

## FANTASTIC PRAGMATISM

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### **Introduction: pragmatism as fantastic, metaphysical and self-critical**

The everyday sense of pragmatic involves ideas of sensible practice, cautious realism about current situations, flexibility allied to technical knowledge, and the prioritisation of what works, as opposed to unrealistic and damaging ideals.

I argue against this technical and sensible flavour of pragmatism, present in many of its historical and contemporary versions. This also implies that I am arguing against much of pragmatism's perceived political and social attractiveness, as an effective, reasonable and grounded approach to problems.

Pragmatism can be taken as technically-minded, realistic and practical, thereby avoiding the excesses of abstract ideologies. Instead, I will defend the thesis that pragmatism should be fantastic, in the precise sense of metaphysically inventive. In making this latter argument, my main critical point will be against the metaphysically «quietist» version of pragmatism, in particular as defended by David Macarthur.

My claim is counter-intuitive, since it seems to commit pragmatism to the forms of idealism that it has sought to criticise and escape. If metaphysics propose ideal pictures of the world, as opposed to detailed, local and evidence-based descriptions - allied to rigorous experimentation - then the fantasies of metaphysics are exactly what pragmatism should avoid.

In response to this critical counter, I will argue that pragmatism should be metaphysically inventive because it cannot avoid being metaphysical. However, I also argue that it should be self-critical in its fantastic creativity. The idea of a philosophical approach free of metaphysical presuppositions and assumptions is a lure, but so is the idea of metaphysical innovation free of critical anchors in experience, practice, rational review and democratic scrutiny.

The challenge for pragmatism is therefore neither how to remain practical, sensible, realistic and yet technically adroit, nor how to avoid metaphysics through kinds of metaphysical quietism. It is how to develop its own metaphysics, while remaining pragmatic as a form of invention. In this latter usage, pragmatic means a constant critical vigilance around the dangers, flaws and necessity of metaphysical creativity.

### **The latency, ineluctability and violence of metaphysics**

There are three main claims to my argument about metaphysics. First, every proposition and logic has metaphysical presuppositions. These are latent when they are denied, or hidden, or missed, or mistaken, or any combination of these.

Metaphysical presuppositions can be denied in two ways. There can be a blanket denial: «there is no metaphysics here». There can be a denial of specific metaphysical presuppositions: «there is nothing dogmatic in what I have to say». For the former, the critical point will be to show that there are metaphysical underpinnings behind apparently plain speech. The same goes for the latter, but with the added task of examining whether there are still remnants of the denied form, such as dogmatism within an anti-dogmatic position.

When hidden or missed, metaphysical presuppositions can be overt in words and ideas, but not recognised as metaphysical, such as the universal

«Man» laying claim to represent humanity but carrying metaphysics about sex, gender, animality and non-animality, reason, language, thought and hierarchies of existence.

The presuppositions can also be concealed and distant, traceable only by following a trail of clues and arguments, like beliefs that take the place of religious metaphysics, yet become similar touchstones while claiming to be free of the flaws of religion. Today, «*Ecrasez l'infâme*»<sup>1</sup> can apply just as well to fanaticism in politics or science, as it once applied to religion, because some approaches to politics and to science have replicated religious forms such as allegiance to untouchable values (identitarians in politics, for instance) and to discredited or ideological sources of knowledge (overconfidence in dated or dogmatic economic theories, for example).

Across two articles on the appeal to common sense, H H Price follows Reid in defining common sense as turning to the «plain man within our breast»:

However sophisticated we may be with the study of philosophy – however much afflicted with what Reid calls ‘metaphysical lunacy’ – we can always appeal, as it were, to the plain man within our breast. We can slip back without difficulty into the common-sense state of mind, and, of course, we constantly do so, even against our will. When we are in that state of mind we make the same judgements as any ordinary non-philosophical person would make if he were in our place; we claim to apprehend the same sort of facts and the same sort of things as he does.<sup>2</sup>

The passage comes from the first of a two part study of common sense by Price. In the second part, he points to the mistakes and illusions of the appeal to the plain man, noting the influence of beliefs, language and mistaken perception on common sense.

The necessity of confused perception, based on the partial quality of any particular perception, leads Price to conclude that appeals to common sense are neither true nor false but rather a kind of unavoidable yet unreliable evidence all philosophy has to start with. For him, perception is similar to viewing only part of a town and having to deduce the remainder and guess at the importance of the particular quarter we do perceive. A partial glimpse of a city is necessarily confused as a view of part of the city, even if it is clear in its immediate purview.

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<sup>1</sup> Voltaire’s slogan «Ecrasez l’infâme!» urges readers - initially d’Alembert in a letter from 28 November 1762 - to stand against religious fanaticism and ignorance. The order leaves the form of infamy open to interpretation. This openness has made it possible for Voltaire’s challenge to be a rallying cry for positive enlightenment from those early days to present times, despite changing candidates for the role of infamy. The slogan is positive, if based on enlightenment principles and progressivity. It is negative, if dependent strictly on opposition to infamy. Voltaire’s letters and in particular to d’Alembert around the *Encyclopédie* should not be seen as private communication but rather «weapons in [Voltaire’s] struggle» R. Brandão, *Réflexions sur la correspondance entre D’Alembert et Voltaire*, «Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale», 1, 45–58, 2017, p 47.

<sup>2</sup> H. H. Price, *The Appeal to Common Sense*, «Journal of Philosophical Studies», 5(17), 1930, pp 27-28.

Against the reliance on common sense in decision making, so often taken as a fetish by British Conservative politicians, the confusion of perception leads Price to reject common sense as a reliable indicator of the true and the good:

It seems, then, that the plain man's statements and the expressions of ordinary language have the same sort of authority in philosophy as the evidence of a muddled and ignorant but fairly honest witness in a law court.<sup>3</sup>

In contrast to Prime Minister Boris Johnson's scientifically dubious request for the British to «live fearlessly but with common sense» in October 2020<sup>4</sup>, ahead of a deadly winter Covid-19 wave, for Price, instead of following common sense, we should examine it and seek to understand its principles. However, he adds an enigmatic caveat that it might not be possible to find such principles.<sup>5</sup>

Price's language, argument and topic are now out of date, nearly a hundred years old and laced with archaic formulae and methods from a very different world. That is my point. Very few would use «Man» in the same way now. Few philosophers would accord the same weight to ordinary language or to off-the-cuff philosophical observations, when compared to a philosopher writing at the same time as Moore and Russell.

The term «plain» is outmoded and suspect as an epithet for another human; it suggests class ignorance and condescension in its assumptions about lack of sophistication. Price's ideas about perception and indeed about witnesses in English law courts ring false to modern ears, given advances in neuroscience<sup>6</sup> and the turn towards «credible»<sup>7</sup>, rather than «honest», in assessing witnesses in the legal process.

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<sup>3</sup> H. H. Price, *The Appeal to Common Sense (II)*. *Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 5(18), 1930, p 202.

<sup>4</sup> S. Payne & J. Cameron-Chileshe, *Johnson tells UK to live "fearlessly but with common sense"* «Financial Times», October 4, 2020

<sup>5</sup> H. H. Price, *The Appeal to Common Sense (II)*, cit. p 202.

<sup>6</sup> Ideas such as predictive processing disprove the immediacy of common sense perception defended by Price. Perception is much more malleable and dependent on prior experience and current intentions and actions than an immediate and unmediated experience: «If this complex multi-dimensional story is on track, then experience emerges where (i) there is integrated bodily and worldly information computed using a generative model that displays temporal depth, and (ii) where that model integrates control and motivation across many timescales, bringing goals and affect into direct contact with an appreciation of the space of possible actions that are currently enabled». K. Nave et al., *Expecting some action: Predictive Processing and the construction of conscious experience*, «Review of Philosophy and Psychology», 2022.

<sup>7</sup> Arguments around the effectiveness and believability of witnesses now centre on credibility, a concept that has quite different factors than honesty, for instance around expertise but also around external factors such as sound volume and presence. See E. Bild, A. Redman, E. J. Newman, B. R. Muir, D. Tait & N. Schwarz, *Sound and Credibility in the Virtual Court: Low Audio Quality Leads to Less Favorable Evaluations of Witnesses and Lower Weighting of Evidence*, «Law and Human Behavior, Technology in the Legal and Criminal Justice Systems», 45 (5), 2021.

Outdated isn't only an indication of a bygone period. It is rather that Price's language and reference points come from a well-formed world that can be deduced from his papers. That world is no longer ours. The main concepts, beliefs and values of his text and their dislocation from ours constitute the metaphysical presuppositions of Price's articles. These are different from the assumptions of his arguments. The latter are logical whereas the former are part of a structure connecting ideas and values into a world view, a metaphysics stemming from a particular time and place, but laying claim to longer, perhaps eternal, applicability.

Metaphysics shouldn't be seen simply as a branch of philosophy and a way of doing philosophy. A metaphysics is also a persistent world view drawing together a web of beliefs, feelings, arguments, concepts, language and values. It is a deep picture of a world, not necessarily a real one, but one that informs and guides how we think and act. In this sense, independent of truth and falsity, every religion has a metaphysics, but so does every philosophy, through its system of beliefs, terminology, logic, structure of values (likes and dislikes), its principles, its central positive and negative terms, but also its enemies and the things it banishes and rejects.

In a discussion of Dilthey and world views, Rudolph Makreel argues for the importance of taking account of a philosophical world view, *Weltanschauung*, in analysing communication: «[...] I have proposed a diagnostic conception of philosophical hermeneutics to reorient human communication to better assess how our various positions in and toward the world affect our ability to understand each other».<sup>8</sup> I am following this intuition that world views have significant effects on subsequent communication. However, I am applying a more restricted definition of world view, as limited to the structures of philosophical concepts, images, examples, values, arguments and metaphors (following Derrida).

For Dilthey and Makreel world views are large scope and epochal «outlooks on life», like a religious, philosophical, cultural or scientific view that comes to dominate a particular historical period:

This makes worldviews and outlooks on life into relevant background conditions for identifying the causes of distorted communication. We started with traditional formulations of worldviews in religion, philosophy, and literature to bring out some typical differences. Although we focused on three traditional worldviews, hermeneutics was introduced to counteract the reifying nature of their metaphysical formulations while preserving their epistemic, reflective, and normative import.<sup>9</sup>

I agree that world views are reifying (epistemically, reflectively and normatively). That is how they come to dominate concrete actions. However, I want to separate metaphysical world views from their times viewed across long periods. Instead, there are many more metaphysical world views than traditionally agreed epochs. They are textual and are kept in reserve alongside worlds, as webs or structures of thought, able to be deployed in new worlds, like the re-

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<sup>8</sup> R. A. Makkreel, *The Review of Metaphysics*, Volume 74, Number 2 (Issue No. 294), 2020, p 344.

<sup>9</sup> R. A. Makkreel, *The Review of Metaphysics*, Volume 74, Number 2 (Issue No. 294), 2020, p 344

vival of old ideas, politics and principles in new contexts. This makes them no less influential and no less dangerous.

The second main claim behind my argument is that all metaphysics have been destructive when put into act (like the decision to spread them through new writing, such as returning to the archaic ‘Man’ as a move in modern culture wars). Metaphysics have, most often unwittingly, turned out to overlook or misrepresent the changing realities they seek to describe and explain.

Familiar versions of this misrepresentation and subsequent violence include kinds of dualism, where a lower tier of existence is judged in relation to a higher one, or kinds of determinism, where necessity is posited against a world of probabilities, or kinds of materialism, where mechanical processes are imposed on living ones, or kinds of adherence to the law of non-contradiction, where dialetheia are viewed as irrational even when they provide satisfactory descriptions of actual cases, or kinds of allegiance to particular assumptions about time, such as its irreversible flow.

The first three versions have long been canonical reasons to support pragmatism, since it is supposed to avoid the excesses of ideological dualisms, accounts of divine or quasi-divine necessity and extreme materialism. The fourth is more controversial, but is growing as a reason to turn to pragmatism with the acceptance of many-valued and fuzzy logics, as well as scepticism towards simple contradictions applied to socially and individually complex issues such as sex and gender, identity and belonging.

I have included the flow of time, as a fifth version of misrepresentation, in order to draw attention to the need for fantastic metaphysical creativity. To be sensible, we might assume that pragmatism should conform to the dominant «Western» assumptions about the irreversible flow of time – and hence assumptions about life and death, hope, loss, history, progress and decline. My claim is that the opposite is true. To remain critical and adapt to new problems around progress and loss, such as cultural and ideological differences about the past and about the place of humans in wider environments, pragmatism should consider and create novel accounts of time.

The appeal to a fantastic (metaphysically creative and critical) pragmatism is a response to the inevitability and destructive nature of metaphysics. Since every philosophy gives rise to metaphysics, to a structured world view, and since every such view involves violent misrepresentations, there have to be two related forms of metaphysical critique: criticism of other metaphysics and their violent effects, but also criticisms of a philosophy’s own metaphysical presuppositions.

Both of these critical stances demand creativity. The critical metaphysics must construct a world view from whence to criticise established ones. It must be constantly reinventing the next and better version of its own metaphysics. There is no pure «view from nowhere»<sup>10</sup> from whence to criticise metaphysics, because criticism requires a selection among metaphysical concepts and structures in order to undermine others, even if those structures are as minimal as a commitment to kinds of logic, or self-description as ‘anti’-metaphysical, or developing a new idea of quietism.

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<sup>10</sup> T. Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1986.

Against this claim for the inevitability of metaphysics, there is a branch of pragmatism that views its scepticism and pragmatic creativity as counter to metaphysical and dogmatic philosophies. Accordingly, it is possible for sceptical pragmatism to stand outside metaphysics and rid thought of its pernicious effects, while contributing to cultural and critical progress.

Ulf Schulenberg has made the argument for a post-metaphysical pragmatism in publications that bring together literary criticism and a defence of pragmatism as humanism. Note that I have kept the separation of prefix and noun or adjective, «post-metaphysics» or «post-metaphysical», where he prefers to elide the prefix into «postmetaphysics». This is not just a matter of grammatical taste; I want to emphasise the dependence on reaction against metaphysics, whereas Schulenberg is emphasising success in passing beyond metaphysics.

The position is summed up thus in his book *Pragmatism and Poetic Agency: the Persistence of Humanism*.

[...] I will demonstrate that one can grasp the unique contemporary significance of pragmatism only when one realizes how pragmatism, humanism, antiauthoritarianism, and postmetaphysics are interlinked. If one appreciates the implications and consequences of this link, then one is in a position to see pragmatism's antifoundationalist and anti-representationalist story of progress and emancipation as continuing the project of the Enlightenment.<sup>11</sup>

The link that concerns me in this passage is drawn between pragmatism, humanism and «postmetaphysics». It is also with the political consequences of the link in terms of 'antiauthoritarianism' and emancipation. I do not deny that pragmatism and humanism have been and can be powerful opponents to authority and allies to emancipation – Schulenberg demonstrates this convincingly in his work on James Baldwin and pragmatism, for instance.<sup>12</sup> The errors are to think that these positive factors are consequences of freedom from metaphysics and that the dangers of metaphysics do not return in humanist pragmatism.

The source of error is in confusing metaphysics with canonical historical instances, represented by Platonism and its descendants, and the transcendental facets of Kantianism (as opposed to Kant's enlightenment legacy in its alliance with other strains of more pragmatic enlightenment). This identifies metaphysics with forms of argument: Plato's idealism and Kant's transcendental deductions. It also identifies it with consequences of those forms, such as eternal values and universal foundations, both of which invite criticism from humanist pragmatism.

In the following passage from an article on pragmatism, humanism and form, Schulenberg's narrow definition of metaphysics is set out starkly. For him, metaphysics are identified with the a priori (independence from human experience) and a theory practice dichotomy (that theory comes before and independently of practice). The human is then identified with embedded practice free of eternal values, abstract truths and unchallengeable forms of authority.

<sup>11</sup> U. Schulenberg, *Pragmatism and Poetic Agency*, Taylor & Francis Group, Abingdon-Thames, 2022 p 2.

<sup>12</sup> U. Schulenberg, *Speaking Out of the Most Passionate Love – James Baldwin and Pragmatism*, «European Journal of American Studies» 2-3, 2007, pp 1-20.

In contrast to my argument for multiple and varied metaphysical world views, metaphysics is fused with the transcendent or transcendental. It is then assumed that culture escapes metaphysics once it frees itself from those forms and arguments:

By criticizing a priori philosophies and their ideal of timeless pure thought, as well as their theory-practice dichotomy, pragmatists argue that there are no nonhuman truths and forms of authority, no eternal moral principles, and no need for the subject's answerability to the world. In a detranscendentalized and postmetaphysical culture the world would no longer be a conversation partner, and the subject, by creatively and imaginatively acting to solve problems and achieve purposes, would appear as a maker.<sup>13</sup>

This passage gives rise to a raft of concepts and forms that are apt to belong to a new metaphysics. Practice and thought are taken to be human in origin and focus. What if there are non-human practices (animal, vegetal, physical) and non-human thought (mechanical, computational, chemical)? A simple opposition is drawn between the a priori and eternal nature of 'bad' metaphysical thought and good empirical practice. What if that practice gives rise to relative distinctions between different forms in time and space that become dominant institutions, like the idea that science and technology, tempered by culture, are always the way to better outcomes?

Metaphysical principles do not have to lay claim to be eternal to be destructively out-of-step with the times. It is sufficient for there to be a relative disjunction and for one world view to have an unjustified basis on the terms of the other, such as a rigid claim to humanism in a world turning to the superior ethical value of animals and nature.

Schulenberg's distinctions repeat the forms of opposition and established, if often flexible, values that are set out in canonical metaphysics. It is also worth noting that the metaphysics to be avoided are caricatured when summed up as *a priori* in a move reminiscent of reductive interpretations of Plato and Kant. These caricatures are closer to what Deleuze calls an «image of thought» than any given philosophy.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, there are signs of the emergence of fixed metaphysical oppositions and of a dominant image of thought in Schulenberg's elevation of problem solving, achievement of purpose and «making». These are consistent with a modern world view based around technicity, goal setting and measurement, human building and cultural production.

If the branch of pragmatism heralded by Schulenberg is right, then metaphysical violence can be mitigated thanks to scepticism. My argument will be that there is no scepticism and no truth that can escape metaphysical foundations. The alternative to metaphysics is based on a time-bound critique of earlier dogmatism on the cusp of social and ideological change, and on appeals to current standards of truth, as set by contemporary sciences and logic, informed by the sensitivity and progressiveness of some cultural productions. This timeliness and presentism will always be an internal threat to pragmatism

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<sup>13</sup> U. Schulenberg, *Pragmatism, Humanism, and Form*, «European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy», XIII-2, 2021, p 272

<sup>14</sup> G. Deleuze, *Différence et répétition*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1968.

as philosophy. They tie philosophy - an untimely subject defined by its capacity to project the present far into the past, and far to the future - to a particular epoch, viewed reflexively and from a single viewpoint with claims to generality through its democratic pluralism.

This brings me to my third claim. Destructiveness takes on insidious characteristics when metaphysics are latent or denied. There is a dangerous complacency in thinking we are free of metaphysics, rather than slowly giving rise to new forms of it. This is because critical counterpoints are missed as illegitimate, mistaken or irrelevant; as if it is a category mistake to call pragmatism metaphysical because it does not rely on dogmatic concepts or transcendental arguments. There is a similar kind of defensive argument in favour of common sense: you are taken to be mistaken to criticise common sense as a philosophical claim, since it is a «mere» appeal to a generally held view, as in Price's borrowed ideas from Reid and Hume.

This does not mean there are no arguments for philosophy free of metaphysics. It means these arguments are vulnerable to their own points, making claims for a difference with transcendental and dogmatic philosophies, when the critical issue is that to make such claims, to situate a philosophy or an experience, already implies metaphysics.

Akin to the accusation of «performative contradiction» raised by Habermas against poststructuralists, or the paradoxical reliance on foundational concepts in anti-foundationalism, raised by Derrida, there is a metaphysical performative contradiction or paradox.<sup>15</sup> It does not have the logical immediacy of phrases such as «I make no truth claims», but rather calls for a philosophy free of metaphysics while drawing on words and things that imply metaphysics; for instance, by relying upon a particular kind of subject, rationality, or conceptual framework, as indicated by ideas like «experience» or «common» or «freedom from metaphysics».

### Post-metaphysical or still-metaphysical quietism?

Schulenberg's branch of post-metaphysical pragmatism is explicitly culturally constructive and politically progressive. It is therefore more prone to kind of performative contradiction and paradoxical returns to metaphysical structures and world views than forms that avoid building new positions and making positive social moves based on them. The insidious return of metaphysics works through a philosophical basis in, among others, concepts, ideas, arguments, metaphors and examples. If your argument depends on them, then it will be at risk. What of positions that avoid making such positive moves. What of quietist pragmatism?

I am not using insidious in its moral sense. The insidiousness I am concerned about is a subtle and hidden background process, not an immoral or amoral act. My contention is that these processes are at work in post-metaphysical pragmatisms even of the minimalist kind, such as the «metaphysi-

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<sup>15</sup> See Dulshan Khan's critical discussion of Habermas's idea of performative contradiction, borrowed from Appel, and contrasted with Derrida's idea of the necessarily paradoxical nature of philosophical anti-foundationalism. I agree with Khan that Derrida's approach offers a better insight into the nature of the problems of 'anti' and 'post' positions in philosophy. D. Khan, *Rereading Habermas's charge of "performative contradiction" in light of Derrida's account of the paradoxes of philosophical grounding* *Constellations*, Volume 26, Issue 1, 2019, pp 4-16.



cal quietism» described positively by David Macarthur, in his studies of Brandom, Price and Rorty. Following and improving on Rorty's more impressionistic version, Macarthur defines quietism in terms of minimal conditions:

Quietism, at a minimum, refers to a non-constructive mode of philosophizing, one that has no ambition to formulate a general philosophical theory nor to provide a straight answer to a philosophical problem. The aim of the quietist, in the region of philosophical thought to which it applies, is not to embrace philosophical doctrines or theories but to earn the right to live without them.<sup>16</sup>

Unlike Schulenberg's commitment to a general and constructive humanism as an answer to a series of moral, political and aesthetic problems, Macarthur restrains quietist pragmatism from any such wide-ranging positive basis and proposed solution. The point against general theories is strictly negative, in seeking to clear a field of metaphysical traces, in the hope of living free of them.

This does not mean that Macarthur is opposed to any positive moves. He distinguishes general and local kinds of philosophical quietism. Wittgenstein represents the first, where philosophy should make no positive moves, restricting itself to a generalised scepticism. Rorty and Brandom represent the second, whereby metaphysical commitments are avoided, but other positive contributions from philosophy are possible and indeed encouraged:

But whatever the prospects of these fully global versions of quietism - and they are a good deal better than is often supposed - it should not be imagined that they exhaust the field. What tends to be overlooked is that there are local versions of quietism that combine quietism in one or more areas with constructive or explanatory ambitions elsewhere. Since these versions are not paradoxical in the manner of the global versions it is best to understand quietism, in the first instance at least, as topic - or discourse-specific.<sup>17</sup>

The paradox Macarthur is referring to is the necessity of setting out what quietism is, or allowing for an inference of what it is, such that quietism becomes a positive teaching or doctrine. For global quietism, this paradox is a constant threat because of its general opposition to a positive basis. For local quietism it is avoided because construction is possible in some spheres but not others. So long as the topic or discourse to be avoided does not return in the positive contributions, then paradox is avoided.

The paradox facing global quietism is the paradox I have attributed to anti-metaphysical pragmatism; for instance, in the case of Schulenberg's humanism. However, if Macarthur is right and it is possible to circumscribe «bad» metaphysical commitments from «good» constructive ones, then my argument fails. In order to make this demarcation - like Schulenberg - Macarthur proposes a limited definition of metaphysics. He does this in two stages. First, he gives a general and inclusive characterisation in terms of a basic or fundamen-

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<sup>16</sup> D. Macarthur, *Pragmatism, Metaphysical Quietism, and the Problem of Normativity*. *Philosophical Topics*, 36(1), 2008, p 196.

<sup>17</sup> Ivi. p 197

tal claim about reality, covering as big a range of metaphysics as versions of reality:

Metaphysics is an attempt to explain phenomena or the appearances of things in terms of some conception of what is really basic, fundamental, or real. Of course, there is notoriously little agreement among metaphysicians about what to include in the appearances and what counts as really real.<sup>18</sup>

Second, he gives a more precise account of the nature of the «attempts» from the general definition:

Any term, concept, sentence, or theory can be put to a metaphysical use insofar as it is employed as part of a metaphysical system or with the explanatory intentions characteristic of metaphysics.<sup>19</sup>

The opening list of this second definition is close to my position in recognising that a wide range of philosophical terms can give rise to metaphysics. I would add things like logics, metaphors and examples; I don't think that would be inconsistent with Macarthur's argument because of the catch all nature of his appeal to «theory». The deep difference is therefore around his definition of a metaphysical system as a basic or fundamental claim about the nature of the real.

My claim is that claims *on* the nature of the real can take insidious forms and that philosophies can give rise to such claims intentionally (claims *about* the real) and non-intentionally and in ways far distant from original inception. The difference is between restricted and broad forms of philosophical effect. For Macarthur, the effect has to be an intended and fundamental or basic claim on the real. For me, the effect just has to be on the real in contributing to a particular world view, as the legacy of philosophical terms such as concepts or metaphors. I'll now go on to show how there are such claims on the real in Macarthur's definition of metaphysics and his local quietism through his commitments to intentions.

Against the idea that we can «earn the right to live without» philosophical doctrines or theories, I am writing in support of the inevitability of metaphysics and hence for the desirability of a self-aware constructive and critical pragmatic metaphysics. My view is that doctrines become insidious when we maintain that we can successfully have 'no ambition to formulate a general theory' while writing sceptically on the margins of such theories.

The argument is process philosophical and linguistic. It does not express an «ought» («philosophy should not claim to be post-metaphysical») but a «cannot» (philosophy - any language - cannot be post-metaphysical). When we use language, when we place our acts and words into living structures, we impede upon, rely on, support and further metaphysical structures. We might not do so consciously, but we still do so when, for example, we use particular pronouns, values, distinctions, entailments, stances, attitudes and judgements. Perhaps more importantly, we also do so by simply remaining silent, not using cer-

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<sup>18</sup> Ivi. p 198

<sup>19</sup> Ivi. p 199

tain words and using others in ordinary or common senses, going beyond some values, erasing distinctions, denying entailments, mocking some stances and praising others, adopting new attitudes, refraining from judging (or appearing to).

These processes also imply a particular kind of pragmatism for metaphysics. It is not the pragmatism of weighing up better or worse outcomes: the pragmatism of options, ends and types of measurement. It is pragmatism of mitigation, of experimentally gaining a sense of how best to work with the necessity of the inevitable good and inevitable bad of positive metaphysical decisions and choices. It's not a pragmatism where experience leads to better judgement, but one where experimentation leads to more and temporarily better creativity.

Macarthur's quietism is a decision, in some local situations, not to judge on a positive basis (which inevitably ends up judging at least in the sense of deciding not to provide counter-positions). The pragmatism I wish to adopt may sometimes be quietist, but as an ephemeral creative practice, laden with metaphysical and political consequences, and critically aware of this. Thus not Rorty's but Beckett's quietism, accompanied by knowledge of positive values:

To know so well what one values is, what one's value is, as not to neglect those occasions (they are few) on which it may be doubled, is not a common faculty; to retain in the acknowledgement of such enrichment the light, calm and finality that composed it is an extremely rare one.<sup>20</sup>

Macarthur's definition of quietism is explicitly intentional: «ambition to formulate», «ambition to provide», «aim not to embrace» and «aim to earn». Note his insistence on the conscious effort to achieve a certain outcome, as opposed to the simple act (aim to earn, rather than earn). It could be claimed that these locutions are designed to indicate difficulty and uncertainty. I accept that. Nonetheless, they do so as aspects of deliberate and sustained intentions.

For Macarthur, metaphysical quietism is intentional and sustained. It is constituted by lengthy practice, refinement, memory and reflexion - repeated over time and as a negation of metaphysics. These are still the marks of construction: to oppose; to build; to review; to memorise; to repeat. Quietism is made and built up against things. Furthermore, this quietism is still a theory and a doctrine, since it groups adherents together around texts and teachings, not only in accordance with the religious roots of the word, but also in its po-

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<sup>20</sup> These are the final lines of Beckett's short review «Humanistic quietism» as quoted in Andy Wimbush's «Another Look at Beckett's "Humanistic Quietism"». Wimbush's rewarding research on Beckett and quietism suggests a quietism that is both positive in terms of values and sceptically reflective: 'What Beckett seems to be advocating here is self-knowledge that is as free from narcissism as it is from self-loathing. He wants the poet to be sufficiently aware of his or her own worth and priorities, while still being able to see where both these things might be enhanced («doubled»). And then, once the enhancement («enrichment») of the poet's worth and priorities has taken place, the poet should still retain his or her initial quasi-quietistic composure of «light, calm and finality», and not be overthrown by self-aggrandisement.' A. Wimbush, *Another Look at Beckett's "Humanistic Quietism"* Journal of Beckett Studies 23.2, 2014, p 215. See also A. Wimbush, *Still: Samuel Beckett's Quietism*, Verlag, Stuttgart, 2020.

litical ones. This is explicitly so for Rorty's social and political statements, as criticised by Bernstein with responses from Rorty where he draws a distinction between radical political commitments and his own more pragmatic ones in tune with liberal democracy «skilfully adapted to the local environment».<sup>21</sup>

Quietists might respond with a distinction between quietism *as* a doctrine and quietism *about* a doctrine, accepting the former but pointing out that the latter is sceptical about theories and rejects action within them. Thus the quietism of no will is a teaching about will, for instance in Schopenhauer, but it avoids acts and doctrines of the will. However, my point is that this avoidance is a doctrine in its own right, as it is in Schopenhauer and in the Hindu Vedanta he drew inspiration from.

Against appearances, quietism as a doctrine about intentional constructions distinguishing local and global commitments satisfies the definition of metaphysics as structures of concepts and values giving a world view. Independent of intentions, such structures have consequences as metaphysics. A doctrine of «no will» might well claim not to have will as part of its concepts, but it still implies a structure rejecting will and leads to a series of consequences about will and the world.

A doctrine of intentions furthers a world view of subjects, aims, intentions, outcomes and responsibilities. This might not seem like metaphysics, because its components are so familiar to our modern sensibilities. However, if we compare these components to metaphysics of passivity or of causal determinations, then the contrast will indicate a clash, not between plain commitments and metaphysical ones, but between different metaphysics and world views, with pros and cons to be debated.

### Conclusion: metaphysical quietism and political quietism

I will conclude with suggestions about the link between political quietism and metaphysical quietism. Defenders of the latter argue that it avoids the violence and dogmatism of traditional metaphysics and yet also avoids being politically silent – in the wide sense of making a difference socially and politically -- by pursuing a different kind of more cautious and critical metaphysics, a kind of ongoing practice marginal to traditional metaphysics, rather than an outright construction.

In his article *Putnam, Pragmatism and the Fate of Metaphysics*, Macarthur draws a distinction between descriptive metaphysics, describing something «that is open to view»,<sup>22</sup> and traditional metaphysics, with the characteristics of an «unfamiliar use of the appearance/reality distinction; the claim that some (few) things are fundamental; and the claim that everything can be explained in terms of such things».<sup>23</sup> Following Dewey and Wittgenstein, he also defends the practice of continuing to criticise metaphysics as a kind of cleansing, vigilance and learning in language and philosophy.

I have proposed a stronger version of continuing metaphysics than all three of Macarthur's options. For descriptive metaphysics, my claim is that

<sup>21</sup> R. Rorty, *Things and Theorists: A Reply to Bernstein*, «Political Theory», 15(4), 1987, p 574.

<sup>22</sup> D. Macarthur, *Putnam, Pragmatism and the Fate of Metaphysics*, *EuJap*, Vol. 4, no. 2, 2008, pp 33-46.

<sup>23</sup> Ivi. pp 33-46, <https://hrcak.srce.hr/file/137217>

they have implicit metaphysics of their own; for instance, through what they choose to describe, how they describe them and what reasons they give (or rely on) for the contingency of the things and descriptions. The enculturation of experience and cognition holds for philosophers as much as it does for social anthropologists:

Cultural learning is the extended inheritance mechanism by which various cognitive traits are transmitted and acquired. It plays an important role in the development of cognitive traits and, therefore, in the enculturation of cognition. Enculturation can be defined as the process by which cognitive capacities are altered and extended by cultural learning. The core features of enculturation are as follows: 1. Modern human minds are highly flexible/plastic and exhibit a high degree of cognitive potential. 2. Modern human minds are dependent upon cultural learning and high-fidelity transmission to acquire knowledge, skills, and develop and refine cognitive capacities.<sup>24</sup>

There is no conceptual choice that is not also inherited and furthered. Thus enculturation can be part of the explanation of how a world view is made and transmitted, and how it influences how we think and act in ways that are culturally relative.

The «open to view» of any description depends on the histories, cultures, bodies, languages, sexes, genders, tools and theories of the viewers. Along with the act of description, they constitute a metaphysical environment that is no more innocent, pure, neutral and free of values and judgement than the encultured perceptions and cognitions of social anthropologists at the outset of their research. At the very point where metaphysical quietism steps aside from traditional metaphysics it steps back into its own metaphysical culture and environment.

Taken from a reflection on Frank Jackson, Macarthur's definition of traditional metaphysics is too «thingly», too quick to read the tradition from esoteric modern concerns with questions about things and reality, when traditional metaphysics are better thought of as systems, structures and models of the world. These include things, for sure, but the point is how the things interact, not what they are, or whether some are real or not. We can read Leibniz with a focus on the metaphysical status of monads, but his monadology is a theodicy, concerned with the relations of monads to God and lessons to be learned from their respective natures with respect to how the world is to be judged, reasoned about and lived in.

The difficulty is not whether we should continue to criticise metaphysics, but on what grounds. Should we criticise them from post-metaphysical side lines, or does critique require an immersion in the same medium of clashes between images and models for the world? The latter requires a constant effort to get metaphysics right and to criticise how getting it right always involves costs - getting it wrong - and damages - catching some things against the grain or omitting them altogether, often with terrible consequences.

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<sup>24</sup> R. Menary & A. Gillett, *The Tools of Enculturation*, «Topics in Cognitive Science» 14, 2022, p 367.

Given the tendency to destructiveness, there should always be a critical effort to expose it for any particular metaphysics and, hence, any particular pragmatism. This is not to reject metaphysics, but to campaign for awareness of the downsides of its complicated constructions. These references to complexity and to building contribute to a definition of metaphysics as the situated invention of philosophical systems. They explain and create a world by articulating all its processes according to models with their own criteria for consistency, function and value.

This invention does not have to be deliberate. Like eighteenth century engineers and scientists, working on steam engines with little inkling of the rail and waterborne revolution that was to follow, thinkers can develop ideas with no clue as to the far-reaching metaphysical and practical outcomes they will (or might) lead to. It has often fallen to novelists to read these clues.

As interventions on the world, metaphysics are not only worthwhile in themselves, as fine and taxing exercises in thought. They are valuable as speculative interactions with worlds over time, as creative ways of responding to change and instituting improvements. As such, metaphysics are political and my argument can be put politically: to avoid the rule of an illusory majority, pragmatism should invent new democracies for overlooked minorities.

This political dimension around democracy and effective progressive acts is of course central to pragmatism. It brings philosophical risks. First, the urgency of political causes enthuses philosophical reasoning and can thereby lead to entrenched views; for instance, around religion or around ideology. Second, actual democratic constituencies take on outsized importance within philosophical reflection; for instance, around universal suffrage. That's not to say that the risks are not worthwhile. It's to say that the debate has high political stakes providing a treacherous setting for philosophical arguments. To navigate these risks it is essential for pragmatism to recognise its necessary tendency to give rise to metaphysics.