies to ethical investigation"[1]. Indeed, it is the "pluralism" and "thoroughgoing holism" which are ubiquitous in Pragmatist writing (*ibid*, xii) which are able to continue to "value the tolerance and pluralism" promoted by the Enlightenment, and to avoid "the epistemological scepticism that came with that tolerance and pluralism", in other words, to avoid "moral scepticism without tumbling back into moral authoritarianism" (*ibid.*, 2). Contrary to the "reactionary metaphysics", directly generated, from a certain tradition — mainly the empiricist (and analytical) tradition — and at the same time, contrary to the "irresponsible relativism" it gave rise to (2000, 5), pragmatism seems to offer the right "middle way", the best available answer to our fear of "the loss of the world", the best way to "renew" (in the Deweyan sense of the term) philosophy"[2].

And Putnam insists on the four following theses as being the main contributions of the pragmatists: antiskepticism, fallibilism, the rejection of the fact/value dichotomy, and the thesis that in a sense, "practice is primary in philosophy" (1994a, 152).

In the main, Putnam's analysis is convincing, and so is his diagnosis about how one may find in the pragmatist movement as a whole, if not solutions, at least convincing parries to the sceptical challenge. It is also true that the differences between the pragmatists, and in particular, between James and Peirce, are not as decisive as one at times tends to say, in particular again, when we deal with *moral* issues. However, it would be inaccurate to underestimate the commonplace fact, long noted by Richard Robin, that pragmatism comes in two principal varieties, one of which stems from Peirce

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[1]   Putnam 1992b, 44ff.
[2]   H. Putnam 1994b, 447, repr. in 2000, 5.

and the other from James[3]. Just as it would be unfair not to recall that Peirce kept underlying the necessity of protecting pragmatism from a "humanistic" or "moralistic" reading. Which was the reason why, in order to state his own position (5.143-144), he finally decided to "kiss his child good-bye" and to coin a new term, *pragmaticism*, ugly enough to be safe from the "kidnappers" who diverted pragmatism and made it the kind of anti-realistic, vulgarly[4] utilitarian and flatly business-like view that this doctrine often evokes. Indeed, he kept lamenting that the "philosophers of today" (he meant Schiller, but also James) "should allow a philosophy so instinct with life to become infected with seeds of death in such notions as that of 'the mutability of truth' "(6.485).

Now it is well known too that, if Putnam credits Peirce for emphasizing that practical interest is inseparable from cognitive or theoretical interest: no one could dream of "a discussion about testing theories or hypotheses that would take place outside certain values or that would assume, for example, the extortion of consensus" (1992b, 76), he also wrote that Dewey was the first philosopher, not only to subscribe to the view that "what applies to investigation in general applies to ethical investigation", but to have put it into practice: indeed, although the view was originally formulated by Peirce, Peirce did not apply it to the moral domain, because he "categorically refused to deal with ethics" (1992b, 88).

This is indeed, as has been shown elsewhere (TIERCELIN 1994, 2002b), a very schematic conception of Peirce's approach to norms and ethics, which underestimates, in particular, the emphasis Peirce put on norms and values so as to elaborate a doctrine of the normative sciences, which, to say the least, did not "come out of the blue"[5]. However, the present paper will focus more on the specific reasons why such a Peircian or pragmaticist approach is best "equipped" not so much as compared with *other* pragmatist attempts, *but as such*, to answer some of the hardest challenges posed by contemporary scepticism, even when it comes to the *ethical* aspects posed by such a challenge.

So after sketching the major aspects of the sceptical challenge and the most common contemporary answers it gave rise to, an analysis will be made of the reasons why the *ethical* aspect of the challenge is specifically acute, and why, then, in many ways, a pragmaticist approach is not fundamentally different from other pragmatist approaches (in particular Peirce's and James'); although finally, some arguments will be presented in favour of a more straightforwardly Peircian or pragmaticist attitude as being the most efficient parry to the sceptical challenge.

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[3] R. S. Robin 1997, 139.

[4] For a vigorous criticism of "vulgar pragmatism" see S. Haack 1993, 1998; Migotti 1988; Tiercelin 1994. Dokic and Engel 2002, conclusion.

[5] See Robin 1964, 271-288 and the classical book by Potter 1967. See also Tiercelin 1994, 1997, and the last chapter of Tiercelin 1993, 335-384.

1. The Various Forms of the Sceptical Challenge

Briefly, the sceptical challenge can take at least three major forms[6]:

1) The epistemological challenge (under the two major forms of the Plato-Gettier challenge and the Agrippa's challenge): Do we know anything? What are the conditions of possibility of knowledge, of justification? What should we add to a true justified belief in order to have any knowledge? Should we favour an internalist or externalist approach, foundationalism, coherentism, reliabilism, evidentialism? How do we justify our beliefs? How do we check they are true? How do we secure our inquiries? From the Ancient Greeks on, up to our most recent contemporaries, three basic types of sceptical reactions may be found to such difficulties: *a) First type of sceptical answer*. No, we do not know anything, the dogmatic (or rustic) sceptic answers. Either knowledge is absolute or it is not: now we can never reach such a thing (Peter Unger's agnoiology in his book *Ignorance* 1975 would be the best contemporary illustration of such a view). But there are other contemporary versions, most of them inspired by a kind of "naturalistic" scepticism, of a neo-humian type (STRAWSON 1985, STROUD 1984): for Stroud, scepticism is "conditionally" correct, for it is the unavoidable result of any inquiry aiming at knowledge and implies, as a consequence, a break between philosophy and ordinary life. For Strawson, scepticism is irrefutable; if we do not admit this, it is only because, psychologically (naturalistic answer), we are unable to do so, even if (attenuated pessimism), it remains ineffective in ordinary life. But the essential point (its theoretical unshakability) is nonetheless taken for granted. *b) Second type of sceptical answer*: Maybe we do know, maybe we do not, so if we want to reach peace of mind (*ataraxia*) we'd rather stop doubting, have an "urban" attitude", and suspend our judgments, the Pyrrhonian says, keep silent (*apraxia*) and avoid asserting anything. Such forms of neo-Pyrrhonism (FOGELIN 1994) are found today (a temptation which Peirce also has at times, yet finally resists): one views scepticism as a genuine problem and agrees that an inquiry into justification and knowledge is well founded, but, following Aenesideme's and Agrippa's dialectical techniques (reinterpreted in the light of the teachings of the linguistic turn), one adopts an attitude of Wittgensteinian inspiration: justification is based on *non epistemic* norms (the "hinges" which allow the door to turn; see WRIGHT 2004). However, none of the (coherentist or reliabilist) analyses offered by most contemporary theories of knowledge are able to avoid the vices of circularity or infinite regress. *c) Third type of answer* more inspired either by the kind of probabilism of a Carneades (i.e: probability viewed as a guide for the conduct of life), or by the reasonable physician Sextus, or by the comfortable Montaigne prompting us to live in harmony with the uses and customs of our country and village, a view which is also often in close connection with common sense, one of the main inspirers of which is E.G. Moore, and the heir of the Scottish (Reidian) philosophy of common sense, but which can also be extended to some aspects of Wittgenstein, interpreted, this time, more as a "pragmatist"

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[6] For a more detailed presentation of the renewal of scepticism in contemporary philosophy, of the various forms it takes and of the basic types of answers that have been proposed, see Tiercelin 2005, 8-62.

than as a "Pyrrhonian" (see WILLIAMS 1991, 1999, 2004, PUTNAM 1995, 2000). The view, basically, is the following; extreme scepticism is taken as unreasonable, in so far as it bets on the overall presence of the risk of error, and leads to agnoiology (or theory of ignorance); the reality of the risk is recognized (fallibilism), but a theory of justification without any warrant of truth is defended, which, however, enables less to "refute" than to "neutralize", as any good therapist would recommend, the sceptic.

2) The metaphysical challenge: if we take the sceptical challenge from the metaphysical side (which appears mainly in the modern times, and is linked with the problem of realism and with the way our ideas are able or not, either to represent the real qualities of the world or to allow us merely to reach the phenomena or appearances, it basically amounts to this: can we prove the reality of the external world? This is the famous - and to some extent the most severe - challenge posed by the Sceptical Cartesian scenario or by some of its contemporary versions such as Putnam's Brain in a Vat (BIV) experiment (see Putnam 1981). As is well known, the reason why today many philosophers call themselves sceptics is that they think it is impossible to overcome Descartes's challenge (STROUD 1984), because it would mean that, in order to know anything, we would have to exclude *all* the alternative situations which might threaten our knowledge, which is something we simply cannot do:
In other words,

1. I cannot know whether sceptical hypotheses (for ex that I am dreaming or that I am a BIV) are false.

2. If I do not know that the sceptical hypotheses are false, then I do not know much.

3. Therefore, I do not know much (Note that the conclusion has an air of paradox, as is often noted when we look at sceptical arguments): indeed, I seem to *know* plenty of things.

Or we can reformulate this along the lines of the so called Argument from Ignorance, formulated by Keith de Rose:

1. I do not know that non-H (for ex. that I do not dream that I am not a brain in a vat);

2. If I do not know that non-H, then I do not know O;

3. Therefore, I do not know that O. (De ROSE 1995, 1)

I cannot, within the scope of this paper, dwell on this aspect of the sceptical challenge, but I would like to point out that, one way to answer it, as Putnam (and before him, Peirce, precisely), among others, has seen, is to try to threaten phenomenalism and to give some consistency to the *realistic* stance (and in particular to stop defining it in terms of some kind of metaphysical or externalist realism)[7]

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[7]   See Tiercelin 2005, 35, and chap. VI.

2. The Acuteness of the Sceptical Challenge as Far as Ethics is Concerned

But let us concentrate on the third aspect of the sceptical challenge, namely the ethical challenge, which, from the start, has something paradoxical about it: for, as the Ancients sceptics claimed, wasn't scepticism precisely recommended as a means to reach happy life, through the absence of trouble? After all, the *epoche* or suspension of judgement was the condition for inner tranquillity, wherein happiness lies. Now, as is well known too, many have blamed the sceptics, in so doing, for running the risk of a kind of neutralisation, by indifference, of the ethical choices[8]. However, let's face it: we also know that there are all kinds of ways and excellent reasons to be an ethical sceptic. As Strawson notes in the first pages of *Freedom and Resentment*, taking the example of Determinism and Free Will, we spend our time oscillating from one perspective to another. If such a situation of doubt and desequilibirum is not proper to ethics, as Noah Lemos has observed (2002: 480), and can also be applied to our beliefs in the reality of the external world or in the existence of other minds, it seems that scepticism is more widespread in ethics than in other domains and also that it takes a more acute form. But why? First, probably, because in morals, it is no longer time for reflexion but for *action*; secondly, because moral disagreements soon turn into *practical dilemmas* much harder or even (so it seems) impossible to solve; thirdly because we have the impression that any ethical choice almost inevitably implies "a formal retreat on one side in exchange of a substantial or vital concession on the other", or, in Jamesian terms, that "our deterministic pessimism may become a deterministic optimism at the price of extinguishing our judgement of regret" (*The Dilemma of Determinism*,129). Hence, we become easy preys to the "authentic sceptic" who, in face of such a disagreement, very easily concludes, if he is a Pyrrhonian, that it is impossible to decide, and presumptuous to believe that truth and falsity can be applied in ethics, or, if he is a dogmatic sceptic, that, anyway, we cannot know anything in that domain. These are current positions in history, still widespread in contemporary philosophy: if one cannot decide, settle at the theoretical level, know anything, justify anything, then it is wise just to rely on the "moderation of the affects", to trust instincts and sentiments, moral conscience, or still, our practices, customs, roots or traditions. Neo-pyrrhonism is often allied with anti-rationalism, sentimentalism and conservatism. But scepticism, when it is dogmatic, is often allied too with relativism and cynicism.

Is there another way, or are we condemned once and for all to "the anesthesia of the moral sceptic brought to bay and put to his trumps"[9]? Either because, the nature and reality of moral facts and principles would be for ever unknown to us, or because we can no longer believe in our claims to universalism – whether they rely on Platonic forms or essences, on *a priori* principles or universal norms – or because, adopting a fall-back position, from a clearly realistic position to a merely cognitivist approach, we decide it's better to stop talking of "knowledge", of "truth", of "objectivity", of "justified beliefs", and even more of any "consensus" in a domain in which, as a matter of fact, we are merely governed by our emotions, desires, preferences, projections, cultural values, habits or norms?

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[8]   As we shall see, this is one of James's main reasons for blaming moral scepticism.
[9]   James, *The Will to Believe* (hereafter WB), 87.

By the way, are we doomed to such a series of dualisms? The dualism of reason and sentiment, of belief and desire, of fact and value, of theory and practice, or again, of norm and value? Have we no other choice than between the dogmatism of universalism and the relativism of values, pessimism or cynicism? And maybe in a more perverse way, between the "soft pillow of doubt" and the just as soft "discourse ethics" of communicative reason? Is the sceptic right when he thinks that in the domain of morals too, we only deal with appearances, a consequence of which is very often, as noted previously, that anything goes, or that one can say yes to everything?

Here we should be careful in our evaluation of the contribution of the pragmatists, generally speaking: as we all know, pragmatists have always fought against false abstractions or pseudo-dualisms and against any intellectualism cut off from experience; now this has often led on their part to a kind of sceptical reaction and therapeutic attitude towards such things, very close, in many regards, to what the sceptics have always claimed one should be doing. In that respect, it is not surprising that one should often find a rather "anti-theoretical" attitude in James but also in Peirce, or in Wittgenstein or Ramsey (whom I think we should count as a pragmatist, or, rather, as a pragmaticist[10]). However, and contrary to what a first impression might suggest, such an attitude is not adopted in the name of a mere conservatism or sentimentalism, and therefore should not be mistaken too quickly with a more or less disguised form of neo pyrrhonism: it is part and parcel of an *offensive undertaking in terms of ethical obligations* for the "moral philosopher" as James calls him, and very clearly in the case of Peirce at least, in the name of a decidedly realistic and cognitivist conception of ethics, eager to answer the "logical demands" – a term which is also used by James (WB, 66) – of ethics. One of the strengths of the pragmatist approach, generally speaking, consists in accounting not only for the subtle alliance, rather than opposition, which prevails between sentiment and rationality, of what James calls our "sentiment of rationality", but also for what is, then, the right attitude to adopt in order to resist the sceptical challenge, in other words, to answer to what is required by the "strict logic of the ethical situation". However, it is here that the positions of the pragmatists may be differentiated, concerning, in particular the question whether, in order to best avoid scepticism, one should evaluate the criteria of ethical *justification*, interpret the relations between it and *epistemic* justification, and determine to what extent one can or should abolish any frontier between fact and value, and get rid or not, as Putnam now claims (2004), of any kind of "ontology" in ethics (and elsewhere)[11].

3. A Common Attitude of the Pragmatists on Many Decisive Aspects of the Way to Respond to the Sceptical Challenge in Ethics

But let us start by being very clear about the reasons why it is right to underline many common elements in the attitude pragmatists have towards this: all of them take the sceptical challenge ethics faces seriously and as something which should be solved, but

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[10]   See Tiercelin 2004d.
[11]   See my comments on this attitude in Tiercelin 2006.

also, and this is very clear both for Peirce and James who always believed that, as pragmatists, we have *obligations*, they all agree on the fact that we should reject all kinds of strict dualisms, between logic and epistemology, on the one hand, and ethics on the other (which has, in my mind, consequences which have often been underestimated), but also between fact and value, or again between reason and sentiment.: this should be insisted upon, for people are at times tempted to oppose them, underlining in particular, a so-called prevalence of ethics over epistemology for James, while Peirce would be a totally dumb, abstract, refrigerated logician, deaf to human and ethical issues. Just as much as James, Peirce considers that the philosopher must look to our practices and see what account of truth would be best suited for them: "We must not begin by talking of pure ideas, – vagabond thoughts that tramp the public roads without any human inhabitation – but must begin with men and their conversation" (CP, 8. 112 – this could even have been written by… Rorty). Now for both of them, one thing is clear: ethics is, no doubt *primary*. "It is impossible to be completely and rationally logical except on an ethical basis" (Peirce writes: 2.198): "Real pragmatic truth is truth as can and ought to be used as a guide for conduct" (Ms 684, p. 11, 1913).[12] But more precisely, on what do they agree?

1. From the negative side, all pragmatists reject any form of moral rationalism and have basically an anti-theoretical reaction: Ethics has no essential state. Ethics is not Practics. They favor a form of Conservative Sentimentalism. Philosophical rationalism, Peirce claims, is a "farce". This is why, there is no possible confusion between Vital questions in which instinct, or the feeling of some "primitive obligation" should be followed and Scientific questions[13] in which, in strict parlance, *belief* – as a disposition to act – has no place (1.635).[14]

2. However, the common condemnation of moral rationalism does not prevent – on the contrary it calls for – a strict conception of rationality as a norm**,** and also the necessity to build a "system of ethics" (James) or a "doctrine of the normative sciences", which transcends the mere laws of "association" and utility, is guided by ends and ideals to realize. In that respect if an "ideal of conduct should be distinguished from a motive to action", it is just the same, impossible to view them as totally separated.

3. Hence, for both James and Peirce, a subtle analysis, involving our whole being, of the way Sentiment *and* Rationality combine in the formation of moral conduct so as to educate not so much a moral sense as a delicate balance between our ideals and our motives, contributing to a "directly felt fitness with things" (James): in particular, unless

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[12] I have analyzed this in detail in chap. 5 of Tiercelin 2005, 146ff. and 173ff..

[13] See RLT, 107-117; 111; 1.50-58; 1.76; 2.82; 1.13; 1.236; 5.582-589. I have analyzed this in Tiercelin 2002b and 2005, 149-160.

[14] Compare: "Any attempt to treat such topics (of "popular philosophy" such as "the relation of man to nature, and the meaning of morality") seriously reduces them to questions either of science or of technical philosophy, or results more immediately in perceiving them to be nonsensical"…Theology and Absolute Ethics are two famous subjects which we have realised to have no real objects"(Ramsey,1931, 291-92) with Peirce: 1.655, 5.60, RTL 110-112 or Ms 437, 14 and with James (*The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life*, 162-164).

ethical norms (which are neither "transcendent" prescriptions nor pure cultural products) were, so to speak, "inhabited" by motives, *i.e* not so much moved by emotions as shaped by feelings-dispositions, involving evaluations, they could not really lead us to action, function as genuine regulative principles, i.e. not as mere "hopes", but as "living hopes" (7.506) (Peirce's equivalent to James's "living options"). And our moral ideals would then rather look like the categorical imperative of the "transcendental apothecaries", not much more valuable than the "barking of a pooch or the hooting of an owl".[15] Both Peirce and James, insist on the fact that, sentiment and feeling in reasoning and inquiry do not reveal the limits of rational self-control. On the contrary, "that we trust our logical sentiments can be a sign of our wisdom and rationality; our instinctive sense of which actions and reasonings are to be trusted can reflect our grasp of what is required of a reasoning agent...", the awareness that "our sentimental attunement to the demands of reason exceeds our intellectual understanding of what rationality involves".[16] So even if the "cool-hearted","scholastic absolutist" Peirce insists more on the emergence of ethical norms from nature on the model of logical norms, and on the controlled and deliberate character of conduct, while the "human" James insists more on our perception of our *obligations* towards the "cries of the wounded", both underline the need for an *ethical community* (or "moral republic") in which it is less important to aim at a "system" than to refine one's ethical *dispositions* or virtues by deepening one's skills, regarding as well the "specific emotions" and "moral perceptions" required for the determination of the ideals to follow, as the capacities for deliberation and decision, in order to have better arms to meet more and more complex ethical situations but also to resist all attempts at "fixing" our beliefs, all sorts of methods of authority might retort to.

4. This is why, basically, pragmatists have a *cognitive* approach to ethics. Conservative sentimentalism indeed: but always together with Control and Criticism, as applied to oneself but also to all those who might constitute a threat, for oneself as for others, to their free exercise. To that extent, even if ethics is a matter of *perception*, one should be aware of the difference there is between immediate *valuing*, and *evaluation*: as Dewey stressed, it is not because something is immediately valued, that it is valuable (PUTNAM 2002, 104); again, although they reject moral rationalism, refuse the dualism of reason and sentiment, the strict dualism of logic and epistemology, on the one hand, and of ethics on the other, they assert the reality of values and of norms and claim the possibility of an ethics in which the notions of truth, objectivity, normativity but also of experimentation and fallibility continue not only to make sense but to impose themselves, although they do not have to be founded on such and such essential definition of the

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[15] Incidentally, if norms are based, from the start on the feelings and values which go along the process of their elaboration, it means that Putnam is wrong to link Peirce on the one hand with Habermas and Apel on the other, at least if the latter's main contribution to ethics lies, as he urges, in maintaining a separation between "values" (reduced to mere subjective preferences" and "norms" which are supposed to rule our "ethical life" within the context of the "ethics of communicative reason" and discussion. For Peirce, norms are never separated from values, this has to do with his account of norms as, so to speak "emerging" from (and not irreducible to) nature". On this, Tiercelin 1997 and 2005, 170ff.
[16] Hookway 2000, 239, Tiercelin 2005, 172ff.

good, or such and such *a priori faculty*, or to give up values, emotions and interests. In other words, the anti-theoretical attitude of the pragmatists must not be viewed as a rejection of "moral philosophy" nor as a rejection of the interest one might find in examining such and such meta-ethical question: but note: if it is as important in ethics as in logic, to *reason* well, the moral philosopher is in a better position if he is a good *logician*, and a good *epistemologist* (and, at least in Peirce's case, and this is why I think is approach is more complete and to the point) a good *metaphysician*. All the more so as meta-ethics, even limited to casuistics is an important part of moral philosophy. This requires to have one's ideas clear about the moral terms, concepts, assertions and judgements, which are much more varied and complex than one usually thinks they are (PUTNAM 2004, 73), and not to trust some vague conceptions or theories of the Good (2004, 19), or even to be merely concerned by the only needs, interests, values – however crucial they may be, as James and Putnam keep stressing – of the individuals.

5. And this is why, also, contrary to what is often claimed, there is just as much in James as in Peirce, a perfect (Aristotelian[17]) awareness of the links to be drawn between our cognitive or epistemic reasons and virtues, on the one hand, and our practical and ethical reasons and virtues, on the other. Although Peirce may not be considered as what we would call today a virtue epistemologist, he also insists on the qualities of character one should have in order to lead inquiry in the proper way and he finds it paradoxical that one might conceive that "a rogue might be as good a reasoner as a man of honor (1. 576). Just the same, and even if his approach does not concern *inquiry* properly, one way to understand the famous debate between James and Clifford in the *Will to Believe* (WB) is to view it as James's conviction that the only way to act ethically (hence, in his view, rationally and logically) in such a circumstance, is to take the "risk" of considering that, in some cases, *practical reasons should outweigh epistemic reasons*. If, for James, we have not only the will but the *obligation* to believe, it is because the only way to overthrow the moral sceptic, this "active ally of immorality" is by refusing the *illusion* it gives us that something like neutrality is possible. To that extent, Putnam is right when he insists that the main contribution of the pragmatists to the ethical debate has consisted 1) in rejecting the positivist distinction between fact and value, 2) in refusing to reduce rationality to mere scientific or instrumental rationality[18]; 3) but also in refusing ethical relativism and adopting a cognitive approach to ethics[19].

Hence, if the points of departure between the pragmatists should neither be located at the level of their awareness of the depth the sceptical challenge poses to ethics nor, fundamentally, at the level of their respective answers to it, where should they be? Mostly at the level of the difference of priority they give (or real interest they manifest) in fully answering *also, both the epistemological and the metaphysical* aspects of the sceptical challenge: now it is precisely in that respect that the pragmaticist approach is in a much better position than the merely pragmatist one to constitute a convincing parry to the sceptical challenge. But how and why?

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[17] On the importance of Aristotle for Peirce, see Tiercelin 2004b.

[18] See in particular his analyses in Putnam 1994a, 154-156, 156-160, 170-1, 201 and 1995, 22. I have analyzed and commented upon Putnam's views in Tiercelin 2002a, 85ff.

[19] On all this see Tiercelin 2002, 24ff, 2003b, 2005, 184 ff. These are themes Putnam has been stressing on and on (e.g. Putnam 1981, 137, 211-216; 1995, 15).

4. The Pragmaticist Approach to the Sceptical Challenge

Avoiding scepticism means that one should be able not only to solve the *ethical* aspects of the sceptical challenge, but, in so far all ethics *and* epistemology are closely connected, in the minds of any pragmatist, to take care of the *epistemological* side of the challenge too, and in particular, to be able to propose satisfactory answers or at least parries to such questions as: Do we know anything? How is our knowledge grounded? Are our beliefs justified? What is the pragmatists' position on that issue? Well undoubtedly, even if such issues are not foreign to any of them, they do not all give them the same weight.

1) It is obvious that Peirce and Dewey or Ramsey (rightly) attach a greater importance to such questions than James or the *latest* Putnam do. We find an illustration of this point of departure in the dialogue between Clifford and James in the *Will to Believe*. Without going into the details of this much discussed debate, the dialogue of the deaf which takes place between James and Clifford[20], which gives the impression in the end, as Susan Haack has demonstrated in her decisive study (1997b), that Clifford is too demanding, from a moral point of view, while James is too permissive, epistemically speaking[21], comes from the fact that they do not make a clear enough distinction, as they should, even if they are pragmatists, between what counts as an *epistemological justification* and what counts as an *ethical justification*. Too demanding, ethically speaking indeed, on Clifford's side, since you cannot always blame someone for believing and acting on insufficient evidence. For 1) there are cases in which a belief is unjustified although its moral evaluation may be simply indifferent or even favourable (see PEIRCE 5.503); 2) this would imply that a moral *ought* implies a *can*, hence that one should always be able to induce in oneself a belief (in others words that one could believe at will, now such a doxastic voluntarism has nothing obvious, or sounds at least paradoxical because it implies that one should be able to performs an act of believing for mere practical reasons having nothing to do with epistemic ones); 3) It would amount to treating all unjustified beliefs as arising from either doxastic incontinence or self deception, and overlooking the possible (individual or cultural) cognitive inadequacy of the agent for which the agent cannot be held responsible hence not blamed; 4) It would be overlooking also the fact that because of the perspectivist aspect of our judgements of justification, and their relying on a background of beliefs, the judgement according to which somebody else' belief is unjustified is itself fallible; 5) and most of all, not seeing that the epistemological ideal one should have lies in a search less for "sufficient" reasons than for the most *adequate* evidence in terms of independence, comprehension, autonomy[22].

But on James's side, the distinction between both kinds of justification is not clear

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[20] Cf. Clifford: "It is wrong always, everywhere, and for everyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence" (*The Ethics of Belief* 1879, 77.

[21] See in particular W. James, WB, 12 or *The Sentiment of Rationality*, 96-97.

[22] Indeed when may we say that the evidence is "sufficient"? When we have our ideas clear and distinct (Descartes)? When they are in conformity with the laws of logic? When they render a hypothesis highly probable ? It is hard to find an agreement here or to take an *a priori* decision without begging the question one way or another. See Engel 2005.

enough either. James holds that it is not always bad to believe on insufficient evidence. This would be fair enough, as S. Haack notes, if he meant it from an *ethical* standpoint. But it is not exactly what he does. He finds Clifford's view a narrow, philistine and coward one (WB, 24-5). There are cases in which we can and should say: "We must know the truth" instead of "we must avoid error", in which it is good (even rational) to believe contrary to the available evidence (WB, 96-7). If we had to respect Clifford's rule, it would go against our "passional nature", and even, against our own interest in terms of knowledge. James seems to make a constant confusion here between ethical *and* epistemic criteria of justification; for he claims (wrongly) that:1) one can believe at will (James's doxastic voluntarism: WB, 74, 77, 108, as if believing and doubting, as Peirce would say, are as easy as lying), out of some "passional decision", so independently of the *epistemic* reasons one may have to believe; 2) that it may be good to, or, even that one should in many cases, believe out of will, and that it may be rational to do so (WB, 89, 81, 69, 29); and even 3) that it may be good to be irrational: i.e., if it is rational to believe only in proportion to what one is justified in believing, it may be at times good (useful, rational) not to be rational. But, James seems to use at times arguments that are meant in an epistemological sense: knowing the truth is no less valuable than avoiding error (WB, 17ff.); believing that *p* sometimes contributes to help seeing that *p* is true (WB, 23-4) and at times arguments that have an *ethical* character: that we should not blame those who have faith without founding themselves on sufficient evidence and that we should respect everyone's freedom[23]. So not only does not James distinguish enough both kinds of justification: neither does he distinguish enough what can hold and even be valued at the level of *inquiry* from what holds in terms of *epistemic justification*. Hence, stressing that it is sometimes better (from an epistemological point of view) to believe something even if evidence is insufficient, he takes the example of the man of science whose insufficiently grounded faith in a theory motivates to the pursuit of its confirmation, and thus makes research progress (WB, 26) Now this does not have to do with the conception of epistemic *justification* but rather with the question of the *conduct* of inquiry[24].

So it is very likely that, although Peirce would agree with James (from an ethical point of view), and although, and despite his basically evidentialist tendencies, he would introduce many qualifications to Clifford's position'("it is always wrong to believe anything on the basis of insufficient evidence"), favoring rather, to follow Haack's distinctions, some *overlap* (rather than strict *correlation* or much less *reduction*) between epistemic and ethical norms, he would clearly be against a pure reduction of epistemological norms to ethical norms[25].

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[23] WB 30, and the quotation borrowed from Fitz-James Stephen WB 33.

[24] The distinction is articulated in more details in Haack 1993, chapter 10.

[25] Which explains, as S. Haack notes, why he "good old friend" Peirce to whom the *Will to Believe* had been dedicated thought it useful in the letter in which he thanked James, to specify the following: "As to 'belief' and 'making up one's mind,' if they mean anything more than this, that we have a plan of procedure, and that according to that plan we will try a given description of behaviour, I am inclined to think they do more harm than good. 'Faith,' in the sense that one will adhere consistently to a given line of conduct, is highly necessary in affairs. But if it means you are not going to be alert for indications that the moment has come to change your tactics, I think it ruinous in practice." (8. 251; 1897) I have analyzed their respective approaches in Tiercelin 2005, 196ff.

This may explain why there is already a difference of approach towards the sceptical issue as such for James and for Peirce: for the former, there are cases in which we can and should say: "We must know the truth" instead of "we must avoid error", in which it is good (even rational) to believe contrary to the available evidence (WB, 96-7). Now it is rather clear that James adopts this position all the more easily as his anti-theoretical attitude and his criticism, in the first pages of *The Will to Believe,* of "objective evidence" and "absolutism" only separates him from dogmatic scepticism by a hair's breadth. It is a constant theme of his: the empiricist, as soon as he starts reflexion, cannot avoid the risk of scepticism (WB, 39-40) And realizing such a danger does not count for nothing in James's doxastic voluntarism. See also (WB, 50): "Our science is a drop, our ignorance, a sea". Or again: "There is but one indefectibly certain truth, and that is the truth that pyrrhonistic scepticism itself leaves standing, - the truth that the present phenomenon of consciousness exists" (WB, 22, 23). The aim is to make something positive of that, in fact deeply sceptical, awareness. Incidentally, James recognizes that suspending one's judgement is not ill founded, in all cases in which we are not facing « living options » (as when we have to chose which view to adopt on the Roentgen rays). In such cases, "Wherever the option between losing the truth and gaining it is momentous, we can throw the chance of gaining truth away, and at any rate save ourselves from any chance of believing falsehood by not making up our minds at all till objective evidence has come. In scientific questions this is almost always the case; and even in human affairs in general, the need of acting is seldom so urgent that a false belief to act on is better than no belief at all" This does not only apply to scientific matters, but also to human affairs. In such cases, the sceptical *epoche* is, if not recommended, at least admitted. "The choice between believing truth and falsehood is seldom forced. The attitude of sceptical balance is therefore the absolutely wise one if we would escape mistakes" (WB, 26). In other words, James's rejection of moral scepticism is all the more "justified" as James has, at the outset, conceded a lot to the sceptic. And he concedes a lot, too, in the end, in claiming that there is no way to "refute" the sceptic with logic, which remains "speechless" in front of it[26] :

We face a real difference here: while Peirce is clear in his condemnation of *radical* or *dogmatic* forms of scepticism as may be seen from his rejection of radical (or paper) doubt and of the whole salad of Cartesianism[27], he never gives up the basically *evidentialist* ideal of relying on logic or knowledge in order to justify our beliefs. Indeed, not only does Peirce provide a detailed and rather unique analysis of the (both natural and normative) mechanisms that govern beliefs and doubts within the context of inquiry, but he also insists, on the one hand, on the necessity of, this time, *genuine* doubts

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[26] "If a pyrrhonist sceptic asks us how we know all this, can our logic find a reply? No! Certainly it cannot". "If we had an infallible intellect with its objective certitude, we might feel ourselves disloyal to such a perfect organ of knowledge in not trusting to it exclusively, in not waiting for its releasing word. But if we are empiricists, if we believe that no bell in us tolls to let us know for certain when truth is in our grasp, then it seems a piece of idle fantasticality to preach so solemnly our duty of waiting for the bell"(WB, 19).

[27] Close to Wittgenstein's views in *On Certainty*, in particular. See Tiercelin 2000 and 2005, chap 3.

prompted by real external causes, which stimulate our inquiry and finally contribute, with the help of the method of *scientific* inquiry ruled by *reality*, to fix our beliefs, and on the other hand, on the necessity of the general application of fallibilism to *all* domains whatsoever (an attitude which incidentally, also separates him, at times, from a hair's breadth, from *extreme* scepticism). This is called by what Peirce names "the logic of pragmatism", and the strict requirements of the scientific method, whose aim is to help "scientific intelligence" to reach the truth, a method which is subject not only to observation and experience, a part which is relatively out of the control of our will, but also to the strict control of our normative capacity of reasoning, inference, deliberation[28], self control, criticism, criticism *of* criticism included**.**[29] This is why fallibilism should suffer *no* exception (which incidentally, means that you should also be a fallibilist as regards fallibilism).[30]

And it is on that count, in particular that, in spite of the many commons aspects there are between Peirce and Wittgenstein in their respective criticism of radical doubt, Peirce's analysis is not only more elaborated than Wittgenstein's but more efficient too as a parry to the epistemological side of the sceptical challenge. His *critical* commonsensism would forbid him to come to such declarations as the ones we can find in *On Certainty*: "Giving grounds, justifying the evidence, come to an end – but the end is not certain propositions striking us immediately as true, i.e. not kind of seeing on our part; it is our acting, which lies at the bottom of the language game" (UG, 204). And this is why too, if Peirce does not want to be involved into the Cartesian scenario (for

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[28]   7.326, W3, 40ff.; 8.41; W2, 8 and 16; Ms 749; Ms 596.

[29]   5.108; 2.182; 2.204; 5.55; 7. 444; 7.457; Ms 692; Ms 453; 8.191 etc.

[30] Peirce's fallibilism is the doctrine according to which our knowledge is never absolute but always swims, so to speak, in a continuum of uncertainty and indeterminacy. (1.171): we can never be certain not to reach knowledge, but to reach a perfectly sure knowledge (4.63). On many questions, we have reached the final opinion (8.43), and rather often, in fact, the beliefs that are established are the best possible we can have in terms of our available evidence. of truth. As Quine, Peirce thinks of science as something which "is not standing upon the bedrock of fact. It is walking upon a bog, and can only say, this ground seems to hold for the present. Here I will stay till it begins to give way" (5. 589, 1898; cf. Skagestad 1981 and Misak 1991,123). So the fact that our beliefs are *in fact* most often indubitable (and therefore that many of them have an irreducible vagueness which renders the concept of truth redundant with the concept of belief), does not imply that they are ever or *de jure* so: hence, fallibilism which does not intend to devaluate knowledge but rather constitutes a rampart against dogmatism and dogmatic skepticism, which in the end are but *lazy* forms of knowledge - remains the only possible theoretical position: our knowledge is not merely probable but *conjectural* and *provisional* character (1.141; 5.168; 5.569; 5.2; 6.526). Now fallibilism is all the stronger as it is not merely *epistemological* but *ontological* due to he indeterminacy operating in nature: this is why it is the job of the *synechistic* metaphysics – ruled by the principle that "all things swim in continua" (1.171) - but also *tychistic* metaphysics – which gives an irreducible place to the spontaneity of chance- that fallibilism is finally founded: we may even say that the principle of continuity is merely the "idea of fallibilism objectified" (*ibid*): CP 1. 171;1.403; NEM.IV, xiii; 7.119). It is not surprising, therefore, that some may have concluded that Peirce was only separated from skepticism by a hair's breadth" (Hookway 1985, 73).

reasons which are clear), he also says how much he is admirative of the Cartesian method, an attitude linked with his *critical* commensism[31] and his radical *fallibilism.*

2) This may also explain why Peirce, more than the other pragmatists, is eager to provide a detailed analysis of the *nature* as such of belief (3.160-1), self control (5.440-41), logical norms, reasoning in general, "viewed as thinking in a controlled and deliberate way" (1.573), to explain *how* norms *emerge* from nature[32] and *why* "the phenomena of reasoning are in their general features, parallel to those of moral conduct" (1.606) in other words, why logical norms are so close to ethical norms *and vice versa*, an attitude which is illustrated in the way again, Peirce defines precisely the *role and aims* of the Normative sciences[33] and emphasizes, as is shown in the famous passage of the *Doctrine of chances,* the very deeply ethical side of epistemology, since "one can *only* be rational if one *identifies himself* psychologically with a whole ongoing — in fact a potentially infinite — community of investigators" (PUTNAM 1987, 83), and that "It is impossible to be completely and rationally logical except on an ethical basis" (2.198).[34] Now, it is true, as Hookway has claimed, that Putnam – who in at least two places (1987, 80ff., and 1994a, 160-1), analyzes Peirce's arguments – is wrong to identify Peirce's solution to the mere fact that I recognize the constraining strength of norms which do not possess a satisfactory instrumental justification in terms of my own purposes (1994a, 168), in other words through a sort of "normative reflexion on our practice", whereas altruism does not seem to be the result of any rational calculus or justification, but rather appears as "immediately" rational (HOOKWAY 2000, 239), as a "primitive conception of rationality", the "social principle" being "rooted in our logic", a sentiment imperatively required by logic, something which has more to do with a kind of "revelation" than with any prescription.[35] However Putnam is right in praising Peirce for his acute perception of the *depth* of the problem of objectivity in ethics: better than anyone, Peirce saw that

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[31] To get an idea of the basic principles of Peirce's critical commonsensism, inspired both by Th. Reid and by Kant, see in particular: 5.416; 5.442;5.498; 5.517; 5. 522.

[32] See Tiercelin 1997 for a detailed analysis of this "emergentism",which is in fact inspired by the "middle-way" suggested by Kant in (*Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, B 166-7.

[33] The *Normative Sciences* (logic, ethics and aesthetics) are "the purely theoretical sciences of purpose (1.282). Logic is "a particular problem of ethics, which is, in turn, dependent on aesthetics" (2.197). Ethics is "a science of ends", whose problem is not right or wrong, but "what I am deliberately ready to accept, as the statement of what I want to do"(2.198). Aesthetics is "the analysis of the end itself"(1.573; 1.574).This is perfectly in keeping with the Kantian inspiration of the pragmaticist approach: "If, as pragmatism teaches us, what we think is to be interpreted in terms of what we are prepared to do, then surely *logic*, or the doctrine of what we ought to think, must be an application of the doctrine of what we deliberately choose to do, which is Ethics" (5.35) "For to say that we live for the sake of action, as action, regardless of the thought it carries, would be to say that there is no such thing as rational purport" (5.429). "Practical" should not to be taken in a "materialistic" or "philistine" sense, but in "the Kantian sense of purposive rational action (or 'conduct'), submitted to our critical self-control"(5.429).To believe is "to be deliberately ready to adopt the believed formula as a guide to action"(5.27).

[34] Compare her Peirce W3, 281-4 and James, *The Sentiment of Rationality*, 94-5.n).

[35] See 1.673 about how Peirce views our duties as "mere cells of the social organism", and as merging into the "universal continuum".

ethical justifications cannot be understood in a purely *instrumental* way, precisely because they rest on certain *norms of rationality*.[36] And he was the one who went into the analysis of such norms in great detail.

3) The third superiority of the pragmaticist approach lies in the fact Peirce takes the metaphysical or ontological aspect of the sceptical challenge seriously. It is quite a common attitude of the pragmatists to think that questions related to metaphysics or ontology should be treated only to the extent that one should quickly get rid of them. Putnam's last book is quite clear about this: Ethics *without* ontology should be the *motto*. True, this is also in part Peirce's reaction towards metaphysics itself and to many of its pseudo-problems. But Peirce's criticism also has a positive side: namely, he is convinced that once philosophy has been purified (in particular thanks to the therapeutic instrument of the pragmatic maxim), it is then possible to erect a *scientific* and *realistic* metaphysics (TIERCELIN 2003a).

Of course we may take James's *radical empiricism* or Putnam's *natural realism* as ways of answering, at least partly, to the Cartesian challenge in developing a convincing account of how our perception relates us to the world.[37] However, although this cannot be achieved within the scope of this paper, it could be reasonably argued that Peirce's subtle account of perception and, in particular, the way he combines it with his sophisticated categorial and semiotic framewok and an original account of abduction[38] offers a really more convincing response to the sceptical enduring challenge of the proof of the reality of the external world. It is all the more important to insist on this metaphysical aspect, since, precisely, for a pragmatist, ethics is viewed, basically, as a question dealing less with a universe of universal norms or maxims functioning as categorical imperatives or prescriptions to be followed than with a *perception of moral values* and an *education of our ethical dispositions*. And this is why, as far as this last aspect is concerned, it is so important to realize that it is not only *perception* that has to be studied carefully, but also the *nature* of such dispositions and the question whether they should be viewed as being either categorical, higher order, or merely functional *properties*. Now we find such a discussion in Peirce and again a very original and fruitful approach to the still current debate today about the real nature and importance of dispositions as genuine and irreducible ontological properties[39].

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[36] This is all the more interesting as Putnam often views James as "the greatest exponent" of pragmatism (1995, 6), or credits Dewey of being the one who applied Peirce's original idea and in particular of having shown how "*what applies to intelligently conducted inquiry in general applies to ethical inquiry in particular*" (Clarke and Hale 1994, 186), and of having given "the epistemological justification of democracy"; this may explain why he also considers that Dewey was at times indulging into a "metaphysics of value" (Clarke and Hale 1994, 196-7), and, too quick in concluding from the "overlap" between scientific values and ethical values to their complete identity (1994a, 174): in that respect, Peirce was "more lucid" when he denounced the relativistic or sceptical risk there was in not maintaining a distinction between the two, and in completely giving up the idea of "pure knowledge" (1994a, 204-5).

[37] For a comparison and evaluation of the three approaches, see Tiercelin 2005, chap 6.

[38] See Tiercelin 2004c and 2005, chap.6.

[39] See Tiercelin 2007.

Some Conclusions

It is never easy to resist scepticism. It is even harder, one might say, if you are a pragmatist. For being a pragmatist implies to stick to fallibilism. Now, being both fallibilists *and* anti-sceptics is, according to Putnam, "*the* unique insight of American pragmatism" (1994a, 152). But the "middle way" adopted is also a narrow one. How can one maintain the truth there is in fallibilism without giving everything to the sceptic? As David Lewis urged, if we do not associate knowledge with "infallibility", we seem to be "stuck between the rocks of fallibilism and the whirlwinds of scepticism" and "both sound insane" (1996, repr. in 1999, 419). In other words, if there is no other way to resist the sceptic, than in being a fallibilist, as the pragmatists urge us to be, it becomes almost impossible to avoid him. And to a certain extent, this may explain why, in the various parries the pragmatists propose to the sceptical challenge, we still find many sceptical components. To take but a few examples: Wittgenstein's criticism of the Cartesian scenario and his attack against radical doubt does not so much comfort a straightforward "realist" or "pragmatist" reading[40] than a basically neo-pyrrhonian attitude: see his diagnosis of the situation (the sceptical illusion is rather "deflated" than "refuted"), or the mobile epistemic status he confers to the "hinge propositions" which seems almost impossible to settle in either sense (WRIGHT 2004). For James too, as already noted, the condemnation of moral scepticism, presented as a sick obsession of the risk of error, is all the more offensive as the threat of epistemological scepticism and of an inaccessible objective certainty is strong. If James blames the sceptics for risking *apraxia*, it is also because, if we are empiricists, we "believe that no bell in us tolls to let us know for certain when truth is in our grasp" and so "it seems a piece of idle fantasticality to preach so solemnly our duty of waiting for the bell" (WB, 25, 32-3). James the empiricist is never far from Sextus or Montaigne.

But neither is Peirce, the experimentalist, in whom the sentimental conservative is indeed close to the Reidian commonsensist, but in whom also (as in Ramsey), one can find elements resembling more a Carneades, in the view that probability is the guide in life[41]. And to a large extent, for Peirce, the situation is even worse, for scepticism has not the peaceful outlook of academic scepticism: since *epistemological* fallibilism goes together with a very extreme *ontological* fallibilism (due to his strong metaphysical commitment to a realism of vagueness), it makes it resemble more, at times, to mere dogmatic scepticism. If our knowledge is basically conjectural and provisional, and if it may even be the case that nothing corresponds to our idea of what reality is (4. 61) then, we are not far indeed from falling into the sceptic's well.

This may explain Putnam's emphasis on the narrowness of the way and his decision no longer to apply fallibilism to every kind of topics: in particular, Putnam contends, there are questions which it seems impossible to revise (such as: Slavery is bad), or some values which seem to have the hardness of "facts", as: "Yeats was a great poet" (2004, 16). In that sense, even if we are cognitivists, not only should we favour other

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[40] On Wittgenstein's pyrrhonism, see Fogelin 1994, 219-222, Tiercelin 2005, chap 3, 104ff.
[41] See in particular OT, 58 and 63, where Ramsey combines this position with an attitude very close to the critical commonsensist position adopted by Peirce.

terms than "justifications", as applied to the ethical domain, but we should also say that justification must *end* somewhere (2002, 131-2). He may be right. Perhaps the right attitude is to adopt a kind of neo-pyrrhonism like the one he finally seems to favour, as well as Wittgenstein or James. Maybe, the right pragmatist attitude is to "accept" the "manifest image", our *Lebenswelt*; the world such as we experience it, hence concentrate our best efforts in recovering a form of "natural realism" or "second naïveté", the sense of the ordinary, of the banal which, Putnam holds, "such strange notions as 'objectivity' and 'subjectivity' we have inherited from ontology and epistemology have prevented us from doing" (1990, 270). Perhaps, we should follow Apelle's recommendation as reported by Sextus, throw the sponge away, burn all our books and prefer to play backgammon and have dinner in a pleasant company, as Hume at times urges us to do. I am not so sure though.

I have stressed and agreed with the fact that the pragmatists insist on the primacy of ethics. Peirce, for his part, always considered that Kant, whom he "more than admired" (5.525) was but a "somewhat confused pragmatist" (5.412); and he described his own development as that of "a pure Kantian" who was simply forced "by successive steps " into Pragmaticism. It is also Kant, whom Putnam refers too, in several occasions, and for example, in opposing the *Schulbegriff* or scholastic concept of philosophy with its cosmological concept or *Weltbegriff*: "But, as is well known, "What should I do?" can be understood in two different ways: either as asserting, as Kant does, the primacy of practical reason, or as asserting the primacy of the question of "life" over the question of knowledge.

Here we have, I think the two possible major pragmatist readings, or : either the *pragmatist* or the *pragmaticist* reading: as far as Peirce is concerned, he was always instinctively suspicious of what might turn into some form or other of idolatry of life, convinced as he was, that if pragmatism was the spiritual heir of kantianism, it was because Kant, better than anyone else, had been able to detect "the inseparable link which exists between rational knowledge and rational finality" (5. 412) and that the main end of inquiry remained the search of truth and the discovery of what is real. Therefore he depicted his whole philosophical enterprise as growing "out of a contrite fallibilism, combined with a high faith in the reality of knowledge, and an intense desire to find things out" (1.14). His reluctance towards "applying" epistemology to ethics is, indeed, the direct consequence (as is the case with Kant), of his conviction of the *primacy* of ethics. This is highlighted in his conception of philosophy and rationality, in which one may find all such important epistemological virtues as: betting on rationality rather than on cynicism, modesty, professionalism, discussion, the values of argumentation, intellectual exchange, rather than visionary outbursts, cult of individual or romantic unbound subjectivity, literary conversation: on the contrary, one should always remain close to the laboratory, which is the exact opposite of scientism and dogmatism, but the promotion of the hypothetical, the fallible, the experimental, hence of the irreducible indeterminacy which necessarily accompanies all thinking activity. It may be that Peirce's disgust for nominalistic individualism and false transcendencies drew him too far in that direction of forgetting the necessary engagement of the philosopher within the *polis*. But this may also be understood in another fashion, namely, the conviction that the best way to promote democracy is and remains to trust the search of truth and to count on the value of knowledge and rationality. For him, it is no doubt through *knowledge* that

philosophy contributes to the "melioration" of human condition, and this is why there is so much to learn, as I have tried to argue elsewhere, from his own contribution not only to a possible new definition of the territory of epistemology itself[42], or to the kind of solution one could bring to the sceptical challenge from an epistemological point of view[43], or to the largely debated issue today concerning the exact place of our practical interests in the constitution of knowledge itself[44], or to such questions as the ones James also raises: whether our beliefs should aim at truth, or at knowledge or at something else; whether there is an intrinsic value in knowledge. But at the same time, as there is no difference in thinking that should not imply a difference in action: there is always a link between epistemology and ethics, and together with this idea, there is the view that one should indeed pass from epistemology to ethics, which, in the end, is primary.

The question is: what are the best means to realize such a passage? It is doubtful that mere conversational practice would suffice. James himself noted that it is not because one gives up the doctrine of objective certainty that one should give up searching or

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[42]   On the various important questions the pragmatists may raise in the necessary re-definition of epistemology itself and of the questions that should be given more prominence within it) and on the possible contribution of pragmatism to several current epistemological debates, see Tiercelin 2005, 259 ff.

[43]   On this, Tiercelin 2005, 263 ff.

[44]   For example, can we claim that "the difference between true belief and knowledge is not purely epistemic" (Stanley 2005, V) and that "the distinction between practical and theoretical rationality is less clear than one might wish"(2005, 2)? Does knowledge matter? Is the value of knowledge independent of other epistemic values, such as the value of truth, or the value of having true beliefs? Is knowledge, as an epistemic value, independent of other values, such as the good or freedom, which are practical or ethical values? If we hold, as pragmatists do, that there are substantial relations between our epistemic reasons to believe and our practical reasons to act, are we legitimate in saying (as James, precisely, claims we are) that the latter can sometimes override the former, and even more strongly, that epistemic reasons and values can be reduced to practical reasons and values?. Apparently, there seems to be a point of departure, here, between some versions of pragmatism (James, Putnam) who seem to favour the view that epistemic and practical values are interwoven, and that it is very hard to distinguish the question whether a belief is true from the question whether a belief is useful, and other versions of pragmatism, such as Peirce's or Isaac Levi's, which seem to maintain a sharp line between concerns about truth and epistemic matters on the one hand, and practical matters on the other. As Engel has recently argued (Stirling 2006), that the latter defend are more conceptions of *epistemic* utility than conceptions according to which epistemic utility would be of a piece with practical utility. In particular epistemic consequentialism, the view that true belief is the main epistemic value and that it should be maximised, is not touched by the arguments of the pragmatic encroachers, because it is perfectly evidentialist and "purist". Who is right? There is a whole debate today on those issues and others related to what some have called the "pragmatic encroachment" on our epistemic concepts and on the degree to which pragmatic factors "affect" or "are relevant" to the assessment of knowledge, and may even affect our epistemic evaluation of beliefs or attribution of knowledge. On these issues, see in particular Hawthorne 2004, Stanley 2005, Horwich 2005; and Engel 2006 (forthcoming).

hoping to find truth itself. If that is the case, the best way to retain the pragmatist heritage while avoiding some of its undesirable "consequences" would certainly be to practice the fallibilist attitude proned by the classical pragmatists, which is miles away from dogmatic absolutism and sceptical relativism, but also to stick to an ideal of truth accessible enough to be still inspired by reality, and not to rush into some hasty adaptation of knowledge to morals, without a clearer understanding of the links between them, and, in particular, to reject at the outset, the means we might have of *justifying* at least some of our ethical beliefs[45].

      3) But again, if ethics is primary, if ethics, from a pragmatist standpoint, is also mostly viewed as an *education* of our moral capacities and dispositions which have more to do with moral *perceptions* than with either some *a priori* faculty, moral sense, or normative prescriptions we should follow, then, there is a third obligation a pragmatist

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[45] As Putnam now seems inclined to urge us not to do I think this is a very important point to evaluate the dividing line among pragmatists, and by the same token, their respective success in avoiding scepticism and nihilism. Let us take moral scepticism. What should we be prepared to do in order to have an efficient "parry" to it, at least if we are a minimal cognitivist about ethics? We should indeed, and, this is what all pragmatists do, reject the argument about the "insoluble moral disagreement". But in order to do that, several ways are open to us: we can contest the fact value dichotomy, rely on some new definitions of science and knowledge and refuse the supposed dualism between ethics and science; reject the very idea of an impossible consensus in any domain whatsoever, in noting that, in fact, on many points, there is indeed agreement rather than disagreement; object to the inference concluding from the presence of disagreements in some domains to their necessary presence in all domains, or from our selective or sporadic errors and our belonging to a certain background to the general fallibility of our judgements in general; refuse to admit that the possible absence of "moral facts" inaccessible to observation, should be a sufficient reason for preventing our judgements, although not being in strict parlance caused by any fact nor insisted by any particular faculty from being justified. But we should *also*, for the sake of minimal *coherentist* requirements, demand the necessary coherence our beliefs should have (hence, incidentally, their necessary confrontation with those of the community), but also indicate that coherence is not enough, that we should confront our ethical beliefs to the teachings and lessons of experience (James, WB, 86, 88, 188) and to reality (*externalist* requirement), that they should, so to speak, track the truth; we should also make sure of the correct functioning of our dispositions to judge (*reliability* of the process) and finally admit that our deepest beliefs rely on a (however modest) *ground*, on in a sense acritical albeit always capable of revision and fallible) sentiments and principles. But we should also, and this should be all the more true if we are convinced, as the pragmatists are, that what applies to investigation in general also applies to ethical investigation in particular, and that our experience is entirely perfused with (epistemic, cognitive and ethical) values and norms, accept to submit our ethical judgements to the same criteria as the ones to which our epistemic judgements are submitted, or at the very least, explain for what reasons ethical and epistemic criteria of justification should be distinguished: in others words, is ethical justification identical with or a particular case of, or analogous to what is required by epistemic justification? Inversely, could epistemic justification be but a particular case of ethical justification? At any rate, I think we should not be too quick in saying that the term "justification" is decidedly inappropriate in ethical matters.

seems to have, namely, to find a solid basis for a correct account of how our perceptions relate us to the real world[46]. And this may explain why, from the beginning, Peirce thought that the only way to have one's ideas clear about this, was to try and find out a correct account of *reality* itself (which incidentally was the motivation for his search into truth, and not the other way round) and to opt for a *realist* position in what he thought was the major point that had to be settled if one wanted to make any progress in thought: namely the problem of universals.

For this is not, contrary to what Putnam often claims, a pseudo-problem we are dealing with (1994b, 509). As far as he was concerned, Peirce was convinced that if the alternative mental - non mental is a wrong alternative in the realists/anti-realists debate, it does not mean 1) that there are no other possible realist solutions apart from Platonism – and as I said, he chose Scotistic realism, nor 2) that there is no genuine real alternative here: namely the one required by the question whether our thought deals or not with real objects. Does this mean one should go so far as claiming that there is a necessary link between pragmatism and realism, or that "pragmaticism could hardly have entered a head that was not already convinced that there are real generals?" (5.503). Maybe not. Although I am tempted to say: Very likely: yes.

But, at the very least, I think that Peirce was right when he claimed that:

> So long as there is a dispute between nominalism and realism, so long as the position we hold on the question is not determined by any proof indisputable, but is more or less a matter of inclination, a man as he gradually comes to feel the profound hostility of the two tendencies will, if he is not less than man, become engaged with one or other and can no more obey both than he can serve God and Mammon. If the two impulses are neutralized within him, the result simply is that he is left without any great intellectual motive […] though the question of realism and nominalism has its roots in the technicalities of logic, its branches reach about our life. The question whether the genus homo has any existence except as individuals, is the question whether there is anything of any more dignity, worth, and importance than individual happiness, individual aspirations, and individual life. Whether men really have anything in common, so that the community is to be considered as an end in itself, and if so, what the relative value of the two factors is, is the most fundamental practical question in regard to every public institution the constitution of which we have it in our power to influence. (8.38)

In his remarkable book, *Rationalité et Cynisme*, Jacques Bouveresse noted that "to believe in morals despite all that we know, is today, more than ever, the moral problem, par excellence" (1984, 93). How can one avoid the irrationalist relativism or the complete scepticism to which the criticism of rationalism, in general and of moral rationalism, in particular, seem to lead? If there is something fruitful indeed in the approach of the pragmatists, and most of all of the pragmaticists, to the contemporary debates in ethics, it is precisely in this that they give us efficient tools for blocking some forms of moral scepticism and relativism, or to use Blackburn's phrase, they provide a genuine "course" between "the soggy sands and the cold rocks of dogmatism" (2001, 29).

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[46] Which might be defined along lines found in 1) 5. 384; 2) 1. 673 and 3) W2, 126.

"Don't look for the moon: we've got the stars", Charlotte Vale alias Bette Davis says at the end of *Now Voyager*: it is very likely that we, humans, do not have the moon, and as Ramsey has taught us, in defending his "human logic of truth", "we should not cry for it" (PP, 93). But for sure, we've got the stars. And for us, pragmatists, or rather, pragmaticists, that's plenty.

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