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A New Look at Wittgenstein and Pragmatism

Sami Pihlström

AUTHOR'S NOTE

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1. Introduction

- 1 Historically, there is presumably relatively little to be added to the already existing scholarship on the relation between Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy and the pragmatist tradition. Russell Goodman's excellent monograph, *Wittgenstein and William James* (2002), tells us most that is worth telling about this issue, at least insofar as we are concerned with Wittgenstein's relation to the classical pragmatist William James (or even to Charles S. Peirce and John Dewey). Any examination of Wittgenstein's relation to pragmatism must begin with Goodman's careful historical work, to which it is very difficult to add significantly new scholarly results.¹
- 2 Such examinations of Wittgenstein and pragmatism should also appreciate the fact that Wittgenstein's own brief remarks on pragmatism – such as the one in *On Certainty* where he admits that his views may sound like pragmatism even though they are not really pragmatist (see Wittgenstein 1969: § 422; cf. also Wittgenstein 1980a: § 266; Goodman 2002: 11, 158) – must be understood against the background of other Cambridge philosophers', especially Bertrand Russell's and G. E. Moore's, conceptions of pragmatism: Wittgenstein was clearly *not* a pragmatist in the sense of James's 'pragmatist theory of

truth,' but then again James himself was hardly a pragmatist in the rather naive sense of pragmatism (and its notorious theory of truth) attributed to him by his Cambridge critics. On the other hand, it is also clear that Wittgenstein was already at an early stage familiar with James's famous work, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), which contains a brief account of the pragmatic method or "Peirce's principle," according to which our conception of the potential or conceivable practical effects of the object of our thought is our conception of that object in its entirety.²

- 3 Wittgenstein has also been intensively discussed by 'neopragmatists' like Richard Rorty and Hilary Putnam, as well as their many followers; it is, however, probably too early to evaluate his contribution to the development of neopragmatist thought, as neopragmatism itself is still developing as a philosophical orientation.³ One of the leading contemporary neopragmatists, Huw Price, also insightfully employs Wittgenstein in his defense of anti-representationalism, global expressivism, and functional pluralism – and even explicitly refers to the similarity between Wittgensteinian "plurality of forms of discourse, or 'language-games'" and the "strong element of discourse pluralism in the American pragmatist tradition, of which [Nelson] Goodman and Rorty are the most prominent recent representatives" (Price 2011: 36).⁴ Thus, it might seem that the relation between Wittgenstein and pragmatism has more or less been exhausted: while Russell Goodman has taken care of its historical dimensions, original philosophers of language like Price have made the most innovative pragmatist use of Wittgenstein's ideas in contemporary systematic philosophy.
- 4 However, philosophically and systematically rather than historically, there is, I believe, still a lot to say about the relation between Wittgenstein and pragmatism. By making this distinction, I am not assuming that philosophy and its history are separable; indeed, I do not believe in such a dichotomy at all. Rather, systematic philosophy and the history of philosophy should be seen as a holistic network of beliefs and ideas to be critically examined *in toto*.⁵ I only want to emphasize that my discussion of Wittgenstein's relation to, or place in, pragmatism is not primarily intended as a detailed contribution to historical scholarship on what Wittgenstein (or the pragmatists) 'really said.' No new "readings" of Wittgenstein, or striking novel historical results, will be offered. My main aims are philosophical in the sense that I want to contribute to the re-evaluation of the pragmatist way of philosophizing today –and, *mutatis mutandis*, of the Wittgensteinian way(s) – from the perspective of this critical comparison.⁶
- 5 The conception of pragmatism presupposed in my discussion is, as will emerge as the argument unfolds, a more or less 'classical' one at least in the sense that I am not at all convinced by Rortyan (or even Pricean) neopragmatist and antirepresentationalist ideas. I am not strongly committed to any specific account of classical pragmatism (although I will emphasize the view of beliefs as "habits of action," originally defended by Peirce); nor do I see classical pragmatism and neopragmatism as fundamentally opposed to each other (as some scholars do). For instance, I want to avoid establishing a new essentialistic dichotomy between classical pragmatism focusing on experience and post-linguistic-turn neopragmatism focusing on language. A picture of pragmatism inspired by Peirce, James, and Dewey but self-critically willing to learn from the new developments of pragmatism itself and its intellectual neighbors (including, say, analytic philosophy and phenomenology) will remain open and developing, continuously in the making (cf. Pihlström (ed.) 2011). This dynamic openness is what makes pragmatism a truly living

philosophical tradition, and my proposed ‘new look’ at Wittgenstein from a pragmatist perspective is one attempt to maintain such openness.

- 6 This paper is organized as follows. First, I will discuss, from a pragmatist perspective, three key issues of Wittgenstein studies that provide useful insights into the ways in which Wittgenstein, or the contemporary ‘Wittgensteinian’ philosopher, may be said to be a pragmatist: the distinction – invoked in recent discussions of Wittgenstein’s *On Certainty*, in particular – between *the propositional and the non-propositional* (section 2); the related tension between anti-Cartesian *fallibilism* and what has been called *the “truth in skepticism”* in Wittgenstein (section 3); as well as the relation between *metaphysics and the criticism of metaphysics* in Wittgenstein’s philosophy, and Wittgensteinian philosophy more generally (section 4). I will also argue that dichotomous readings of Wittgenstein in terms of these three philosophical (or metaphilosophical) oppositions lead to unpragmatist and even un-Wittgensteinian positions. I will then proceed to a more explicitly metaphilosophical consideration of a fourth, equally harmful dichotomy, the one between *deconstructive (therapeutic) and (re)constructive or systematic, argumentative philosophy* – which is, I will argue, again something that the pragmatist, together with Wittgenstein, ought to overcome rather than rely on (section 5). These issues are, and largely remain, open questions in Wittgenstein scholarship. I can here only summarize how a pragmatist reader of Wittgenstein *might*, or perhaps should, deal with them; thus, what I will offer is merely a pragmatist proposal to overcome certain dichotomies or dualisms that in my view threaten to lead current Wittgenstein scholarship astray. After having gone through these topics at a general level, I will briefly apply my considerations to the philosophy of religion, which is an important field of inquiry for both Wittgensteinian and pragmatist thinkers (section 6). A short conclusion (section 7) will finally pull the threads together.

2. ‘Hinges’: Propositional and Non-Propositional

- 7 Wittgenstein’s ‘pragmatism’ has been perceived, especially in *On Certainty* (1969), to focus on *non-propositional* ‘hinges’ – that is, fundamental certainties-in-action that our thoughts and any meanings those thoughts or our uses of language are able to express depend on.⁷ Thus, ‘hinge propositions’ is actually a misleading expression, just as ‘grammatical sentences’ is: hinges, in the full pragmatist sense, are not propositional but profoundly action-based. Clearly, it is easy to suggest at a general level that Wittgenstein provides us with a ‘pragmatist’ picture of human language-use and meaning: any meaning possible for us is grounded in public human ways of acting, that is, language-games. Wittgenstein’s later philosophy generally can be read as an attempt to show that it is only against the background of our human form(s) of life, of our habits of doing various things together in common environments, that meaning and also the learning of meanings are possible. In this sense, Wittgenstein establishes a pragmatic philosophical position – arguably as a response to a ‘transcendental’ question concerning the necessary conditions for the possibility of meaning.⁸
- 8 The ‘pragmatist’ reading of *On Certainty* defended by Danièle Moyal-Sharrock makes these ideas more precise by arguing that, for Wittgenstein, our basic certainties are ‘certainties in action’ instead of propositionally expressible claims known with certainty to be true. Wittgenstein, after all, says in *On Certainty* that “an ungrounded way of acting” is prior to any ungrounded presupposition (Wittgenstein 1969: § 110) and that our “acting,” instead

of “seeing,” lies “at the bottom of the language-game” (*ibid.*: § 204; original emphases). He also famously quotes, approvingly, Goethe’s *Faust*: “In the beginning was the deed” (*ibid.*: § 402). While this reference to action as such provides a more or less standard picture of Wittgenstein – also endorsed by Goodman (2002: 5, 19-20), who notes that the “priority of practice over intellect” and the deep interrelation of action and thought are among the commitments shared by Wittgenstein and William James – few scholars have joined Moyal-Sharrock in explicitly labelling Wittgenstein’s position ‘pragmatist’ (or ‘logically pragmatist,’ ‘pragmatist in a broad sense’). Moyal-Sharrock strongly emphasizes that the pragmatic certainty at issue here is non-propositional, non-empirical, and non-epistemic. A central pragmatic condition of meaning, according to Wittgenstein, is *trust*, understood as an instinctive, primitive, unreasoned, immediate reaction. “Without this unflinching trust, there is no making sense,” Moyal-Sharrock (2003: 133) aptly notes, referring to Wittgenstein’s (1969: § 509) famous statement that “a language-game is only possible if one trusts something (I did not say ‘can trust something’).” For instance, the assumption that the earth has existed for many years “forms the basis of action, and therefore, naturally, of thought” (*ibid.*: § 411), and this is something we trust on rather than know or even believe to be true in the sense in which we know and believe many other things.⁹

- 9 In *On Certainty*, then, the ‘hinges’ of our language-game(s) are the practical certainties we instinctively and immediately rely on – that is, what we trust without too much reasoning about the matter. Such hinges, including, say, our continuing trust in the reality of such things as stones and chairs or other people (not to be conflated with theoretical claims to know, on the basis of philosophical arguments, for instance, that physical objects or ‘other minds’ ‘really exist’), ‘enable sense’ instead of themselves having sense (Moyal-Sharrock 2003: 134). Operating as such hinges, grammatical rules, in Wittgenstein’s special sense of ‘grammar,’ make language-games possible instead of being moves within a game (*ibid.*: 134-5). A hinge, according to this reading of *On Certainty*, is an ‘enabler,’ not an hypothesis to be tested (*ibid.*: 135). Wittgenstein’s anti-skeptical argumentation concludes that we ‘cannot doubt’ certain things if we are to (continue to) make sense with our expressions (*ibid.*: 138). These transcendental-sounding formulations invoke the practice-laden background of our language-use as the condition for the possibility of meaning. Moreover, this pragmatist point is highlighted by the fact that, while Wittgenstein’s philosophy is of course centrally focused on language, the notion of language must be construed more broadly than as a mere propositional system – as, instead, a genuine human practice within the natural world.
- 10 However, despite my deep appreciation of Moyal-Sharrock’s pragmatist reading, I would modify her view by arguing that pragmatism blurs the boundary between the propositional and the non-propositional. The basic idea here is something that already Peirce and James insisted on: beliefs (and, analogously, any propositional states we attribute to human beings) are not just propositional attitudes ‘in the head,’ that is, in the Cartesian-like mind (or brain) of the believer, but ‘habits of action’ in the world.¹⁰ The notion of a habit is crucial here. While I must simply use it in a vague and general sense in this context, referring to the traditional pragmatist idea that to believe something is to be prepared to act in certain ways, this notion of a habit could in a more detailed investigation be fruitfully compared to Wittgensteinian notions such as custom, technique, and perhaps also game.¹¹ After all, Wittgenstein does say in the *Investigations* (1953, I, § 150) that learning a language is mastering a technique. Accordingly, engaging in any propositional activity can be said to be based on human activities or habits, ways of

doing things in a normatively governed, though always possibly changing, manner. There is no fixed or permanent normative structure of language; as Jaakko Hintikka has often remarked in his studies on Wittgenstein, language-games themselves are, for Wittgenstein, “prior to their rules.”¹²

- 11 There is, then, for a pragmatist reader of Wittgenstein inspired by the classical pragmatists’ emphasis on habits and habituality, no dichotomy between the propositional and the non-propositional in the sense of ‘pragmatist’ interpretations of Wittgenstein such as Moyal-Sharrock’s. Relying on such a dichotomy, which, in Moyal-Sharrock’s reading, is intended to yield a new form of foundationalism – an action-based and therefore non-propositional rather than propositional response to scepticism – is both unpragmatist and un-Wittgensteinian. While Moyal-Sharrock is certainly correct to point that the ‘hinges’ Wittgenstein invokes are not propositional in the standard sense (any more than they are epistemic or hypothetical), neither aspect – the propositional or the non-propositional – of the certainties Wittgenstein examines should be denied, or even can be denied, as they are inextricably intertwined.
- 12 This, however, is a pragmatist reinterpretation of (the third) Wittgenstein, not an attempt to interpret Wittgenstein’s actual views with any detailed historical accuracy. Even so, the denial of the dichotomy between the propositional and the non-propositional – or, similarly, between the linguistic and the non-linguistic – does in my view capture the ‘spirit’ of *On Certainty* better than a dichotomous interpretation, even a ‘logically pragmatist’ one.

3. Knowledge and Certainty: Fallibilism and the Truth in Skepticism

- 13 As a result of its remarkable conception of certainties-in-action, Wittgenstein’s *On Certainty* is, furthermore, anti-skeptical and anti-Cartesian in a way strongly resembling Peirce’s famous anti-Cartesian writings from the 1860s (see again Peirce 1992-98, vol. 1). Both philosophers maintain, in contrast to Descartes’s notorious methodological skepticism, that we cannot begin our inquiries from complete doubt. Rather, we must, inevitably, always begin from within our beliefs – or, what amounts to the same, our habits of action – that already presuppose a great number of various certainties, or ‘hinges.’ Otherwise there can be no knowledge or inquiry at all, or even any meaning, according to Wittgenstein (see section 2 above).
- 14 In Peirce’s philosophy of science, this anti-Cartesian starting point is developed into the well-known thesis of *fallibilism*: we could always be wrong, even though we cannot simultaneously doubt everything we believe. Any of our beliefs could be wrong, and we might, as inquiry progresses, have reasons to revise or give up even our most strongly maintained views or theories. We just cannot give all of them up at the same time. We have to have a firm basis for revising those parts of our belief system that need revision, even though that basis itself may also be called into question at a different time or from a different point of view. There is no final, universal, or apodictic certainty to be had anywhere in human affairs; our inquiries are fallible and revisable through and through.
- 15 This fallibility or revisability is fully natural for us as the kind of beings we are. As our factual circumstances change, as our forms of life are continuously recontextualized, the basic certainties constitutive of our language-games and of the meanings expressible

within them may have to be revised or given up, though *not* on the basis of reason or evidence because (as ‘hinges’) they are not based on reason or evidence (cf. Hertzberg 1994, especially 48-50). In this sense “our language-games are tied to the actual world we live in” (*ibid.*: 59).

- 16 It would presumably be misleading to call Wittgenstein a ‘fallibilist.’ This would indicate that he has a theory to advance in epistemology and the philosophy of science, something comparable to Peirce’s (and Dewey’s) pragmatist and naturalist theory of inquiry emphasizing the gradual revision of our beliefs and habits of action in the course of experience, where inquiry is launched as a response to the problematic situations arising from surprising and unexpected results of our actions that make us doubt the original beliefs (habits) we had been relying on. Yet, while it is clear that he does not defend such a theory, or presumably *any* epistemic theory at all, his conception of the pragmatic hinges briefly explored in the previous section should be understood in a fallibilistic ‘spirit.’ These practice-embedded certainties are never final but must be revised and corrected, as our practices and/or forms of life change and develop. Even the strongest of our hinges may have to be given up in new circumstances, although we may be unable to even coherently consider the possibility of having to give up our belief in, say, physical objects. In this general attitude to our relation to the world we live in (and inquire into), Wittgenstein is, I submit, a pragmatic fallibilist. Moreover, insofar as Wittgenstein is understood not only as a thinker with pragmatist inclinations but also as a post-Kantian transcendental philosopher employing transcendental arguments and reflections (see also section 5 below), this choice of terminology might also play the important role of reaffirming the transcendental philosopher’s entitlement to fallibilism and *antifoundationalism*: even if we inquire, transcendently, into the necessary conditions for the possibility of things we take for granted, the results of such inquiries need not be regarded as apodictically certain.¹³
- 17 This idea has also been expressed by saying that, while Wittgenstein’s late work is clearly anti-skeptical, there is an appreciation of the ‘truth in skepticism’ to be found in his philosophy as well. Precisely the fact that our language-games, forms of life, and/or habits of action¹⁴ do not have any metaphysical grounding or foundation can be understood as such a recognition of the fundamental truth of skepticism, even though, again, skepticism as a philosophical theory cannot be maintained.¹⁵ As a philosophical position, skepticism results from a theoretical urge that both pragmatism and Wittgenstein reject. Skepticism should be overcome not by offering a theoretical argument that finally silences the skeptic (this cannot be done) but by investigating the ways in which the skeptic’s “game” is dispensable – that is, there is no need for us to philosophize in terms of that game, following its rules – while containing a fundamental seed of truth in the sense of making us better aware of our groundlessness and precariousness.
- 18 Similarly, the ‘officially’ strongly anti-skeptical pragmatists reject all foundationalist theoretical attempts to “ground” knowledge, science, meaning – or anything – in anti-skeptical philosophical arguments. Space does not allow me to elaborate on this theme further here, but it seems to me that pragmatists and pragmatic fallibilists and naturalists (following Dewey) have often dramatically neglected their clear similarities to Wittgensteinian antifoundationalism and ‘fallibilism.’ Both sides would benefit from deepening comparisons that would also strengthen the status of a general

antifoundationalism in contemporary thought still too often troubled by foundationalist concerns both in epistemology and in ethics and political philosophy.

- 19 In any case, our conclusion at this point is that there need be no conflict or dichotomy between our commitment to fallibilism and our commitment to the ‘truth in skepticism.’ Both are pragmatically needed (and both are available in Wittgenstein), just like the propositional and the non-propositional cannot be dichotomously separated but must both be incorporated in our pragmatist picture of practice-embedded human being-in-the-world.¹⁶

4. Reality: Metaphysics and Anti-Metaphysics

- 20 Both Wittgenstein and the pragmatists have often been regarded as radically anti-metaphysical thinkers, even though Peirce, in particular, is also famous for his evolutionary metaphysics (see, e.g., Anderson & Hausman 2012) and even Dewey has been argued to incorporate metaphysical themes in his naturalism (cf. Sleeper 1986). For instance, Rorty (typically downgrading Peirce’s importance in the development of pragmatism) repeatedly pictures both Jamesian-Deweyan pragmatism and Wittgenstein’s later philosophy in an anti-metaphysical and anti-epistemological fashion, and more recent neopragmatists like Price (2011) share this negative attitude to metaphysics. However, as I have argued in several works (e.g., Pihlström 2009) –but won’t be able to argue in detail here– this is a fundamental misrepresentation of pragmatism. The pragmatists – and, perhaps analogously, Wittgenstein – can be seen as offering us a new kind of metaphysics, one based not on the futile attempt to climb above our forms of life into a God’s-Eye View but on human practices and especially our practice-embedded *ethical* and more generally evaluative standpoints and considerations. Engaging in metaphysics is a way of interpreting our human being-in-the-world, which cannot be separated from ethical values (or other values, including aesthetic ones, for that matter). This general idea is also closely related to the pragmatist rejection of the fact-value dichotomy.¹⁷
- 21 This is not at all to say that either pragmatists or Wittgenstein would not engage in the criticism of metaphysics. Obviously, they do. They both heavily criticize not only specific metaphysical ideas (e.g., Cartesian assumptions in the philosophy of mind or the picture of meanings as mental or abstract entities untouched by the practices of language-use) but also, and more importantly, the very conception of metaphysics based on traditional pre-Kantian metaphysical realism (transcendental realism), just as Kant himself did throughout his critique of reason. However, they need not leave the matter at that point but are able to offer a reconstructed – or, as we might say, post-Kantian – pragmatic, naturalized yet in a sense transcendental way of doing metaphysics in terms of, and on the basis of, human experiential practices (forms of life, language-games). *Pace* Price, this is continuing metaphysics “in a pragmatist key” instead of abandoning metaphysics altogether. Pragmatism and Wittgensteinian explorations of fundamental, yet revisable and fallible, features of our forms of life here converge into what we may describe as a pragmatic philosophical anthropology, which, transcendently interpreted yet pragmatically naturalized, is itself a form of metaphysics.
- 22 Moreover, the kind of pragmatism, or pragmatic philosophical anthropology, that Wittgenstein and philosophers like James share is deeply pluralistic (cf. again Price 2011, chapters 2 and 10). Both James and Wittgenstein insist on the contextuality and

pragmatic circumstantiality of human meanings, thought, and experience; we never encounter the world as it is in itself but always within one or another context – that is, a practice or a form of life. Furthermore, as there is no super-context or -practice over and above all others, there is no single correct way of using language or interpreting experience, no privileged representations in the sense of the ideal language isomorphic to the structure of the world that Wittgenstein imagined in the *Tractatus* (1921); instead, there is a plurality of equally acceptable ways of conceptualizing reality through different pragmatic engagements, each with their own valuational purposes built into them. These may be related to each other through networks of family resemblances – a famous Wittgensteinian notion that may in fact be drawn from James's *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902). Language-games are not mirrors of an independent reality, and there is no way of representing the world from a God's-Eye View; instead, there are only human, contextual, pragmatically embedded perspectives from within our forms of life.

- 23 At this point I would like to draw support from Putnam's account of Wittgenstein's relation to Kant and pragmatism: "Wittgenstein inherits and extends [...] Kant's pluralism; that is the idea that no one language game deserves the *exclusive* right to be called 'true,' or 'rational,' or 'our first-class conceptual system,' or the system that 'limns the ultimate nature of reality,' or anything like that" (Putnam 1992, 38). Putnam continues to observe – very interestingly from the perspective of our project of integrating Wittgenstein into the pragmatist tradition – that for this reason Wittgenstein can be said to refute key ideas propounded by two leading twentieth-century pragmatists, i.e., both W. V. Quine's reductive naturalism and Rorty's relativistic and postmodernist neopragmatism: "he agrees with Rorty, against Quine, that one cannot say that scientific language games are the only language games in which we say or write truths, or in which we describe reality; but, on the other hand, he agrees with Quine as against Rorty that language games can be criticized (or 'combated'); that there are better and worse language games" (*ibid.*).¹⁸
- 24 Arguably, a Wittgensteinian pragmatist may hold that our practice-embedded perspectives may, and often do, yield (or presuppose) metaphysical insights into the way the world is, or must be thought to be (by us), from within the various practical contexts we operate in. These, again, are not insights into the world as it is absolutely independently of our conceptualizing practices and value-laden practical points of view, but they are metaphysical – or philosophical-anthropological – insights nonetheless. For example, the well-known Wittgensteinian thesis (if we may say that Wittgenstein ever maintained philosophical theses)¹⁹ that there can be no private language in the sense of a language that only its speaker could ever understand or learn to use, just like the pragmatically pluralistic thesis derivable from the Putnamian interpretation just cited, can be interpreted as a metaphysical thesis about the way the world, including language and our life with language, is, for us language-users in the kind of natural circumstances and contexts (forms of life) we operate in. In this sense, both pragmatism and Wittgenstein can be understood as critically rethinking the nature of metaphysics – and anti-metaphysics – rather than moving beyond metaphysics.²⁰

5. Philosophy: Deconstruction and Reconstruction

- 25 In recent Wittgenstein studies, several noted scholars have suggested that Wittgenstein's philosophy is completely different from any traditional attempts to philosophize in terms

of theses and arguments. Those are to be rejected as remnants of 'dogmatic' ways of doing philosophy. Instead of engaging with theses and arguments, philosophy should be therapeutical and deconstructive, helping us get rid of assumptions that lead us to philosophical problems in the first place. The 'New Wittgensteinians,' taking very seriously Wittgenstein's encouragement to 'drop the ladder' toward the end of the *Tractatus* (Wittgenstein 1921: § 6.54) and his later proposal to lead philosophical thought to peace' (Wittgenstein 1953, I: § 133), support this therapeutic-deconstructive program.²¹

- 26 Again, we can perceive a misleadingly dichotomous choice between implausible extremes at work here. To defend a modestly traditional conception of philosophy as a systematic, argumentative practice employing theses and arguments supporting those theses is not to be a dogmatic believer in any particular philosophical system. As a brief illustration of this, I suggest that, despite his criticism of traditional ways of doing philosophy, Wittgenstein can be seen as employing Kantian-styled *transcendental arguments* (e.g., the private language argument) in favour of certain philosophical conceptions (e.g., the view that our language is necessarily public).²² The private language argument can be regarded as transcendental precisely because the fact that language is public is claimed to be a necessary condition for the very possibility of linguistic meaning. A private language would not be a language at all; as Wittgenstein notes, rules cannot be followed privately. Similarly, it could be argued that, necessarily, there must be agreement about certain apparently empirical matters ('hinges,' e.g., our basic conviction about the earth having existed for a long time and not just for, say, five minutes) in order for there to be meaningful use of language at all.²³ I am not making any claims about the success of Wittgenstein's arguments, but it seems to me clear that he can be plausibly read as employing the transcendental method of examining the necessary conditions for the possibility of something (e.g., meaningful language) whose actuality we take as given.²⁴
- 27 Analogously, the pragmatists can also be reinterpreted as philosophers presenting and evaluating transcendental arguments (or at least, more broadly, transcendental considerations and inquiries), even though radical neopragmatists like Rorty have tried to depict not only Wittgenstein but also the classical pragmatists, especially James and Dewey, in a deconstructive manner, as some kind of precursors of both post-Wittgensteinian therapy and Derridean deconstruction (and postmodernism more generally). For a pragmatist, there is no reason at all to resort to any unpragmatic dichotomy between, say, "transcendental philosophical *theory*" and "philosophizing as an *activity*" (Pleasants 1999: 181). Rather, philosophical theorizing itself is a practice-embedded human activity, and any activity that can be properly called "philosophical" surely has theoretical aspects.
- 28 A healthy pragmatism should, instead of relying on an essentialistic dichotomy between post-philosophical therapy and systematic argumentation, insist on the compatibility and deep complementarity of deconstruction and reconstruction. Deconstruction should always be followed by reconstruction. This is in effect what Dewey argued in *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (1920); as Putnam (1992) later put it, "deconstruction without reconstruction is irresponsibility." Thus, whenever a philosophical concept, problem, or position is "deconstructed" or therapeutically shown to be optional, a reconstructed pragmatic account of whatever it is that originally drew philosophers' attention to that concept, problem, or position should follow. For example, while Dewey devastatingly deconstructs a whole set of traditional philosophical dualisms – e.g., those between the mind and the body, experience and nature, as well as knowledge and action, to name but

a few – he also offers a reconstructed picture of how a non-reductively naturalized philosophy in the service of democracy as a way of life can deal with the issues that were previously thought to require these problematic dualisms.²⁵ The move from deconstruction to reconstruction is a stage in the process of inquiry needed to settle the problematic situation the philosophers seeks to transform.

- 29 Therefore, the crude dichotomy between therapeutic and systematic philosophy is, again, completely unpragmatic and in my view also anti-Wittgensteinian, as it assumes an essentialistic conception of *the* proper way of doing philosophy, without letting the richness of different philosophical aims, methods, and conceptions flourish. It thinks before looking, to use a Wittgensteinian phrase; or, to adopt a Peircean expression, it blocks the road of inquiry. Our philosophical inquiries often need both deconstruction and reconstruction; therefore, to narrow-mindedly restrict proper philosophizing to one of these impedes philosophical understanding.
- 30 Just as pragmatism and pragmatically interpreted Wittgensteinianism seek to mediate between the propositional and the non-propositional and between metaphysics and the criticism of metaphysics, they also seek to mediate between therapeutic-deconstructive and systematic-reconstructive conceptions of philosophy. Here pragmatism, also Wittgensteinianized pragmatism, can reaffirm its role – emphasized by, e.g., James in *Pragmatism* (1907, chapter 1) – as a critical mediator, a middle-ground-seeker, continuously hoping to reinterpret, re-evaluate, and transform traditional philosophical controversies.

6. Philosophy of Religion: Applying the Criticism of the Four Dichotomies

- 31 If we are able to avoid the dichotomies and assumptions discussed in the four previous sections in a pragmatist and (I claim) Wittgensteinian way, we should also be able to look and see what happens to a particular field of philosophical inquiry, such as the philosophy of religion, when they *are* avoided. Even though this paper cannot even begin to examine the Wittgensteinian tradition in the philosophy of religion, or even Wittgenstein's own views on religion, at any length,²⁶ let us very briefly consider philosophical investigations of religion on the basis of the following four ideas derived from the treatment of Wittgenstein's relation to pragmatism above. Moreover, following Goodman (2002) again, we should recognize that the commitment to the philosophical importance of religion is shared by Wittgenstein and James, as well as by most other pragmatists, even though few pragmatists have straightforwardly defended any traditional religious worldview.
- 32 First, it may be suggested that religious believers' specifically religious 'certainties' – the basic convictions underlying their religious 'language-games' or forms of life – are *both propositional and non-propositional*, that is, manifesting or incorporating (if not simply expressible in the form of) theological theses (e.g., regarding God's reality) but not reducible to mere linguistic statements considered in abstraction from human habits of action. Such certainties are, rather, themselves habits of action, combining propositional and non-propositional elements (cf. section 2 above).
- 33 Secondly, religious beliefs, including action-based 'certainties,' can be criticized and rationally rejected in the spirit of fallibilism and general philosophical

antifoundationalism; yet, just as there is no rational grounding for them based on religiously neutral criteria of reason, they cannot be rejected simply because of the lack of such grounding. This is comparable to ‘the truth in skepticism’ (see section 3 above). Religious beliefs, understood as practice-embedded certainties or fundamental convictions shaping the believers’ lives, are not scientific-like hypotheses to be tested in the way we test scientific or commonsensical beliefs about the world. Even so, they can be given up and/or revised in the course of our on-going experience and its transformations. They are not immune to criticism, because our lives and their contexts can and do change, requiring us to modify the concepts and language-games (including religious ones) we (may) employ to make sense of those lives. Or better, *if* one’s faith is immune to criticism, then it is not genuinely religious at all (cf. Pihlström 2013, chapter 7).

- 34 Thirdly, pragmatist philosophers of religion should *both* criticize traditional dogmatically metaphysical ways of pursuing theology and the philosophy of religion (e.g., the ‘proofs’ of God’s existence or the artificial logical puzzles related to the concept of omniscience, for instance) *and* be willing to consider metaphysical expressions for their ideas concerning God, the soul, etc., even though pragmatic metaphysical inquiries into religion and theology primarily have to start from, or be subordinated to, ethical reflections on what it means to be a human being (cf. Pihlström 2013, especially chapters 2 and 5; as well as section 4 above). In addition, for instance, process-theological reconstructions of the divinity might be worth exploring from both pragmatist and Wittgensteinian perspectives.
- 35 Fourthly, philosophy of religion, like Wittgensteinian-cum-pragmatist philosophy generally, should be *both deconstructive and reconstructive* (cf. section 5 above): we should, therapeutically, avoid dogmatic religious and/or theological beliefs but also, systematically and argumentatively, contribute to the critical analysis and evaluation of such belief systems. These are two sides of the same coin and equally important as parts of a philosophico-theological search for an ever deeper understanding of religion.
- 36 Both pragmatist and Wittgensteinian philosophers of religion should, in my view, subscribe to something like these formulations concerning the nature and tasks of the philosophy of religion today –admittedly only very briefly and preliminarily articulated here. We may, more specifically, join Goodman (2002: 154) in understanding James’s pragmatic conception of religion as ‘Wittgensteinian’: the significance of religious terms is ‘*established* by their use’; our understanding of such terms, symbols, or pictures is constituted by the ‘service’ we put them to in our lives and practices, which is very different from claiming, along with the naïve pragmatic theory of truth, that the truth of religious beliefs would be established by their utility or usefulness. Accordingly, it is not on the basis of their usefulness –their utility value to the individual or even to the group– that we determine the truth of religious views or beliefs; yet, when trying to articulate the very meaning of those views and beliefs in the context of human life and culture, we do have to refer to the ways they are ‘used’ – their ‘service’ for us – within our practices. They have to ‘make a difference’ somehow, and in many cases the specific “difference” religious ideas make in our lives is ethical in the sense that they enable us to see the world and our lives within it in certain value-laden ways.
- 37 In order to articulate this pragmatist conception of religion in more detail, we need more than is available in Wittgenstein’s own cryptic and aphoristic remarks on religious matters in *Culture and Value* (Wittgenstein 1980b) and in some of his students’ notes; we need a more systematic pragmatic-cum-Wittgensteinian investigation of the ways in

which religious expressions, symbols, beliefs, and worldviews are embedded and employed in cultural practices. Wittgenstein's philosophy of religion could therefore – in a more comprehensive discussion – be interestingly compared not only to James's pioneering work on religious experience and his pragmatic defense of the legitimacy of religious beliefs in terms of their morally motivating force (see James 1907, chapter 8) but also to Dewey's (1934) religious naturalism, which seeks to accommodate religious experience and values, including even the concept "God," within a naturalistic position avoiding any dogmatic commitments to supernaturalist metaphysics and pre-modern non-democratic social structures and institutions. "The religious," according to Dewey – and I suppose we might say, according to Wittgenstein as well – must be emancipated from historical religions and their dogmatic creeds that often hinder, instead of enabling, the flourishing of the truly religious qualities of experience (cf. Pihlström 2013, chapter 3). This paper, however, cannot develop these themes any further.

7. Conclusion

- 38 My reflections on Wittgenstein's relation to pragmatism have been partly programmatic and certainly need to be made more precise, both historically and systematically. I do not think I have offered any fundamentally new interpretation of Wittgenstein (or the pragmatists); this paper has only offered a *proposal* to consider these philosophical frameworks together in a certain way. Yet, I hope that by putting these two philosophical perspectives together in this specific way, questioning the dichotomies I find pernicious, may help us in reinterpreting both as orientations that ought to be taken very seriously in today's philosophical discussions – concerning metaphysics, religion, or the nature of philosophy itself. In particular, while philosophical thought must obviously make distinctions and use them for specific purposes, it is crucially important to move beyond the dichotomies briefly discussed in sections 2-5 above, as such oppositions tend to hinder philosophical progress instead of enhancing philosophical understanding.²⁷
- 39 While there would be no point in insisting that Wittgenstein was a 'pragmatist,' given that 'pragmatism' may itself be regarded as a 'family-resemblance' term and concept (cf. Goodman 2002: 178), we may see Wittgenstein as offering a pragmatist (or at least pragmatic) answer to a transcendental question concerning the very possibility of meaning. He argues – in his own peculiar non-linear way – throughout his late works that the possibility of language and meaning is (non-foundationally, fallibly) grounded in public human practices, or forms of life, within which language is used, that is, practices, or perhaps better, habits of action whose radical contingency and continuous historical development are among their key features. Moreover, Wittgenstein's pragmatist acknowledgment of there being no higher standpoint for us to adopt than the humanly accessible perspectives internal to our language-games and practices (that is, that we cannot reach a 'God's-Eye View,' or that aspiring to do that would be a misunderstanding of the human condition, rather than an attempt to do something that would be meaningful yet contingently beyond capacities) may be regarded as his pragmatic reason for pursuing the 'transcendental' problem concerning the possibility of meaning in the first place. The fact that Wittgenstein's transcendental problems must be taken seriously even within a pragmatist interpretation highlights the fact that the Kantian background of both pragmatism and Wittgensteinian philosophy ought to be acknowledged. As I have suggested, Wittgenstein poses transcendental questions (e.g., 'how is meaning possible?')

and offers pragmatic answers to them (e.g., in terms of ‘certainties-in-action,’ or ‘hinges’). Moreover, it goes very well together with this Kantian-cum-pragmatist approach to resist any strict, essentialistic dichotomy between the ontological structure of the world itself and the conceptual structure we impose on the world through our language-games, and to endorse the moderately constructivist view that the world we live in is to a considerable extent constituted by our categorizing it in terms of our language-use.²⁸

- 40 This Kantian background of pragmatism brings me to my final conclusion. To be a pragmatist, or to be a Wittgensteinian thinker today, is to be continuously reflexively – transcendently, as we may say – concerned with one’s own philosophical perspectives and approaches, not only with their intellectual but more broadly with their ethical integrity. It is to turn one’s self-critical gaze toward one’s own practices of philosophizing, one’s own being-in-the-world, one’s own habits of action, intellectual as well as more concretely practical. In James’s terms, it is to take full responsibility of one’s individual “philosophical temperament” (see James 1907, chapter 1) and to self-critically develop it further, through one’s contextualizing inquiries, hopefully learning to listen to the richness of the human ‘voices’ speaking to us from within the indefinite plurality of language-games that our fellow human beings play with each other and with us.

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NOTES

1. I will occasionally refer to Goodman's interpretation throughout this essay, but I try to look at the relation between Wittgenstein and pragmatism from a slightly different angle (and not to restrict myself to the comparison of Wittgenstein and James). For some pioneering historical work on the relations between Wittgenstein and Peirce, see Bambrough 1981, Gullvåg 1981, Haack 1982, Nubiola 1996, and Crocker 1998. Wittgenstein's relation to James was discussed by commentators already earlier (cf. Fairbanks 1966, Wertz 1972, Baum 1980), but Goodman's interpretation is much more comprehensive and detailed. (See, however, also Ben-Menahem 1998.) On the other hand, some of the more recent interpreters who find connections between Wittgenstein and pragmatism fail to consider Wittgenstein in relation to the historical pragmatist tradition. This is as true about those who read Wittgenstein in relation to deconstruction and postmodernist (Rortyan) 'pragmatism' (see the essays in Nagl & Mouffe (eds.) 2001) as it is about those for whom pragmatism seems to be basically a certain anti-skeptical position within analytic epistemology (Bilgrami 2004), or a view of norms alternative to 'epistemological realism' (Williams 2004, especially 95-6).
2. See Goodman's (2002, especially chapter 2) discussion of Wittgenstein's reception of James's Varieties. On the pragmatic method or pragmatist principle, see, e.g., the various reflections in Pihlström (ed.) 2011.
3. I do think that Putnam's readings of Wittgenstein in relation to Kant and the pragmatist tradition (e.g., in Putnam 1995) are largely on the right track – indeed, Putnam is one of the few thinkers who admit that both Wittgenstein and the pragmatists share a Kantian heritage – and therefore part of what I am going to say is to some extent indebted to Putnam, both philosophically and historically, but I am not going to explicitly rely on his interpretations of Wittgenstein or the pragmatists here. In this essay, space does not allow me to elaborate on the interpretation of Wittgenstein as a (neo-)Kantian thinker engaged in transcendental argumentation. While I share such a picture of Wittgenstein (cf. Pihlström 2003, 2004, 2006), believing it can be pragmatically enriched, its defense is not necessary for the present examination of Wittgenstein's relation to pragmatism. See also Pihlström (ed.) 2006, and see section 5 below.

4. For Price's defense of global expressivism as the framework within which Wittgenstein's linguistic (functional) pluralism makes sense, see especially Price 2011, chapter 10 (cf. also chapter 14). For a "Kantian" (and Wittgensteinian) pragmatist, an interesting further question inspired by Price's work would be whether global expressivism could be understood as a pragmatist version of transcendental idealism within which (only) a pragmatic or empirical realism becomes possible. This paper is not the proper place to examine such an issue further, though. I should note, however, that where I clearly would not follow Price's pragmatism is his strongly anti-metaphysical approach. In my view, the pragmatist should not "escape" metaphysical and ontological questions, should not simply "replace" them with questions about thought and language, and should not embrace "anthropology" instead of a (renewed) metaphysics "in a pragmatist key" (cf. *ibid.*: 315). For an alternative pragmatist conception of metaphysics, see Pihlström 2009; cf. also Pihlström (ed.) 2011.
5. This idea could be spelled out, e.g., in terms of Morton White's holistic pragmatism (e.g., 2002); cf. also Peperzak 1986.
6. This is something I have to some extent tried to do in earlier publications (cf. Pihlström 2003, 2004, 2006, (ed.) 2006). I am not going to repeat those reflections here; fortunately, I hope I do have novel points to add. Moreover, while my more recent investigations of pragmatism (Pihlström 2009, (ed.) 2011, 2013) do not explicitly deal with Wittgenstein, their approach is compatible with a "Wittgensteinianized" pragmatism as well.
7. The key reference here is Daniele Moyal-Sharrock's interpretation, as defended in her monograph on *On Certainty* and her papers on the 'third Wittgenstein': see Moyal-Sharrock 2004, and (ed.) 2004, as well as Moyal-Sharrock & Brenner (eds.) 2007.
8. On Wittgenstein's (late) philosophy as a pragmatist response to a transcendental problem, see also Pihlström 2003, chapter 2. Goodman (2002: 28) also notes that the Wittgensteinian 'we' is 'the 'necessary' or 'transcendental' we of the 'human.' For a more comprehensive treatment of Wittgenstein and the "transcendental we," see Lear 1998. Cf. section 5 below.
9. Another scholar explicitly referring to the 'primacy of practice' as Wittgenstein's view is Anthony Rudd (see his 2007: 153). He even suggests that we might call Wittgenstein's stance 'transcendental pragmatism' (*ibid.*: 158) – also suggested by myself in Pihlström 2003, chapter 2. Rudd's (2007: 146) illuminating discussion of Wittgenstein's Zettel (Wittgenstein 1970: §§ 413–4) – the famous example of the realist and the idealist teaching their children the word 'chair,' with no genuine difference in these teachings that would make any practical difference – could also benefit from an explicit comparison to James's (1907, chapter 2) pragmatic method, which argues for the same conclusion: "if a philosophical difference does not show itself in any way in practice, there is no real point at issue at all" (Rudd 2007: 146).
10. Relevant writings by Peirce and James on beliefs as habits of action can be found in Peirce (1992–98, especially vol. 1 and the classical 1877 essay, "The Fixation of Belief," contained therein) and James (1907), particularly chapter 2. In this paper, I cannot discuss these or other pragmatist classics in any detail.
11. Note, then, that I am not here using the term 'habit' in any technical Peircean logical and/or semiotic sense but more loosely as referring to human habitual practices. This concept is a close relative of the concept of a form of life in Wittgenstein. However, my usage of 'habit' does, I think, retain a link to the views of the founder of pragmatism, given that it is in terms of habits that we have to understand our ability to make any sense at all with our linguistic or other semiotic expressions. Habits are a key to signification – but also to inquiry and belief-fixation, as both Peirce and later Dewey argued.
12. See the essays collected in Hintikka 1996. This is not to say that Hintikka would accept this view ("language-game holism," as it has sometimes been labeled) as a philosophical conception of language, even though he does believe it was Wittgenstein's position. Cf. also Price's (very different) proposal to give "a pragmatic account of the origins of the semantic" (Price 2011: 205).

Goodman (2002: 14-5) speaks about “pragmatic holism” as a Jamesian view that Wittgenstein felt coming “uncomfortably close” to his own position.

13. On the possibility of fallibilist transcendental argumentation, see Westphal 2003. Goodman (2002) in my view makes justice to both aspects of Wittgenstein by both emphasizing that Wittgenstein and James shared a commitment to antifoundationalism (*ibid.*, 5) and duly noting that Wittgenstein, unlike James, maintained a clear distinction between philosophy and science, or philosophical and empirical justification (*ibid.*: 30-1). Another important difference between Wittgenstein and pragmatism is political and cultural: Wittgenstein never shared any of the progressivism of the pragmatists (see *ibid.*: 167 ff.).

14. I am not saying that these concepts are identical. My point is general enough to be made with regard to any or all of them, depending on one’s philosophical (and terminological) preferences.

15. This, of course, is something that has famously been elaborated on by Stanley Cavell (see his 1979). However, Cavell, presumably, would find little added value in comparisons between Wittgenstein and pragmatism. For more comprehensive discussions of Wittgenstein’s relation to skepticism, see McManus 2004.

16. My use of a Heideggerian phrase here is of course deliberate. In Heidegger’s case as much as in Wittgenstein’s, the question of possible links to pragmatism has been discussed (e.g., Okrent 1988) and needs further discussion.

17. Cf., e.g., Putnam’s work on this topic, especially Putnam 2002; see also Pihlström 2005.

18. It is far from clear that Quine can be called a “pragmatist” at all, despite his influence on both Putnam’s and Rorty’s versions of neopragmatism. See Koskinen & Pihlström 2006.

19. I am fully aware that some New Wittgensteinians resist such formulations. See the next section for a brief pragmatic critique of such views.

20. Another possible example of a metaphysical topic receiving a pragmatic-cum-Wittgensteinian treatment is the ‘actionist’ (‘interventionist,’ ‘manipulative’) theory of causation defended by one of Wittgenstein’s distinguished followers, G. H. von Wright (1971, 1974). However, it is unclear whether we can say that von Wright’s views on, say, causation are “metaphysical” at all; he is generally an anti-metaphysical thinker, like so many Wittgensteinians, and he can be said to investigate the concept of causation instead of the metaphysical structure of causation itself. But then, again, this dichotomy between metaphysical structures of reality and our conceptualizations of those structures from within our practices must be called into question by the pragmatist (and, a fortiori, by the Wittgensteinian pragmatist).

21. See Crary & Read 2000, Wallgren 2006, as well as several essays in Pihlström (ed.) 2006.

22. The “Kantian” tradition in interpretations of Wittgenstein goes back at least to Erik Stenius’s seminal study (Stenius 1960).

23. See the discussion of ‘hinges’ and the ‘logically pragmatist’ interpretation of *On Certainty* in section 2 above. The notion of “transcendental pragmatism” was already referred to in that context (cf. Pihlström 2003; Rudd 2007).

24. Note also that the transcendental interpretation is certainly not the only way of making Wittgenstein a philosopher of theses and arguments. Wittgenstein has, of course, been employed in the service of analytic philosophy of language in a distinctively pragmatist manner by Huw Price (2011): his expressivist, minimalist, and functionally pluralist engagement with Wittgenstein, or engagement with semantics from a Wittgensteinian perspective, is certainly not deconstructive in the sense of Rorty’s or the New Wittgensteinians’ projects but genuinely reconstructive (which does not mean I would agree with his use of Wittgenstein: Price is too anti-metaphysical a pragmatist for my taste, as was noted above).

25. Similarly, we might say that James (1907, chapters 3-4) first deconstructs, by employing (his version of) the pragmatic method, several traditional philosophical issues and ideas (e.g., substance, the free will, God, and the dispute between monism and pluralism), and then

reconstructs these issues and the corresponding debates in terms of his pragmatist grounding of metaphysics in ethics. Thus, he does not suggest (deconstructively) that we should simply abandon those issues or the related philosophical concepts; he (reconstructively) suggests that we can find their pragmatic core by using the pragmatic method (cf. Pihlström 2009).

26. D. Z. Phillips's work is, of course, the most widely read – and most controversial – within 'Wittgensteinian' philosophy of religion. For a collection of up-to-date essays, see Phillips and von der Ruhr (eds.) 2005. These discussions rarely connect Wittgenstein, or Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion, with pragmatism; for some reflections in this regard, see Pihlström 2013, especially chapter 3; for an earlier attempt to connect Wittgenstein's philosophy of religion with the pragmatists,' see Pihlström 1996, chapter 5.

27. There is a sense in which James might even be seen as a more thoroughgoing critic of harmful dichotomies than Wittgenstein. Yemina Ben-Menahem touches something important in the following: "James's pragmatism is no less a critique of traditional fixations than is Wittgenstein's. But the philosophical dichotomies Wittgenstein holds fast to, fact and value, internal and external, causes and reasons, are the very dichotomies James is trying to bridge. Thus, while for Wittgenstein the description of language is the description of its grammatical internal relations, for James the internal and the external, the causal and the linguistic, are ultimately inseparable" (Ben-Menahem 1998: 134). Accordingly, while I have argued that Wittgenstein shares with the pragmatists a critical attitude to certain dichotomies taken to be foundational to philosophy – or, perhaps better, that a pragmatist interpreter of Wittgenstein should view Wittgenstein's philosophy in such a manner that those dichotomies are left aside – this is not to say that Wittgenstein and the pragmatists would have rejected all and only the same dichotomies. There are dichotomies that Wittgenstein, unlike the pragmatists (or at least James) holds fast to.

28. Taking this view ontologically seriously might also throw new light on Wittgenstein's (1953, I: §§ 371, 373) well-known claims about 'essence' lying in grammar.

ABSTRACTS

This essay reconsiders Wittgenstein's relation to the pragmatist tradition. I first discuss, from a pragmatist perspective, three key issues of Wittgenstein studies: the distinction – invoked in recent discussions of *On Certainty*, in particular – between *the propositional and the non-propositional* (section 2); the tension between anti-Cartesian *fallibilism* and what has been called *the 'truth in skepticism'* in Wittgenstein (section 3); as well as the relation between *metaphysics and the criticism of metaphysics* in Wittgenstein's philosophy, and Wittgensteinian philosophy more generally (section 4). I then proceed to a more metaphilosophical consideration of yet another problematic dichotomy, the one between *deconstructive (therapeutic) and (re)constructive or systematic, argumentative philosophy* – which, I argue, the pragmatist, together with Wittgenstein, ought to overcome rather than rely on (section 5). After having gone through these open issues in Wittgenstein scholarship at a general level, I briefly apply my considerations to the *philosophy of religion*, which is an important field of inquiry for both Wittgensteinian and pragmatist thinkers (section 6).

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