Seeking the Middle Way in Pragmatist Philosophy of Religion

Two Case Studies of the Ethical Grounds of Metaphysics in Pragmatism

Buscando o Caminho do Meio na Filosofia Pragmatista da Religião
Dois Estudos de Caso dos Fundamentos Éticos da Metafísica no Pragmatismo

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Abstract: The present essay will illuminate the nature of metaphysics, pragmatically understood, by examining the idea of a "middle way", or *via media*, in the context of pragmatist philosophy of religion. In metaphysics and elsewhere, the most reasonable philosophical position often lies in between implausible extremes, although the extreme positions may be more interesting. This article, seeking to identify and defend some methodological options for the metaphysical "middle-ground-seeker", suggests that a pragmatist methodology is *a* plausible approach for the one who attempts to maintain the middle ground and that promising versions of such methodology can be found in William James's and John Dewey's pragmatisms. The Jamesian and Deweyan case studies to be taken up come from the philosophy of religion. First, James's pragmatic way of dealing with metaphysical (including religious) issues in *Pragmatism* is considered, also in comparison to Kant's antinomies; subsequently, Dewey's pragmatically naturalist philosophy of religion is discussed along the same lines. Accordingly, instead of exploring the prospects of pragmatist metaphysics in general terms, this topic will be approached through these two case studies mainly focusing on the metaphysical aspects of the philosophy of religion; yet, this yields a general moral whose relevance extends beyond the philosophy of religion, as metaphysics finally emerges as dependent on ethics.

Keywords: Dewey. James. Kant. Metaphysics. Naturalism. Philosophy of religion. Pragmatic naturalism. Pragmatism.

Resumo: *Este ensaio esclarecerá a natureza da metafísica, pragmaticamente entendida, examinando a ideia de um "caminho do meio", ou via media, no contexto da filosofia pragmatista da religião. Em metafísica e em outras disciplinas, a posição filosófica mais razoável frequentemente se situa entre dois extremos implausíveis, embora as posições extremas possam ser mais interessantes. Este artigo, tentando identificar e defender algumas opções para "aquele que busca o caminho do meio", sugere que uma metodologia*

pragmatista é uma abordagem plausível para quem tenta manter o meio termo, e que versões promissoras dessa metodologia podem ser encontradas nos pragmatismos de William James e John Dewey. Os estudos de caso Jamesianos e Deweyanos a serem analisados vêm da filosofia da religião. Primeiramente, considera-se a forma pragmática com que James lida com as questões metafísicas (inclusive religiosas) no Pragmatismo, também em comparação com as antinomias de Kant; subsequentemente, discute-se a filosofia da religião pragmaticamente naturalista de Dewey, conforme essas mesmas linhas. Por conseguinte, em vez de explorar as perspectivas da metafísica pragmatista em termos gerais, este tópico será abordado através desses dois estudos de caso focando, principalmente, os aspectos metafísicos da filosofia da religião; isto, todavia, gera uma moral geral cuja importância se estende além da filosofia da religião, pois a metafísica finalmente emerge como dependente da ética.

Palavras-chave: *Dewey. Filosofia da religião. James. Kant. Metafísica. Naturalismo. Naturalismo pragmático. Pragmatismo.*

1. Introduction: pursuing a *via media*

Metaphysics, the science of "Being *qua* Being", is traditionally one of the central, if not *the* central, sub-discipline of philosophical inquiry. Its origins may be traced back to the very beginning of Western philosophy, the pre-Socratics' concerns with the *arche* of all things. As is well known, various anti-metaphysical movements emerged especially in the early decades of the twentieth century, and a critical attitude toward metaphysics dominated much of twentieth-century philosophy, both linguistically oriented analytic philosophy and phenomenology preoccupied with the analysis of consciousness and experience. The historical roots of those movements critical of the very idea of metaphysics as a philosophical discipline go back to such classical figures as Kant and Nietzsche – not to forget the pragmatist tradition.

However, metaphysics no longer seems dead, as it perhaps did in the mid-1900s. It has forcefully returned to the center of contemporary philosophical inquiry. As the anti-metaphysical currents of thought just mentioned have emphasized, and as most philosophers have taken for granted since Kant, the project of metaphysical inquiry needs (meta)philosophical justification. It is not acceptable for a critical thinker to engage in metaphysics just as "business as usual". Increasingly, philosophers – particularly analytic ontologists – tend to ignore this requirement, however, seeking to delineate the ultimate categorial structure of Being itself, without caring about Kantian-like epistemological or semantic restrictions and worries – or pragmatist ones, for that matter. While such analytic metaphysics has turned into an influential paradigm in contemporary philosophy, I want to investigate metaphysics and its prospects pragmatically and to thus blur any principled dichotomies between not just metaphysics and epistemology but also metaphysics and ethics. Insofar as metaphysical inquiry into being or existence is possible, it is to be conducted as, or in the spirit of, Kantian transcendental philosophy, pragmatically transformed; then, however, it will no longer be an inquiry into the categorial structure of the mind- and language-independent (or, more generally, conceptualization-independent) reality

"in itself" but an inquiry into the structure of our human – humanly categorized and conceptualized – world.[1]

In this paper, I will examine the nature of metaphysics, pragmatically understood, in relation to the idea of a "middle way", or *via media*. In metaphysics and elsewhere, the most reasonable philosophical position often lies in between implausible extremes, although the extreme positions may be more interesting and may stimulate discussion and criticism in a way the more moderate ones never can. My paper, seeking to identify and defend some methodological options for the metaphysical "middle-ground-seeker", suggests that a pragmatist methodology is *a* (though surely not *the*) plausible approach for the one who attempts to maintain the middle ground and that promising versions of such methodology can be found in William James's and John Dewey's pragmatism, especially in James's treatment of some traditional metaphysical problems in *Pragmatism*.[2] After a discussion of James, another example from the pragmatist tradition, Dewey's pragmatically naturalist philosophy of religion, will be considered along the same lines. Accordingly, instead of exploring the prospects of pragmatist metaphysics in general terms, I will approach this topic through these two case studies mainly focusing on the metaphysical aspects of the philosophy of religion – hoping, nonetheless, to draw a general moral whose relevance extends beyond the philosophy of religion.

Famously, James offers pragmatism as a mediator between the "tender-minded" temperament, which is rationalistic, intellectualistic, idealistic, optimistic, religious, free-willist, monistic, and dogmatical, and the "tough-minded" one, which is empiricist, sensationalistic, materialistic, pessimistic, irreligious, fatalistic, pluralistic, and skeptical (p. 13). But such pragmatic mediating is not restricted to the Jamesian "philosophical temperaments". For example, in the philosophy of science it seems that most of the reasonable positions to be seriously developed lie between the extremes of strong (more or less scientistic) *scientific realism*, according to which science is the measure of what there is, and radical relativism and/or *constructivism*, according to which "anything goes" and there are no objective criteria for acceptable scientific research at all. For example, pragmatist philosophy of science, all the way from James's and Dewey's account of theories as "instruments" up to, and including, such neopragmatists as Hilary Putnam's and Thomas Kuhn's engagement with the realism issue, has struggled with (at least) two essential tensions, or gaps that need to be bridged: between realism (affirming the objectivity of scientific truth-seeking) and instrumentalism (which denies truthvalues to theories, treating them as mere instruments of prediction and control of observable phenomena), on the one side, and between realism and relativism or constructivism (which denies the objectivity of

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1   I have defended this general position in a number of earlier works. My up-to-date account of pragmatist metaphysics is available in: PIHLSTRÖM, Sami. *Pragmatist Metaphysics*: An Essay on the Ethical Grounds of Ontology (London; New York: Continuum, 2009). See also: id. "Pragmatism and the Ethical Grounds of Metaphysics", *Philosophical Topics*, v. 36, p. 211-237, 2008.

2   See JAMES, William. *Pragmatism*: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking. Ed. by Frederick H. Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers, and Ignas K. Skrupskelis (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1975 [2007]), especially Lecture III: "Some Metaphysical Problems Pragmatically Considered". (Hereafter cited as P, followed by page numbers, in the text.)

the scientific pursuit of truth, declaring rival theories and/or paradigms good for their own purposes, acceptable on their own standards, or even incommensurable), on the other.[3] Plausible pragmatist views seem to offer one or another way of bridging the gap, or resolving the tension. Thus, they all, possibly in very different ways, seek a *via media*. Classical pragmatism, especially James's and Dewey's, can be seen as a middle path between realism and instrumentalism, whereas for neopragmatism the need to find a middle way between realism and relativism (and/or constructivism) seems to be more pressing.[4]

Conflicts like this one might be described, in Kantian terms, as *antinomial*. Reason sets us conflicting demands. On the one hand, we should – to continue the example drawn from the philosophy of science – listen to what experience tells us and be extremely cautious in speculating about the existence of any facts, entities, or lawlike regularities transcending our immediate experience. Hence the appeal of empiricist instrumentalism. On the other hand, we should view science as a pursuit of objective truth, even about the unobservable entities and processes there undoubtedly are "behind", or underlying, the experienceable phenomena – i.e., about the entities, processes, facts, and laws that are postulated in order to explain observable facts. Hence the appeal of scientific realism. The middle-ground-seeker, e.g., the pragmatist philosopher of science following the footsteps of Dewey, should somehow attempt to reconcile these conflicting demands.

Similarly, in the philosophy of religion (my main area of concern in this article), a conflict of intellectual demands seems to arise between *evidentialism*, which requires that religious beliefs ought to be examined and evaluated on the basis of similar rational criteria as all other kinds of belief and thus be subjected to neutral, objective standards of rationality, and *fideism*, which argues that evidentialists (theistic and atheistic alike) misunderstand the distinctive nature of religious faith, reducing it to hypotheses testable by empirical (or in general intellectual) means, even though a genuinely religious person does not conceptualize her/his faith in that way at all but sees it as a fundamental existential attitude to the world and life as a whole. Thus, again, the need to reconcile these different standpoints seems to arise. The evidentialist seems to be right in saying that we cannot simply give up all intellectual considerations when examining religious beliefs and/or ways of life, because otherwise we end up with shallow relativism. (The same outcome threatens to follow from Kuhnian considerations in the philosophy of science.) But the fideist seems to be right in countering this argument by the insight that there is something special

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3   I try to tell this complex story in PIHLSTRÖM, Sami. "How (Not) to Write the History of Pragmatist Philosophy of Science?", *Perspectives on Science*, v. 16, p. 26-69, 2008. I admit that it may sound odd to call Kuhn a neopragmatist. I am not, of course, making any historical claims about his pragmatist background, but referring to his generally pragmatist tendency to understand science as a processual (and social) practice instead of a completed product of such a practice.

4   By no means do I want to downplay the importance of Charles Peirce as the founder of the pragmatist tradition, of course. On the tension between realism and idealism in Peirce (and, through his work, in the later pragmatist tradition), see PIHLSTRÖM, Sami. "Peirce's Place in the Pragmatist Tradition". In: MISAK, Cheryl (Ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to Peirce* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 27-57.

in religious beliefs and religious ways of using language, something that cannot be fully captured by understanding those beliefs as essentially similar to scientific ones. The seriousness of a truly religious perspective on the world seems to be lost, if religious beliefs and statements are construed in terms of evidential considerations familiar from science.

Just as in the philosophy of science, the pragmatist usually tries to occupy the middle ground in the philosophy of religion.[5] The need to find a *via media* is often pressing and may even seem to be required by the intellectual respectability of these philosophical disciplines. Indeed, from a pragmatic point of view, it may seem to be a condition for the adequacy of a philosophical inquiry into the nature of religion that it somehow reconciles the conflicting perspectives of evidentialism and fideism, both of which are, arguably, rooted in our practices of living religious lives and of critically thinking about such lives. Philosophies of religion that do not even try to do so will be deemed hopeless from the start. It is equally important to note that the conflicts calling for a middle path are *metaphysically relevant.* To find the middle way is a metaphysical task in the sense that finding such a way is part of "structuring the world" into a humanly habitable shape. This is a most pragmatic task.

The dialectical situation of the middle-ground-seeker is, in conflicts such as the ones I mentioned, very difficult. The one who defends a *via media* – e.g., a "pragmatic realism" as an alternative between extreme realism ("metaphysical realism", strong scientific realism) and irresponsible postmodern constructivism(s) and relativism(s), either in the philosophy of science or in the philosophy of religion – usually faces severe criticism from both sides. Thus, s/he will have to steer the middle course between Scylla and Charybdis and will find her/his own position constantly insecure. What is to be done in such a challenging situation?

My proposal, in brief, is that the middle-ground-seeker is in such cases justified in using the argumentative resources of both of her/his enemies, or more specifically, in using the weapons of one enemy against the other, and *vice versa.* That is, each of the extreme positions can be pragmatically employed in order to refute the other, and thereby eventually to refute both. This will then secure, or at least indirectly contribute to the defense of, the more plausible middle way. This view, bearing some resemblance to Kant's famous resolution to the Antinomies in the *Critique of Pure Reason,* in which the opposing theses are shown to rest on a common, mistaken, assumption (that is, transcendental realism, which the Kantian transcendental thinker rejects in favor of transcendental idealism)[6] accommodates an essentially pragmatist, though not for that reason flatly instrumentalist, position.

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5 See, for some Jamesian reflections regarding these matters, PIHLSTRÖM, Sami. *"The Trail of the Human Serpent Is over Everything":* Jamesian Perspectives on Mind, World, and Religion (Lanham, MD: University Press of America [Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group], 2008), especially ch. 2.

6 Regarding Kant's Antinomies, I am crucially indebted to the interpretation by Henry E. Allison; see his *Kant's Transcendental Idealism:* An Interpretation and Defense – Revised and Enlarged Edition. CT & London: Yale University Press, New Haven, 2004 (1st ed. 1983), ch. 13. See also GRIER, Michelle. *Kant's Doctrine of Transcendental Illusion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

The key novelty in the pragmatist suggestion of how to deal with the dialectical situation is that the pragmatist can, for good pragmatic reasons, *tolerate* the (apparent) contradiction of the opposing arguments presented by the various "extremists", and thus use those arguments to combat both extremes, though only for a restricted period of time, until the end of the dialectical inquiry and the emergence of the desired middle way. This is because beliefs and arguments used to support them are, for the pragmatist, dynamic and evolving things, habits and thus processes, rather than states. This is a central premise in the metaphilosophically pragmatist defense of the right of the middle-ground-seeker to engage in dialectical argumentation *pro et contra*, an argumentation whose ultimate purpose is to overcome the debate, or at least the conflicting theses presupposed in the beginning of the debate, in order to finally occupy an *aufgehoben* pragmatic *via media*. That middle path will be the pragmatist's metaphysical position in the given matter, her/his proposal of how to construe the world and its significance for us in relation to that particular area of puzzlement.

2. James's pragmatic method and its applications

After having illustrated the need and the legitimacy of a pragmatic, critically and restrictedly tolerant approach to the challenge resulting from the conflict of extreme positions calling for a moderate, yet metaphysically committed, middle path, I will move on to a more historical question concerning the role played by such a metaphilosophical idea in the actual pragmatist tradition. Did the classical pragmatists, we may ask, employ anything like the method I have been outlining? I cannot here engage in any thoroughgoing historical scholarship regarding this matter; obviously, further investigation is needed. I will, however, make a few historical points about the ways in which James did use at least something closely resembling the method I am recommending, and then move on to an analogous consideration of Dewey.

I refer, specifically, to the examples he used to introduce the "pragmatic method" – a method he derived from Peirce's writings in the 1870s[7] – as a philosophical way to settle disputes that might otherwise remain unsettled. For James, philosophical (as well as scientific) ideas and theories are essentially "instruments". As such instruments, they should never be dogmatically embraced but can be *used* for finding the middle ground in a dispute which would otherwise remain an interminable conflict between extreme views that can hardly communicate with each other. We may thus relatively easily extrapolate what James says about science to a metaphilosophical discussion of the status of philosophical views and theories. What may be slightly more difficult is to demonstrate the interpretive claim that his project is essentially Kantian – not only in the positive sense of providing (naturalized and pragmatically contextualized) transcendental conditions for the possibility of cognitive experience

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7   The most important papers by Peirce at the background of James's pragmatism are "The Fixation of Belief" (1877) and "How to Make Our Ideas Clear" (1878), both in *The Essential Peirce* (2 v.), The Peirce Edition Project, ed. Nathan Houser *et al.* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992-98), v. 1.

in terms of human practices,[8] but in the more negative or critical sense of resolving the antinomial conflicts that (philosophical) reason more or less naturally arrives at when carelessly employed. I will not even begin such a demonstration here, as I have dealt with James's "Kantianism" at some length elsewhere.[9]

After having introduced the pragmatic method in Lecture II of *Pragmatism*, James goes on, in Lecture III, to explore pragmatically "some metaphysical problems", many of which are essentially related to the philosophy of religion.[10] The first of these is the problem of *substance*. James applauds Berkeley's criticism of the concept of a *material substance* and Locke's and Hume's in his view equally pragmatic criticisms of the notion of a *spiritual substance* (p. 46-48). In each case we ought to give up, he argues, Cartesian and other traditional metaphysical assumptions about fundamental substances underlying experiential reality (e.g., "souls" as spiritual substances), since the work for which such a traditional notion of substance seems to have been needed can very well be done with the experiential characteristics or attributes in terms of which the substance is "known as" some particular thing.[11] James seems to be saying that we need not reject the notion of substance completely, if we are prepared to understand it in terms of such experiential attributes merely. This is, then, a case in which a reconciliation of extremes – that is, traditional substance metaphysics and a thoroughgoing elimination of whatever job the concept of substance was needed to perform – is required and pragmatically achieved.

James's second, perhaps more illuminating and successful, example is the dispute between *materialism* (or *atheism*) and *spiritualism* (or *theism*) (p. 48-56). When the pragmatic method is applied to this key problem in the philosophy of religion, the question of whether the world is "guided" by its "lower" or "higher" elements (p. 49), it will not be treated in a "stagnant intellectualist fashion" but dynamically, with an eye to the *future* of the world: "What do we *mean* by matter? What practical difference can it make *now* that the world should be run by matter or by spirit?" Here he crucially notes: "It makes not a single jot of difference so far as the *past* of the world goes, whether we deem it to have been the work of matter or whether we think a divine spirit was its author" (p. 50). Accordingly, the mistake of both extremes, traditional atheistic materialism and traditional theism, is the assumption

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8 For such a naturalized reconceptualization of the Kantian transcendental tradition, see PIHLSTRÖM, Sami. *Naturalizing the Transcendental*: A Pragmatic View. Amherst, NY: Prometheus; Humanity Books, 2003.

9 See PIHLSTRÖM, Sami. *"The Trail of the Human Serpent Is over Everything"*, especially chs. 2 and 5; as well as PIHLSTRÖM, Sami. "Synthesizing Traditions: Reconciling Pragmatism and Transcendental Philosophy", *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, v. 23, p. 275-290, 2006.

10 The following discussion is partly indebted to the one offered in PIHLSTRÖM, Sami. "Metaphysics with a Human Face: William James and the Prospects of Pragmatist Metaphysics", *William James Studies*, v. 2, 2007 (online). Cf. PIHLSTRÖM, S. *"The Trail of the Human Serpent Is over Everything"*, ch. 3, as well as, *Pragmatist Metaphysics*, ch. 5.

11 Thus, James writes (p. 47): "Berkeley's criticism of 'matter' was consequently absolutely pragmatistic. Matter is known as our sensations of colour, figure, hardness and the like. They are the cash-value of the term. The difference matter makes to us by truly being is that we then get such sensations; by not being, is that we lack them. These sensations are its sole meaning. Berkeley doesn't deny matter, then; he simply tells us what it consists of. It is a true name for just so much in the way of sensations."

that the world is "finished", complete as it is. The dispute is "purely verbal", if there is no future, no experiences to expect (p. 51). "[I]f no future detail of experience is to be deduced from our hypothesis, the debate between materialism and theism becomes quite idle and insignificant. Matter and God in that event mean exactly the same thing – the power, namely, neither more nor less, that could make this completed world […]" (p. 52).

The middle path, the pragmatic position, can be reached only when that assumption is given up and when it is realized that the merits of the rival standpoints must be inquired into in terms of the future they promise for the world, the future experience that may result, if one of them is true and the other false. That is an application of the pragmatic method, which advises us, in order "[t]o attain perfect clearness in our thoughts of an object", "only consider what conceivable effects of a practical kind the object may involve – what sensations we are to expect from it, and what reactions we must prepare", and to conclude that "[o]ur conception of these effects, whether immediate or remote, is then for us the whole of our conception of the object, so far as that conception has positive significance at all" (p. 29). When it is admitted that the world has a future, and that the two rival hypotheses, materialism and theism, offer quite different future expectations, then the dispute can be pragmatically considered, and it will be immediately seen that it is "intensely practical" (p. 52).[12]

After having examined the materialism vs. theism case in its practical and to a large extent ethical dimensions,[13] James moves on to his third example, which also helps us to appreciate his Kantian orientation. This is the "*question of design in nature*" (p. 56-59, original emphasis). Here the metaphysician who inquires into "design" (or the lack thereof) in an abstract way, having in mind a general principle of design, is led astray. "Pragmatically", we are told (p. 58), "the abstract word 'design' is blank cartridge. It carries no consequences, it does no execution. What sort of design? and what sort of a designer? are the only serious questions, and the study of facts is the only way of getting even approximate answers." The analysis is thus similar to that of the previous problem.[14] The pragmatist, as James emphasized throughout his writings, turns her/his gaze away from abstract principles and toward concrete facts of experience.

Finally, James raises his fourth problem – the most Kantian of the problems he discusses in the third lecture – the problem of *free will* (p. 59-62).[15] Again, things

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12 When the dispute *is* thus considered, James's sympathies are, unsurprisingly, on the theistic side, because the "need for an eternal moral order is one of the deepest needs of our breast" (p. 55), and James always acknowledged the pragmatic importance of such deep human needs.

13 On the profoundly ethical thrust of James's pragmatist metaphysics, see PIHLSTRÖM, S. *"The Trail of the Human Serpent Is over Everything"*, especially chs. 3-5.

14 Again, James does sympathize with the theistic idea of design, though not with any of the traditional arguments for God's existence (including the "argument from design"), when he writes (p. 59): "If not a blind force but a seeing force runs things, we may reasonably expect better issues. This vague confidence in the future is the sole pragmatic meaning at present discernible in the terms design and designer."

15 In addition, Lecture IV is entirely devoted to yet another metaphysical problem, "The One and the Many", which James famously considered "the most central of all philosophic

go wrong if the problem is stated as a question about the fundamental structure of reality, considered apart from human experiences and interests. The problem of freedom must rather be tied to our human points of view, particularly to how (again) we are oriented to the future, in order to find out its true pragmatic significance.[16] Determinism "assures us that our whole notion of possibility is born of human ignorance, and that necessity and impossibility between them rule the destinies of the world" (p. 61), but the free will theory "pragmatically means *novelties in the world*" (p. 60) and is thus "a general cosmological theory of *promise*" (p. 61), "a doctrine of *relief*" (p. 61). It is, hence, connected with a broader religious – for James, essentially "melioristic" – metaphysics in which the world is governed by genuine aims and purposes (whose satisfaction is possible but not guaranteed) and in which human beings can do their share in the world's "moral salvation".

Proceeding to the conclusion of his discussion of these four metaphysical problems, James recapitulates his main point:

> See then how all these ultimate questions turn, as it were, upon their hinges; and from looking backwards upon principles, upon an *erkenntnisstheoretische Ich*, a God, a *Kausalitätsprinzip*, a Design, a Free-will, taken in themselves, as something august and exalted above facts, – see, I say, how pragmatism shifts the emphasis and looks forward into facts themselves. The really vital question for us all is, What is this world going to be? What is life eventually to make of itself? The centre of gravity of philosophy must therefore alter its place. The earth of things, long thrown into shadow by the glories of the upper ether, must resume its rights. (p. 62)

When the pragmatist performs this "turning around", or "shift of emphasis", s/he, however, lets the opposing traditional viewpoints each have their say. On my reading, the Jamesian pragmatist feels free to employ the insights of the old metaphysical disputes, drawn from both sides, in order to locate the weak points of the opposing theses. The reason why this is possible is precisely the future-oriented, dynamic procedure of pragmatist inquiry. Metaphysical puzzles are not viewed as conflicts between two views complete and finished as they stand. Rather, a metaphysical problem is always an individual human being's – in the end, *my* – attempt to come to terms with the different considerations reason offers in favor of the antinomially conflicting positions in the midst of experience. This is especially clear when the metaphysical puzzles examined are religiously and/or theologically relevant. It is

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problems, central because so pregnant" (p. 64). I will neglect that problem here, because it is not a good example of James's concern with middle paths. James, after all, resolutely affirmed pluralism, rejecting monism. This obviously shows that his attempt to find a *via media* was itself undogmatic: in some cases he strived for a middle path, but not always. For James's developments of his pluralist, radically empiricist metaphysics, see William James, *A Pluralistic Universe* (1909) and *Some Problems of Philosophy: A Beginning of an Introduction to Philosophy* (1911), both eds. Frederick H. Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers, and Ignas K. Skrupskelis (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1977 and 1979, respectively).

16 Notably, the pragmatist is not only interested in short-term future but, "so far from keeping her eyes bent on the immediate practical foreground, as she is accused of doing, dwells just as much upon the world's remotest perspectives" (p. 62).

such an individual inquirer who asks, "What is life eventually to make of itself?", and there is no permanent stopping place in the process of the inquiry. We have to establish and critically revise our habits – our habituation in the world – all the time. The dialectics between opposing metaphysical theories, abstractly conceived, cannot simply go on forever, because one must always live forward, encounter new experiential facts. But precisely for this reason, the original conflict can be transcended, and the pragmatic middle ground option may gradually (or suddenly) emerge. Typically, such a middle ground is opened when it is realized that the conflict has been premised on misleading background assumptions.

3. Dewey's pragmatically naturalist philosophy of religion

We now turn from James to Dewey. Again, as in James's case, I will focus on one well known text, this time on Dewey's only book specifically devoted to the philosophy of religion, *A Common Faith* (1934).[17]

In interpreting Dewey's religious views, it is important to apply his pragmatic naturalism to religious values, ideals, and qualities of experience. The background here, just as in James, is the apparent clash between science and religion – the tough- and the tender-minded, thus two "extremes" again. This tension, which once more desperately seems to call for a critical middle path, was a formative factor for Dewey's philosophy as a whole, a crisis to which he promised a pragmatist remedy.[18] In his (few) writings on religion he tried to resolve it by navigating between the perils of supernatural religions and religiously inspired dogmatic moral conservatism,[19] on the one side, and militant atheism, on the other, arguing that both lose religious qualities of human experience, reducing experience to something poorer and narrower than what it may become.

As Dewey puts it in *A Common Faith*, religious values can be "inherent in natural experience" (LW9:20). "Any activity pursued in behalf of an ideal end against obstacles and in spite of threats of personal loss because of conviction of its general and enduring value is religious in quality" (LW9:19). "The religious" must be liberated from the supernatural commitments of actual historical religions, from dogmas and doctrines that are, pragmatically, unnecessary. The values and ideals belonging to the religious attitude are not imaginary but real; they are "made out of the hard stuff of the world of physical and social experience" (LW9:33). The religious is, through

17 This book is available in vol. 9 of John Dewey, *The Later Works*, 17 v. (ed. by Jo Ann Boydston. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), henceforth cited as LW9 in the text. This section is connected with another paper of mine, more specifically on Dewey's philosophy of religion, "Dewey and Pragmatic Religious Naturalism", forthcoming in *Cambridge Companion to Dewey* (ed. by Molly M. Cochran. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
18 See, e.g., ROCKEFELLER, Stephen C. *John Dewey*. New Haven, CT; London: Yale University Press, 1991.
19 Reinhold Niebuhr's "theological neo-orthodoxy" was (at least implicitly) among the objects of Dewey's critique. See KUKLICK, Bruce. *A History of Philosophy in America 1720-2000*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001; p. 192. On the religious situation in the early 1930s as a background for Dewey's project, see: ROCKEFELLER, *John Dewey*, p. 452ff.

this rearticulation, rendered part of nature – which, for a pragmatic naturalist like Dewey, is all-encompassing.[20]

The basic contrast thus lies between religions and "the religious" (that is, religious experience, or religious qualities or aspects in experience). The *proton pseudos* of both traditional religions and militant atheism is the identification of the religious with the supernatural, which disentangles religiosity from life.[21] Religion must be brought down to earth, to what is "common" between us.[22] Supernaturalism – especially the claim that religions have a monopoly of supernatural means to further human ideals – is an obstacle in pursuing the natural changes that are in our power to bring about; hence, religious values need emancipation (LW9:19-24, 38-39, 45, 50-53).[23] This is how Dewey contrasts his proposal to the quarrels between religious and scientific ideas:

> I shall develop another conception of the nature of the religious phase of experience, one that separates it from the supernatural and the things that have grown up about it. I shall try to show that these derivations are encumbrances and that what is genuinely religious will undergo an emancipation when it is relieved from them; that then, for the first time, the religious aspect of experience will be free to develop freely on its own account. (LW9:4)

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20 For brief accounts of this basic message of *A Common Faith*, see KUKLICK, *A History of Philosophy in America 1720-2000*, p. 192-195; and Milton R. Konvitz's "Introduction" to LW9 (1986), xi-xxxii; for detailed discussions, see: ROCKEFELLER, *John Dewey*, chs. 10-11; ELDRIDGE, Michael. *Transforming Experience*: John Dewey's Cultural Instrumentalism (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 1998), ch. 5; HICKMAN, Larry. *Pragmatism as Post-Postmodernism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), ch. 11; as well as John R. Shook's unpublished essay, "John Dewey on Faith and Religion". Many interpreters have argued that Dewey's main interest in *A Common Faith* is not religion as such, but social progress, democracy, and other more this-worldly topics on which he wrote voluminously elsewhere. However, for a comprehensive treatment of Dewey's theological relevance – even for Deweyan pragmatism as a theological methodology – see: SONESON, Jerome Paul. *Pragmatism and Pluralism*: John Dewey's Significance for Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

21 However, though Dewey clearly rejects religious traditions and focuses on the functions of religious experience, those functions can also be used to evaluate the traditions in terms of how they succeed in promoting religious qualities. See: SONESON. *Pragmatism and Pluralism*, p. 126. Instead of rejecting traditions for the good, it may be more helpful to say that no *specific* religious tradition is superior to others in serving genuinely religious functions (ibid., p. 134). We might perhaps talk about the multiple realizability of religious qualities in different religious traditions. Then, the communication across religious communities becomes a crucial issue (ibid., p. 144-145).

22 As Howard L. Parsons notes, Dewey's title "perfectly expresses his Emersonian faith in the familiar. The abstractness and fixity of dogma separate; the concreteness and fluidity of our common experience unite and integrate." (PARSONS. "The Meaning and Significance of Dewey's Religious Thought", *The Journal of Religion*, v. 40, p. 170-190 [here 173], 1960.)

23 The emancipatory project of *A Common Faith* is somewhat analogous to the project of liberating aesthetic experience as a natural form of human experiencing in *Art as Experience* (1934, LW10). The explicit references to religion – and religious art – in the latter work would deserve a separate discussion. See, again, ROCKEFELLER, *John Dewey*, ch. 11, for remarks on *Art as Experience* in relation to Dewey's evolving views on "natural piety" and "mystical intuition".

Thus, Dewey is about to tell us what is "genuinely religious" – apparently in contrast to what is pseudo-religious or superstitious. The key to this normative distinction lies in the difference between (a) religion(s) and the religious. A religion is "a special body of beliefs and practices having some kind of institutional organization", whereas "religious", as an adjective, does not denote any specific entity but "attitudes that may be taken toward every object and every proposed end or ideal" (LW9:8). Many elements of actual religions survive from "outgrown cultures" (LW9:6); we should leave such baggage behind. Religions largely "prevent […] the religious quality of experience from coming to consciousness and finding the expression that is appropriate to present conditions, intellectual and moral" (LW9:8) – particularly to modern scientific thinking. Dewey, then, is clearly not proposing *a* religion but "the emancipation of elements and outlooks that may be called religious" (LW9:8).

Dewey is above all concerned with religious experience, which is well in line with his general project of raising experience into the status of a fundamental philosophical category. However, Deweyan religious experience is social – his conception of the religious articulates a "common faith" – rather than individual, as in the equally experience-centered philosophy of religion of James.[24] More importantly, religious experience, for Dewey, is not a special type of experience. It is not *sui generis*.[25] As a quality of experience, "religious" can be connected with aesthetic, scientific, moral, or political experience, as well as with experiences of companionship and friendship (LW9:9). Whenever there is "a change of will conceived as the organic plenitude of our being", there is a religious attitude, outlook, or function (LW9:13). Thus, "whatever introduces genuine perspective is religious" (LW9:17). Since, for Dewey, religious experience cannot be self-sustaining but requires other experiences (scientific, moral, social, political, aesthetic),26 one might, in contemporary philosophical jargon, read him as saying that religious qualities of experience *supervene* on those other, more fundamental, qualities, or that they *emerge* from the latter.

As Deweyan religious experience is in and of nature, the attitude which "attributes human achievement and purpose to man in isolation from the world of physical nature and his fellows" is "essentially unreligious" (LW9:18). Naturalism avoids the extremes of both atheism (materialism) and supernaturalism. A paradigmatic case of a non- or even pseudo-religious way of thinking, for Dewey, is an individualist, supernaturalist account of spirituality isolated from other individuals. Conversely, the

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24 See JAMES, William. The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature (1902). In: *The Works of William James*. Ed. by Frederick H. Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers, and Ignas K. Skrupskelis (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1985).

25 ROCKEFELLER, *John Dewey*, p. 472. One contrast perceived by Rockefeller is to Rudolf Otto's influential theory of "the holy".

26 See also KONVITZ, "Introduction", xiv. Furthermore, Konvitz points out that, according to some religious traditions, the relation between religious and moral experience is the opposite to the one described by Dewey: morality might be a derivative value of a more fundamental religious attitude to life, not *vice versa* (ibid., xxviii). Another question that arises here is why precisely these kinds of experience are fundamental to religious experience. Could there be other forms of experience, perhaps more banal and everyday ones (e.g., related to sports), in which religious elements could also be involved? (Think about the "religious" enthusiasm of some ice hockey fans, for instance.)

paradigmatic case of a social enterprise carrying religious qualities is science, whose methods Dewey sought to incorporate into moral and political "inquiries". "Faith in the continued disclosing of truth through directed cooperative human endeavor is more religious in quality than is any faith in a completed revelation", Dewey argues (LW9:18). Our "faith in intelligence" may, then, become religious in quality (LW9:19).[27] Here Dewey arrives at his famous definition: "Any activity pursued in behalf of an ideal end against obstacles and in spite of threats of personal loss because of conviction of its general and enduring value is religious in quality" (LW9:19).

Dewey further reaffirms his trust in the "new methods of inquiry and reflection" as having become "the final arbiter of all questions of fact, existence, and intellectual assent" (LW9:22-23). The scientific method can accept nothing as sacrosanct, beyond critical testing (LW9:27-28); there can for us be no return to any pre-scientific revealed religion. Dewey characterizes "faith" as "the unification of the self through allegiance to inclusive ideal ends, which imagination presents to us and to which the human will responds as worthy of controlling our desires and choices" (LW9:23). In moral faith, we are "possessed" by our imaginative vision of ideals; when this moral faith has a "unifying function", it may be called religious.[28] Again, there is no need to view the ideal ends "possessing" us as supernatural: "The assumption that these objects of religion exist already in some realm of Being seems to add nothing to their force, while it weakens their claim over us as ideals, in so far as it bases that claim upon matters that are intellectually dubious." (LW9:29; cf. 32-33.) Yet, the "reality" of ideal ends and values is unquestionable. Dewey offers a pragmatic argument: it is "unnecessary" for the religious attitude to rely on any supernatural dogma. Values arise from nature, having their roots in "natural conditions", emerging through imagination's "idealizing" existence (LW9:33). Dewey is a pragmatic realist about values and ideals when he notes: "The aims and ideals that move us are generated through imagination. But they are not made out of imaginary stuff. They are made out of the hard stuff of the world of physical and social experience." (LW9:33.)

One of the imaginatively projected ideals dear to many is the idea(l) of God, reinterpreted by Dewey as the "*active* relation between ideal and actual" (LW9:34; original emphasis). Dewey adds, however, that he would not insist that the name "God" must be given to this (or anything) (LW9:34-35). He seems to suggest that *if* we speak about God, this is how we should do it: scientifically, naturalistically, immanently. Dewey's position is compatible with our not using the concept "God". Yet, Dewey wanted to make room for our use of that concept, to understand people who cannot help using it.[29] The concept of God as a relation between the ideal

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27 As Rockefeller notes (*John Dewey*, p. 104), all knowledge, scientific or philosophical, was religiously meaningful and valuable, according to young Dewey in the 1880s. Cf. ibid., p. 442-443, for Dewey's view on the religious value of the faith in the experimental method of science.

28 Ibid., p. 478-479.

29 He writes: "Whether one gives the name 'God' to this union, operative in thought and action, is a matter for individual decision. But the *function* of such a working union of the ideal and actual seems to me to be identical with the force that has in fact been attached to the conception of God in all the religions that have a spiritual content; and a clear idea of that function seems to me urgently needed at the present time" (LW9:35).

and the actual also helps us to overcome the "lack of natural piety" that "militant atheism" suffers from:

> A religious attitude […] needs the sense of a connection of man, in the way of both dependence and support, with the enveloping world that the imagination feels is a universe. Use of the words "God" or "divine" to convey the union of actual with ideal may protect man from a sense of isolation and from consequent despair or defiance. (LW9:36)

This way of conceptualizing divinity enables Dewey to connect his reflections with his view of continuous *growth* as our highest goal. The growth of knowledge in scientific inquiry, "growth in understanding of nature", may also be religious in its aims and aspirations (LW9:38). After all, the study of the mysteries of creation has often been viewed as a fundamentally religious activity.

Dewey also considers at length the social relevance of his conception of faith. He argues that there is no need to "shut religious values up within a particular compartment" – to draw a sharp division between the religious, on the one side, and the secular or profane, on the other (LW9:44-45).[30] The liberation of the religious from narrow supernaturalism is ethically and socially, even politically, relevant:

> I cannot understand how any realization of the democratic ideal as a vital moral and spiritual ideal in human affairs is possible without surrender of the conception of the basic division to which supernatural Christianity is committed. Whether or no we are, save in some metaphorical sense, all brothers, we are at least all in the same boat traversing the same turbulent ocean. The potential religious significance of this fact is infinite. (LW9:55-56)

We have the potential to grow, struggling together toward the actualization of ideals, instead of assuming that our ideals are "already embodied in some supernatural or metaphysical sense in the very framework of existence" (LW9:56). We can here perceive that Dewey's philosophy of religion is anti-metaphysical in the sense that there is no such thing as "the very framework of existence", because existence itself emerges in and through human ideal-driven inquiries. Yet there is a tension here. Dewey, as a good naturalist, does seem to subscribe to something he describes as "the mysterious totality of being the imagination calls the universe" (LW9:56). There is, after all, the natural universe, giving rise to any human values and ideals there may be. Religious qualities of experience are inherently related to this mysterious nature, or the awe we feel when realizing that we are parts of it, and its growth. This can hardly be a *thoroughly* anti-metaphysical view. We are not forced to see Dewey as anti-metaphysical through and through. Rather, his reflections on religion may, like James's, lead us to a new appreciation for the possibility of pragmatist

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30 This suggestion might be compared to analogous pragmatist accounts in moral philosophy: morality, or moral experience, is so ubiquitous in human practices that it should not be "compartmentalized" in its own special department. Moral values pervade our existence as a whole; experience comes to us "screaming with values", as Hilary Putnam often quotes Dewey as saying. See: PUTNAM, H. *Ethics without Ontology* Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2004; see also: PIHLSTRÖM, Sami. *Pragmatic Moral Realism*: A Transcendental Defense. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2005.

"middle ground" metaphysics of the human world, of what humanly structured reality is (inevitably) like, for us. Dewey, then, offers a middle path between radically atheist and traditionally theist (dogmatic, supernaturalist) philosophy of religion. It remains to be seen in what sense, if any, this amounts to a metaphysical account in the philosophy of religion.

4. Naturalism, religion, and (anti-)metaphysics: Dewey and Wittgenstein

Ludwig Wittgenstein famously thought, not unlike the Deweyan naturalist, that the believer and the non-believer may share the same worldview, thus maintaining exactly the same factual beliefs. The value or meaning of the world is not to be found *in* the world, according to Wittgenstein. Therefore, the Wittgensteinian alternative in the philosophy of religion may come close to the quite anti-metaphysical, naturalist line of thought just outlined, even though some of Wittgenstein's writings (particularly *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*) may also be seen as belonging to the genre of mystical literature.[31] Wittgenstein would never have approved of Dewey's or other religious naturalists' way of rendering religious qualities of experience scientifically acceptable. Yet, Wittgensteinian insights into religious language may enrich the Deweyan separation between religious experience and the dogma of traditional religions, if one fears that Dewey leaves religious experience without determinate content.[32]

The comparison between Deweyan and Wittgensteinian perspectives may be continued by invoking the notion of *genuine* religious experience, as contrasted to pseudo-religious or superstitious dogma. Indeed, Dewey's charge against traditional religions in *A Common Faith* might be understood as an argument against their pseudo-religious tendencies. Truly religious values and qualities must, he repeatedly argues, be emancipated from the pseudo-religious domination of supernaturalist assumptions, which requires occupying the middle ground between theism and materialism. Yet, it is difficult to draw the line between the religious and the pseudo-religious.[33] Though Wittgenstein would have resisted any easy reconciliation of science and religion, he might have agreed that supernaturalist, dogmatic religions are pseudo-religious in treating essentially valuational statements as metaphysical statements about the essence of reality. Such supernaturalism breaks the rules of truly religious language-use.

Equipped with this insight, we may return to the issue of metaphysics vs. anti-metaphysics in Deweyan philosophy of religion. At a general level – in relation to Dewey's conception of experience and nature – there has been considerable debate over whether Dewey engages in metaphysics, and if so, in what sense.[34] I will not

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31 It is beyond the scope of this paper to evaluate either Wittgenstein's or his commentators' views on religion. I will only briefly note some analogies and disanalogies with Deweyan views.

32 For such a Wittgensteinian approach to a Deweyan problem, see AIKIN, Scott F.; HODGES, Michael P. "Wittgenstein, Dewey, and the Possibility of Religion", *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, v. 20, p. 1-19, 2006. Aikin's and Hodges's paper is not actually an interpretation of Dewey but an attempt to employ Wittgensteinian resources for reconstructing pragmatist philosophy of religion.

33 Cf. PIHLSTRÖM, Sami. "Religion and Pseudo-Religion: An Elusive Boundary", *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, v. 62, p. 3-32, 2007.

34 These debates have often followed the interpretations given in: SLEEPER, Ralph W. *The*

continue this debate but only note, again, that it can be applied to religion in an illuminating way. We may ask whether Dewey is really talking about religious qualities or religious reality, or *only* about human attitudes, practices, experiences, etc. Is there a possibility for a "religion after metaphysics",[35] or will such a "religion" be merely a deflated pseudo-version of the real thing? Could a naturalized account of divinity suffice for a religiously adequate conception of "ultimate meaning"[36] – or is such a notion a mere remnant of foundationalist metaphysical theology that any reasonable naturalist will set aside? Obviously, analogous questions arise in the context of Wittgenstein's and his followers' philosophy of religion, too.

These Deweyan problems, like James's, go back to Kant. Both Kant and Dewey rejected dogmatic, transcendent, theistic metaphysics; both approached religiosity from an ethical point of view, Kant in terms of practical reason and Dewey in terms of values and ideals. (James did the same, in his own way.) For Dewey, the pursuit of "ultimate meaning" and value in a supposed isolation from other human beings and nature is illusory.[37] However, Dewey's view on religious qualities in experience may be too deflated for a Kantian taste. After all, Kant attempted to save elements of traditional Christian theism, even metaphysical theism, though in a form subordinated to ethics. As John Shook observes, Dewey's God, even in the early idealist phase, was never fully theistic in the sense of being external to human nature; it was "immanent in human nature".[38] Perhaps, however, we may see Dewey's God as an *ethico-metaphysical* principle, if we understand metaphysics itself (religious or theological metaphysics included) as subordinated to, or inextricably entangled with, ethics (moral values, ideals, and commitments).[39]

There is a form of metaphysics that might be maintained even in the Deweyan – and, *mutatis mutandis*, Wittgensteinian – framework, with no commitments to supernatural dogmas. This is a metaphysics emphasizing the *mystery* of the natural world, requiring a kind of humility and recognition of our indebtedness to nature for everything there is and for everything we are, or can ever hope to be. J.P. Soneson argues that such a "combined sense of mystery and indebtedness" characterizes the Deweyan "religious quality of experience", and that if this is appreciated, we may even view Dewey as "fundamentally a religious thinker".[40] The primary context for this understanding of Dewey is the "precariousness" or "instability" of existence –

Necessity of Pragmatism. New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1986; see also HILDEBRAND, David L. *Beyond Realism and Antirealism: Dewey and the Neopragmatists*. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2003.

35 Cf. Mark A. WRATHALL (Ed.). *Religion after Metaphysics?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

36 See ROCKEFELLER, *John Dewey*, p. 527-539.

37 Ibid., p. 562.

38 SHOOK, John R. *Dewey's Empirical Theory of Knowledge and Reality*. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2000. p. 143. On the Kantian background of Dewey's early idealism, see: ibid., p. 140. In his unpublished paper cited above, Shook calls Dewey an "atheist".

39 I find such an entanglement obvious in James (see PIHLSTRÖM, S. *"The Trail of the Human Serpent Is over Everything"*), but arguing for the point in a more detailed manner in the Deweyan case goes beyond the scope of this paper.

40 SONESON, *Pragmatism and Pluralism*, p. 90; 126-127.

our insecurity and contingency – he emphasized not only in his writings on religion but especially in *Experience and Nature* (1925/1929, LW1).[41] Life is potentially tragic, because we may always lose things we hold dear. As Soneson reflects:

> The tension between tragedy and hope, I want to argue, is the womb in which the religious function, as Dewey understands it, is nurtured and born. There is no need for the religious function apart form the tragedy of life. On the other hand, the religious function is not possible apart from the potential for growth that grounds the hope that circumstances can change for the better, that fulfill-ment or satisfaction – salvation, to use the more traditional term – is possible amid the tragedy of life.[42]

Deweyan philosophy of religion by no means denies the reality – the full, painful reality – of evil and tragedy.[43] A recognition of their reality is a kind of metaphysics – a metaphysics of the fundamental (though not historically immutable) traits of human existence in a precarious natural world full of contingency, a world that is a source of tragic collapses as well as of liberating, enabling, energizing hope. Soneson is, I believe, right to point out that Dewey is a metaphysician in a Kantian sense. For both, "the task of metaphysics is to state the conditions for the possibility of knowledge", though for Dewey, such conditions are not apodictic a priori ones.[44] Metaphysics "reflect[s] upon what our talk about things implies about the kind of world or con-text in which we live".[45] It is roughly in this sense that we may view not just James's but also Dewey's treatment of the religious aspects of experience as metaphysical in a quasi-Kantian manner. The dualism between metaphysics and the criticism of metaphysics, just like the one between religious and secular views or experiences, calls for a *via media* in Deweyan pragmatism – as it does in Wittgensteinian reflec-tions on the ways in which "essence lies in grammar".[46] The true pragmatist has no practical use for such sharp dichotomies, not even in theology, but ought to critically transform them into habitable middle grounds.

    Yet, arguably, Dewey might have paid more attention to evil and suffering as

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41 See ibid., p. 129. Soneson thus in a way defends Dewey against critics who argue that Dewey underestimates the contingency or "dependency" of human existence.

42 Ibid., p. 131.

43 See also ROCKEFELLER, *John Dewey*, p. 484-490. For a dispute over whether there is a place in Dewey for the "tragic sense of life", see BOISVERT, Raymond D. "The Nemesis of Neces-sity: Tragedy's Challenge to Deweyan Pragmatism". In: HASKINS, Casey; SEIPLE, David I. (Eds.). *Dewey Reconfigured*: Essays on Deweyan Pragmatism (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999), p. 151-168; MORSE, Donald. "Pragmatism and the Tragic Sense of Life", *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, v. 37, p. 556-572, 2001; BOISVERT, "Updating Dewey: A Reply to Morse", *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, v. 37, p. 573-583, 2001; and SAITO, Naoko. "Pragmatism and the Tragic Sense: Deweyan Growth in an Age of Nihilism", *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, v. 36, p. 247-263, 2002. Once again, the discussion of the place of the tragic in pragmatism seems to call for a critical middle path. On the reality of evil in James, see PIHLSTRÖM, *"The Trail of the Human Serpent Is over Everything"*, ch. 4.

44 SONESON, *Pragmatism and Pluralism*, p. 166-167.

45   Ibid., p. 167.

46 See WITTGENSTEIN, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*. Trans. G.E.M. Anscombe. Ox-ford: Basil Blackwell, 1958 [first published 1953]. I, p. 371.

both metaphysical and religious or theological problems. Despite the devastating loss of two sons, he maintained a generally optimistic (melioristic) attitude to life, while recognizing the reality of tragedy.[47] The question is whether his recognition of the tragic sense of life is deep enough. For instance, James's depiction of a "sick soul" in the *Varieties* may, in the end, be religiously more adequate. Thus, there is certainly room for more discussion of who is the metaphysically most perceptive pragmatist. James's forceful acknowledgment of the undeniable reality of evil and suffering both in *Pragmatism* and elsewhere might, after all, be a more adequate metaphysical characterization of the world we live in. Pragmatically, it might be a better metaphysics of the human world – and it might do us more good.

5. Concluding remarks

Dewey, we have seen, is a dedicated middle-ground seeker in his philosophy of religion at least in the following four senses. He mediates between militant atheism and traditional, supernaturalist theism. He also mediates between realism and constructivism (both in the philosophy of religion and generally), because nothing – neither God nor the objects of scientific and everyday inquiry and problem-solving – is for him "ready-made" and self-sufficient independently of on-going inquiry, yet nothing is simply constructed by us, either. He mediates between naturalism and idealism, because he maintains the reality of ideals but stresses their rootedness in natural life and practices. Finally, he mediates between metaphysical and anti-metaphysical accounts of religious faith, ideals, and values, as we have just seen. There are, thus, many ways in which Deweyan pragmatism is a critical *via media.*

The same holds for James, who also mediates between traditional (overly metaphysical) versions of theism (including Hegelian absolute idealism and pantheism), on the one side, and naturalist, materialist atheism, on the other. I hope my two brief case studies have shown the viability of middle-ground seeking at the core of pragmatist philosophical methodology, which for both James and Dewey crucially entangles metaphysics and ethics with each other. It is precisely, and perhaps only, through this entanglement that a critical, self-reflective habituation on a middle ground in central metaphysical issues in the philosophy of religion is possible.[48]

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47   See ROCKEFELLER, *John Dewey*, ch. 5.
48   I am grateful to Professor Ivo A. Ibri for kindly inviting me to submit this paper.

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