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Prolegomena to Normative Science

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Preface

A dissertation is the fault of one but the product of many. The bulk of my work has been undertaken while working in three research projects, “Peirce’s Pragmatic Philosophy and Its Applications” funded by the University of Helsinki Funds, “Ethical Grounds of Metaphysics” funded by the Academy of Finland, and “Pragmatic Objectivity” funded by the Helsingin Sanomat Foundation and the University of Helsinki Funds. These three projects and their principal investigators, Prof. Ahti-Veikko Pietarinen, Prof. Sami Pihlström and Dr. Mats Bergman, respectively, have provided invaluable academic – as well as valuable financial – backing for my research.

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Helsinki, September 2013

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Sources

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Introduction

1. The theme of this work

Questions of normativity are among the most vexing in philosophy, and among the philosophical questions that most concern us in our everyday life. What is it to maintain that something is correct or incorrect, right or wrong, good or bad? Is normative opinion (rationally or objectively) constrained in any fashion, or merely the product of the history of ourselves and our societies? What, if anything, can be said to those with whom we find ourselves in deep disagreement over normative questions? Many of these questions are due to our contemporary scientific picture of the world. How does normativity fit into a scientific, philosophically naturalist worldview? Is science itself dependent on norms, and how can those norms be justified in light of its own project and theories?

The five articles that comprise this thesis outline a perspective from which to answer these questions. Two features are common to all of them. Firstly, they are inspired by the tradition of philosophical pragmatism, especially by its origins in Charles S. Peirce's ideas and its outgrowth in contemporary non-representationalism. Secondly, especially when taken together, these articles lay the ground for a scientific approach to norms, a normative science.¹ The first three

¹ The title of this thesis alludes to Kant's *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (1783). There Kant encapsulated the project of *The Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/1787) as the attempt to show the possibility of metaphysics as a science; here it is inquiry into normative questions that is put on the path of science. Analogously to Kant's critique, I argue that inquiry into normative questions cannot rely on mere conceptual analysis or draw from a source that transcends experience. But whereas Kant's reconstruction of metaphysics relied on the idea that metaphysical claims are synthetic *a priori*

articles are mainly critical in nature. The first two concern contemporary pragmatist arguments which attempt to justify a democratic political outlook by drawing from epistemic norms, putting forward a rebuttal of Robert B. Talisse's [1] and Cheryl Misak's [2] arguments that we all are bound by similar epistemic norms. The third article considers a widespread philosophical approach to normativity which maintains that normative principles are valid when they are shared by all agents [3]. It is argued that this constructivist stance – shared by thinkers such as John Rawls, Jürgen Habermas and Christine Korsgaard – faces a dilemma between what I call historicist relativism and conceptual chauvinism, the choice between relying on either our contingent moral agreements or artificial stipulations of key terms.

The last two articles are more constructive in nature. The fourth article argues, both in a historical and a systematic vein, that contemporary non-representationalism fits the notion of truth and realism developed by the classical pragmatists, especially Peirce, and that this combination can be exploited to reconceptualize normative realism [4]. Finally, the fifth article offers a reconsideration of philosophical naturalism, and attempts to show that the notion of normative science developed can be fitted to a broadly speaking naturalist framework [5]. The connections between the different arguments developed in these papers are not always evident. The purpose of this introduction is to systematically put together different themes from the five articles and to introduce their context in some of the most central contemporary philosophical debates.

2. Cognitivism and non-cognitivism

With their typical linguistic and analytic bent, contemporary philosophers working on issues of normativity have concentrated on their linguistic expressions: normative claims (or judgments). To find

and due to the operation of our faculty of understanding, here the appeal and indeed inevitability of certain normative opinions is understood to be *a posteriori*, due to the influence of an external reality.

out what it is to be right or wrong, good or bad, correct or incorrect, and so forth, we set out to find out what we mean by saying that something is so. Indeed the whole of *meta-ethics* has been considered the study of normative (or more narrowly moral) language. Accordingly, forms of normative realism (such as *moral* realism) have standardly been conceived as the combination of two theses. The first is the *cognitivist* semantic thesis: it maintains that normative claims are fact-stating, or describe the ways things are. The second thesis is ontological: it holds that things are as described by (some) normative judgments. As a third component, many moral realists have insisted that the facts in question are independent of what we think, believe, desire and so on, while others have been content to formulate “realist” views where the facts in question are dependent on what we do or would think or desire under certain (counterfactual) conditions.

The cognitivist semantic thesis faces two major challenges. The first is the problem of accounting for the facts our normative claims are “about”; the second is giving a suitable account of moral motivation, or the connection between normative claims and the motivation to act. The source of the first issue – and the starting point of the contemporary meta-ethical debate – can be traced back to G. E. Moore’s (1903) famous Open Question Argument. This argument challenges the cognitivists to make good sense of what sort of properties normative terms such as “good” and “right” predicate. In Moore’s view, such predicates cannot be analysed in other terms, and moral judgments are thus *sui generis*. Specifically, as normative notions cannot be analysed in any *non*-normative terms whatsoever, Moore’s position came to be viewed as the strong defence of moral non-naturalism.

Following the lines set by Moore, some contemporary cognitivists have proposed forms of non-naturalism about normative “facts” (Shafer-Landau 2003). But this view contradicts philosophical naturalism, which maintains that all of reality is (or at least could be) studied by science. This results in countless difficulties with making sense of normative claims and properties – to name a few, questions about what would count as evidence for a normative claim, how there can be properties that appear to have no causal consequences at all, and how two things with the same natural properties seem to (also)

have the same normative properties.² The prospects of non-naturalism have commonly been considered dim, and cognitivists have mostly attempted to provide naturalist accounts of normative predicates.

The first strategy of doing so is what we could call *analytic* naturalism. It maintains that it simply does not follow, from the fact that competent speakers may wonder whether some explication of a term is correct, that the explication is mistaken, let alone that the term cannot be analysed (Smith 1995; 2004; Pettit and Jackson 1995; Jackson 1998). By the second strategy, it is no wonder that attempts at analyses of normative terms will result in open questions, because reference of such terms is not fixed by their conceptual content (Boyd 1988). Instead, following Saul Kripke's (1980) and Hilary Putnam's (1985) views of the reference of natural kind terms, this *synthetic* naturalist account holds that a moral term such as "right" refers to some natural property even if competent speakers are not aware of this; the analogy is to the way in which competent speakers for a long time were unaware that "water" refers to H₂O. Both strategies thus admit the motivating premise of the Open Question Argument, the intuition that open questions about normative terms are bound to arise, but insist that this do not imply that the cognitivist project is doomed.

² Shafer-Landau (2003), one of the few contemporary champions of meta-ethical non-naturalism, has attempted to address these concerns. He maintains that normative properties are constituted by, or supervene on, descriptive properties, which are the causally efficacious properties studied by the (social and natural) sciences, and that our knowledge of such normative properties is based on a number of self-evident truths about them which we may track by reliable methods of moral thought. But even if the sort of supervenience suggested by Shafer-Landau were a fruitful approach to normative properties, we still seem to be no further ahead in grasping what those properties are supposed to be "like". The second claim is even more tenuous: reliance on ultimately self-evident (or self-justifying) moral beliefs and "reliable" methods of arriving at such beliefs looks simply implausible when contrasted with entrenched (first-order) disagreements about morality and moral procedure.

Neither of these two strategies is without problems. Their most formidable difficulty, in my view, is due to the second central challenge to cognitivism, which is to explain the role that normative claims and thought plays in our agency – a role which appears to differ in kind from that of non-normative claims and thought. A central phenomenon concerning normative judgments is their *practicality*, their action-guiding force. In contemporary debates, this phenomenon is often discussed in terms of *moral motivation*: if someone judges that it is right, or good, to perform some action, he is (at least usually) motivated to perform that action (Smith 2004, ch. 15; Blackburn 1998, 59–68). Such a constant connection between normative judgment and motivation seems to be a central feature of the particular “oughtness” that comes with normative judgment.³ In the jargon of these debates, motivational judgment internalists, who have argued that the connection between normative judgment and motivation is a necessary one, have an upper hand in the debate with the respective externalist view, which maintains that this connection is at bottom contingent and coincidental.

Non-naturalists and synthetic naturalists have not managed to account for the strong connection between normative judgments and motivation: they have traditionally been externalists (Shafer-Landau 2003; Boyd 1988).⁴ Naturalists of the analytic sort have attempted to

³ To be more precise, the connection between moral judgment and motivation has caused problems for the cognitivist view when coupled with the so-called Humean theory of motivation, which maintains that beliefs as such are not sufficient for motivation, but require the presence of other mental states or dispositions, commonly called desires. The Humean account has considerable appeal: it seems plausible that two agents may be quite differently motivated despite sharing the exact same beliefs.

⁴ Intuitions about a strong connection between moral judgment and motivation are, I think, the reason why the following counterexample due to Terrence Horgan and Mark Timmons (Timmons 1990; Horgan and Timmons 1992a; 1992b) has often been taken to cast the synthetic naturalist approach into serious doubt. Assume that our use of the concept “right” is causally regulated by the natural property *N*, and that on Moral Twin Earth, the inhabitants’ use of the concept “right” is causally regulated by the natural property, *M*. If the synthetic naturalist view were correct, Horgan and

accommodate internalist intuitions. A common approach has been to maintain that normative judgments express beliefs *about* motivation.⁵ According to the simplest version of this view, speaker subjectivism, normative claims are the speaker's descriptions of his or her own desires: to say that murder is wrong is for the speaker to say that he or she does not desire to murder (see Dreier 1990). However, as it does not appear plausible that normative claims are such simple reports of actual desires but, rather, claims concerning what it would be (in some manner) *correct* to desire, cognitivists have offered more refined accounts. Perhaps the most plausible such account is Michael Smith's (1995; 2004) view that our claims about what it is right for us to do (under some circumstances) are claims about what fully rational agents would converge to desire us to do (in those circumstances). But it remains unclear whether we can give any unequivocally *naturalist* content to the (ideal) circumstances of full rationality, or whether the conceptual buck is simply being pushed back by such an account.

Timmons point out, we and the twin-earthlings, when calling actions "right", are talking about *different* things, as is the case in Putnam's (1985) famous "Twin Earth" example. But according to Horgan and Timmons, in the "Moral Twin Earth" scenario, we *do* think that there is a genuine disagreement about what is right (cf. van Roojen 2006, 168). In my view, these intuitions hold only when the twin-earthlings are quite consistently *motivated* to do what they claim is right (as the thought example stipulates): if this occurred only occasionally, the intuition that we disagree with them would likely evaporate. The "Moral Twin Earth" scenario is really just a rerun of R. M. Hare's (1952) famous "missionaries and cannibals" argument. Hare argues that, faced with an unknown language, we would not translate words used to refer to things we commonly consider good, right, and so on, with our normative vocabulary. Rather, we would reserve normative vocabulary for terms that appear to play the relevant action-guiding role for the speakers.

⁵ This approach thus attempts to secure a *conceptual* (and *hence* necessary) connection between normative claims and motivation. Accounts of this sort in which the import of a central term is made at least in part dependent on the responses of agents are often called *response-dependent* views about their meaning (Pettit 1995; Jackson 1998).

Indeed, the more plausible an account the cognitivists offer of the properties and facts that normative terms and claims refer to, the less plausible it seems that such properties and facts can be studied within a naturalist framework or made sense of in any unequivocally descriptive terms, fuelling scepticism about the normative. The non-cognitivist alternative avoids these difficulties with a simple and elegant response. It holds that moral (or more broadly normative) statements do not express beliefs but, rather, non-cognitive states such as emotions and desires. It maintains that the cognitivist project is futile as normative claims do not describe the world. Instead, these claims express such functional states that play the relevant practical role of setting the ends or purposes of action; thus non-cognitivism has no difficulties with accounting for the internalist intuitions. These features, among others, have made the non-cognitivist view attractive to many in contemporary meta-ethics.

3. Expressivism and non-representationalism

Non-cognitivism will however need to deal with a set of issues of its own. Traditional non-cognitivism as proposed by Stevenson (1944) and Ayer (1952) held that, as expressions of non-cognitive states, normative claims or statements – in contrast to non-normative ones – have no truth-values. But this appears not to do justice to several realist-seeming features of moral thought and talk. Firstly, it appears that moral claims, unlike, say, commands or cheers, are truth-apt. Secondly, it seems that moral claims, unlike questions or boos incur ontological commitments. Thirdly, moral claims do not appear to express non-cognitive states in embedded contexts, such as “she believes that murder is wrong” or “if murder is wrong, stealing is wrong”. As a variant of this last issue, the non-cognitivist view was met by a criticism by Peter Geach (1965) and John Searle (1962), who argued, on Fregean grounds, that the non-cognitivist has no plausible account of how statements expressing non-cognitive attitudes enter into logical relations such as those involved in deductive inferences. For a while such difficulties, especially the Frege-Geach-Searle objection, were held to be a decisive refutation of non-cognitivism.

Simon Blackburn's (1998) quasi-realist approach sets out to make sense of the realist-seeming features of normative claims, non-cognitivistically understood. Rather than attempting to give an account of the conceptual content of "true", the deflationary view on truth concentrates on the use and function of the truth predicate. Applied to normative language, expressivists argue that "true" in "it is true that murder is wrong" adds nothing semantically robust to the claim, "murder is wrong". By the same token, claims such as "*it is a fact that* murder is wrong" incur no difficulties to the expressivist view, as the italicized words add nothing ontologically robust to the initial claim (that murder is wrong).

Huw Price (1997; 2007; 2011b) picks up the expressivist's deflationary attitude towards key semantic terms and argues that this approach is to be globalized. In Price's non-representationalist view, there is no interesting philosophical theory to be given about truth or reference, or "aboutness" in a semantic sense, for any domain of language. The result is a pluralistic picture of the function of language, where different assertoric practices are taken to incur differing but equally "deflated" ontological commitments. Instead of *object naturalism*, the attempt to give an account of the reference of a language and address the resulting ontological questions over the existence of the referents, the philosophical study of language is rather to take the form of *subject naturalism*, an (anthropological) inquiry into its function which does not assume its ontological commitments. An important consequence of this view – central to the argument developed in this thesis – is that the global expressivist view does without any contrast with between normative and non-normative statements (thoughts, beliefs) in representationalist (semantic or ontological) terms. The differences between these sort of thoughts or commitments are functional rather than representational by nature.

The ontological commitments of the meta-language in which this inquiry is conducted – that of science, or more specifically the sort of (philosophically inclined) anthropology Price suggests – should not be taken to be more than perspectival, something that appears privileged from its own point of view. While for those already working in a scientific framework, scientific ontological commitments

appear to have a privilege over the commitments made in other, non-scientific discourses, there is no non-circular justification of why the ontological commitments of *science* should be taken as primary, or understand all first-order ontological commitment as scientific ontological commitment (Price 2007). This is Price's anti-metaphysical stance: there is no place for a specifically metaphysical inquiry over and above the "deflated" ontological commitments made in our assertoric practice.⁶

Even when globalized, however, the deflationary approach does not immediately address the third issue (see Dreier 1996). As of yet there is no generally accepted response to the Frege-Geach problem. Earlier expressivist responses have drawn from the idea that inconsistent normative claims express incompatible *attitudes* of, say, approval and disapproval (Blackburn 1988). This however has the awkward implication of indefinitely expanding the number of differing relations of (in)compatibility between different claims and attitudes. At the same time, expressivist views have become more encompassing. In Allan Gibbard's (1990; 2003) view, non-normative

⁶ Moreover, in [4] I argue at some length that, although hypothetical realism is an ontological tenet, it is compatible with non-representationalism. Price (1997) follows Carnap (1950) in arguing that there is no room for ontological questions external to a theory (questions about whether things "really are" as that theory has them from a perspective "outside" of that theory) but only "pragmatic" external questions of the choice of linguistic framework. Even if Quine's (1953) criticism of the analytic-synthetic distinction blurs the distinction between "pragmatic" and (empirical) internal questions, it does not leave room for *external* ontological questions. Instead, Price (2007) argues for what we could call a Quinean monistic attitude towards existence combined with a Carnapian pluralism about linguistic function: a single existential quantifier is applied in a variety of discourses which have their differing linguistic uses and purposes. My proposal here aligns with this picture: it resists the idea of (non-pragmatic) external questions and can well incorporate a "deflationary" attitude towards existential quantification. But taking advantage of the notion of pluralism of use and function, it also emphasizes the difference between a (linguistic) practice in which meeting an external standard is considered a norm, and other practices where no such norm is present.

statements are expressions of belief-like states instead of descriptions of the world. But despite its initial appeal, Gibbard's approach still does not yet yield us an account of how a normative claim and its negation are (logically) inconsistent (Unwin 1999; 2001). Mark Schroeder's (2008) insight is to conceive of normative claims as expressing a single attitude towards *contents* which in turn may be compatible or incompatible. But this approach, as Schroeder then shows, will lead to insurmountable difficulties when applied to inferences mixing normative and non-normative premises (or conclusions).⁷

Recent research gives some good reason for optimism about expressivism's prospects, however. In accordance with the initial phrasing of the non-cognitivist view – that normative claims express attitudes – most extant solutions to the Frege-Geach problem maintain that the expressivist's logic must be a logic of attitudes. But the expressivist may instead point out that his basic position about the function of normative claims (as a thesis in its *pragmatics*) may turn out compatible with a variety of accounts of the semantics of such claims; in particular, it may be argued that there is no need to view the *semantic values* of such claims simply in terms of the attitudes they express. If this line of argument is workable the expressivist view may be supplemented, for example, by a suitably modified deontic logic, following Gibbard's initial ideas (see Yalcin 2012; Charlow *forthcoming*).

Another, more radical alternative to escape the clutches of the Frege-Geach-Searle objection is to note that the proposed solutions all set out with the received view that conceptual and propositional *contents* enter into logical relations such as that of deductive validity, and (certain) mental states are attitudes towards such contents. But rather than starting out with this picture of content, the global expressivist could take his reversal of the traditional picture to cut deeper. The most prominent suggestion along these lines is Robert Brandom's (1994; 2000) inferentialist semantics. According to Brandom, logical language makes explicit material inferential relations,

⁷ In distinction to the *global* expressivist view that will be explored below, I will, in [4], call Gibbard's and Schroeder's attitudes-towards-contents view *regional* expressivism.

rather than vice versa. From this perspective, the traditional embedding problem need not even arise. The inferences which the objection challenges the expressivist to explain – and which everyone thinks must be valid – depend on material inferential relations; the whole problem appears only when we take an inference already articulated with the aid of logical vocabulary and *then* attempt to find the suitable contents (and attitudes) that would secure deductive validity.

4. Objectivity and relativism

The global expressivist position has, in my view, good prospects of tackling the technical issues faced by traditional non-cognitivism. The most central difficulty of the expressivist picture is rather its unsettling implication that there is nothing to back our views beyond the preferences we merely happen to have – a form of *relativism* that this position appears to result in. Briefly put, the problem is this. Proponents of expressivism have themselves drawn attention to the demand of intersubjective agreement in many of our discourses (Price 1998; 2003; Gibbard 2003, ch. 4; see Brandom 2000, ch. 6). In particular, debates over normative issues count among them: differences in moral opinion certainly invite disagreement to be resolved. Moreover, we commonly think that at least some moral facts persist independently of the moral opinions we, our groups and societies happen to have. However, if our preferences or approvals and disapprovals – the stances that our normative claims express – are simply the products of the contingent development of ourselves and our societies, what are our hopes of attaining a lasting agreement over normative opinion?

Here it is needful to be more precise about the central notions at hand. Consider objectivity first. An aspect of the concept of truth as used in our assertoric practices that Price (1998; 2003) has drawn attention to is its function as a “convenient friction”. The response “that’s not true” points towards a disagreement to be resolved at least in many of our discourses. This “friction” between speakers points, first, towards a *standard beyond* one’s opinion: it draws a distinction

between how things are and how the speaker thinks they are. Second, conversational friction demands of others to *share* our opinion, or *intersubjectivity*. Expressivists such as Price (2003; 2011a) have pointed out that *why* disagreement matters in many of our assertoric practices is because we aim to coordinate the dispositions and commitments that are put forward in claims made in those practices.⁸

Relativism is a broad notion; for the purposes of this discussion, it is useful to distinguish at least three different variants. A first variant might be called *conceptual* relativism. It maintains that truth is conceptually or indexically tied up to the opinion of some individual or group of individuals: to call some claim true is to say that the claim is believed by the speaker, his group, his culture, and so forth. Such relativism has not gained much popularity, but it has an analogue in speaker subjectivism, the meta-ethical position which maintains that usage of key normative terms is pegged to the speaker's own attitudes or desires. To be sure, the expressivist position is not a form of conceptual relativism: it precisely contests the view that normative claims or terms refer to the conative states of those who make such claims (cf. Horgan and Timmons 2006). A second variant we might call *factual* relativism, which argues that the world itself, or the "facts", are different for different individuals (groups, cultures) and hence

⁸ Similarly, Brandom has emphasized that assertions are subject to two kinds of normative assessment: aside the assessment of whether an assertion was correct in light of how the speaker takes things to be and whether he has good reasons for doing so, another dimension of assessment concerns "whether the assertion is correct in the sense of being true, in the sense that things are as it claims they are" (2000, 187). Brandom takes it to be a "basic criterion of adequacy of a semantic theory that it explain this [latter] dimension of normative assessment" (2000, 187) and accordingly, he has gone to great lengths to show that his account of assertion as a move in a game of giving and asking for reasons incorporates this normative status. This account does not entail that some discourse would be privileged in such an assessment; instead, the normative status is operative in any point of view of such assessment: "What is shared by all discursive perspectives is *that* there is a difference between what is objectively correct in the way of concept application and what is merely taken to be so, not *what* it is – the structure, not the content" (1994, 600).

truth, too, is relative. But again, expressivism hardly results in this form of relativism. The expressivist view of normative language does not imply that any normative view is as good as any other: this would amount to a normative stance of its own right, and arguably a very strange one at that (cf. Blackburn 1998, 296).

A third and far more interesting form of relativism is the *historicist* position advanced by Richard Rorty. Global expressivism is akin to Rorty's (1979; 1982) *anti-representationalism*, which abandons the idea that there is something like "the world" which would constrain our opinion in a rational fashion.⁹ All that remains, in Rorty's "Darwinian" story, are the *causal* connections that we, including our opinions, have with "facts". Following Donald Davidson, Rorty attempts to show that the idea of the world, and of truth as correspondence with the world, have fuelled both realism and relativism alike. The upshot, Rorty argues, is that there is no hope for truth and objectivity in a sense that would exceed the approval of one's peers. There is no privileged language game or, in Rorty's terms, "final vocabulary" – there is only the game that prevails.

For Rorty's unabashedly ethnocentrist "Western liberal intellectual", there is "nothing to be said about either truth or rationality apart from descriptions of the familiar procedures of justification which a given society – *ours* – uses in one or another area of inquiry" (2010, 229), admitting as he does that "we must, in practice, privilege our own group, even though there can be no non-circular justification for doing so" (2010, 335). In Rorty's slogan, intersubjective agreement should be grounded in "solidarity" rather than (fact-based) "objectivity". While we may hope to bring others under the same fold, our success is a sheer historical fact. Rorty does not think that his view amounts to a form of relativism deserving of the name. But as neither of the two other variants of relativism just

⁹ In distinction to Rorty's anti-representationalist position, Price takes seriously Paul Boghossian's (1990) argument that we cannot coherently formulate an irrealist view of semantic terms, and takes care not to overstep his subject naturalist position. Instead of saying that our statements do *not* represent or our terms do *not* refer, he emphasizes that the whole question does not appear in the subject naturalist framework as he conceives of it.

listed have received much serious support, it is Rorty's historicism that can seriously be advanced as a philosophically interesting relativist position.

It is this historicist form of relativism that expressivism risks collapsing into. The expressivist's own view of assertoric practices, as we saw, entails that many of them entail a demand of intersubjective agreement. Again, how is any lasting agreement to be achieved, if there is nothing beyond our contingent views to settle our common opinion? Moreover, in the global expressivist view, this is the case with *non*-normative opinion as well.¹⁰ Avoiding such implications of has been a central motivation of *realist* views, which attempt to show that our opinions are answerable to something beyond the views of any possible group of individuals. But before turning to the realist solution advanced in this thesis, a consideration of a less workable alternative is in order.

5. Constructivism and transcendental arguments

There is a venerable, Kantian tradition that stands on the borderline of meta-ethics and normative ethical theory. It maintains that normative claims or judgments, while not factual or attempting to represent things as they are by their nature, can however be *valid*.¹¹

¹⁰ A particular issue of interest concerns the global expressivist's own view of language. Subject naturalism as presented by Price is the study of language from an anthropological perspective. Presumably, it does not equal global expressivism: competing subject naturalist accounts may offer a differing picture of the function of language. Indeed, some of these competing views might even validate object naturalism. In [5], I argue that, without recourse to some normative notions to back his specific subject naturalist account, Price appears to face a choice between an internal realism (based on his particular subject naturalist account) and simply assuming a certain ontology of language-users as primary.

¹¹ While this discussion concerns constructivism as a position in ethical theory, compassing both meta-ethical theory and normative ethics, its purview need not be limited to normative discourse, especially if there is no contrasting notion of *factual* truth on the table. Although Habermas has later

This validity is understood as being due to an intersubjective agreement or *consensus* among (human) agents: valid claims are such that we all agree or are bound to agree on, under circumstances to be specified.¹² This position I will call *constructivism*. We could say that the cognitivist's view is *conceptual*, retaining the traditional representationalist picture, while the constructivist supplies a *critical* account of what the validity of a (normative) claim amounts to.

Constructivists have advanced somewhat differing lines of argument to show that there are normative principles in this manner shared by all agents.¹³ Christine Korsgaard (2008; 2009) argues that the Kantian hypothetical and categorical imperatives are the constitutive, normative principles of agency, the principles "that we must be at least trying to follow if we are to count as acting at all" (2009, 45). Korsgaard's moral constructivism parallels John Rawls's *political* constructivism. In *A Theory of Justice* (1999 [1971]), Rawls

distinguished factual truth and normative validity, his earlier position was of this wider sort: he proposed an epistemic account of truth (along constructivist lines) of both non-normative and normative claims. Kant's own position has a certain affinity to such "global" constructivism: while non-normative (or descriptive) claims represent facts, the objectivity of such claims is grounded *a priori* in our joint faculty of understanding. In turn, in line with the global non-representationalist view, the pragmatist position here developed does not assume that there is a robust notion of factual truth in terms of correspondence readily available. However, the pragmatist, as I will presently argue, does not support a constructivist notion of validity nor an epistemic notion of truth by which truth is ideal justification or warrant.

¹² Common to these views is the notion that valid views are such that would be endorsed by everyone under conditions of freedom. Habermas's view of argumentative speech nicely captures this stance: as a process of communication, it presupposes universal and equal rights of participation in the absence of "all external or internal coercion other than the force of the better argument" (1990, 89).

¹³ These principles are usually considered to be norms concerning specific norms. Kant's categorical imperative could be viewed as exactly such a norm concerning the *validity* of norms: it is the norm of acting out of such specific norms that one can will to be universal laws. From the constructivist perspective, the imperative would itself considered valid as it is shared by all agents due to their common practical reason.

argued that his democratic principles would be agreed upon by all citizens in the “original position”, behind the “veil of ignorance” that hides many of their particular features, showing these principles to be thus valid. In *Political Liberalism* (1996) and other later writings, Rawls held that despite differing “comprehensive doctrines” concerning normative issues, an actual “overlapping consensus” about democratic principles can be reached by citizens on the political level. Jürgen Habermas’s (1990; 2003) famous argument for democracy takes a different direction: he maintains that communication itself presupposes democratic principles, shared by all participants of a communicative discourse.

Perhaps, then, constructivist arguments could be deployed to tackle the problem with historicism: to show that certain normative principles are not merely contingent but shared by all, at least under some ideal circumstances. Conventionally, of course, constructivists themselves have understood their view as a *third* alternative in meta-ethics and ethical theory (Rawls 1996, 91–99; Korsgaard 2008, ch. 10). But as constructivism agrees with the expressivist in that normative claims are not to be understood as representing some believer-independent “facts”, there is nothing in principle that would prevent the expressivist from using its argumentative resources. The difference with the cognitivist view is more salient. While the cognitivist has attempted to formulate the conceptual content of normative claims (and predicates) – an account of the sort of facts that would make a normative claim *true* – the constructivist attempts to spell out the criteria in light of which a normative claim would be considered *valid*.¹⁴

¹⁴ However, the cognitivist’s account of the conceptual content may coincide with the constructivist’s criterial account. As a central example, Michael Smith’s cognitivist position (already discussed above) is the conceptual analogue of Korsgaard’s criterial stance. In Smith’s view, the conceptual content of a normative term such as “right” is to be explicated in terms of what everyone would desire to do under circumstances of full rationality; for Korsgaard, valid moral norms are such that we would agree upon if we were practically rational.

As I argue at length in [3], the constructivist position however faces a dilemma prone to dim its prospects. To avoid the historicist version of relativism, it must resort to artificially restrictive conceptual stipulations. Consider Korsgaard's view, by which the Kantian principles of practical reason – the hypothetical and categorical imperatives – are constitutive of action and agency. This is the case because *actions* are considered to be such actings, and agents such actors, that purport to follow these principles. The validity of these principles then relies on how we have defined these key terms. But what of those who do not care about being “agents” by the definition given? Similarly, it appears that Rawls's liberal democratic principles are supported by all parties (in the original position) simply because the relevant parties are exactly those who agree on the democratic principles. This problematic stance I will call *conceptual chauvinism*: it is for us to take into account, by way of suitable definitions of key terms, only those who are relevantly similar. Consensus is achieved by narrowing the scope of the parties whose opinions matter. The constructivist might of course simply point out that wide-reaching agreement over some principles actually exists; indeed, Rawls's later stance on validating democratic principles comes close to such a view. But this alternative leads back to historicist relativism: such agreement simply happens to be the case.

This dilemma can be put in specifically Kantian terms. The constructivist notion of validity is that of the Kantian *synthetic a priori*. The attempt is to show that it is not a mere historical fact *a posteriori* that some normative principles are not agreed upon as a mere historical fact *a posteriori* but, rather, that they receive *a priori* support. But the the constructivists have accomplished to show this merely by defining key terms in ways that lead to the desired conclusion. Perhaps, say, all agents attempt to follow a set of principles because that is what it means to be an agent. But such an agreement is then founded on an *analytic a priori* truth. The constructivist has not managed to show that agreement on some normative principles is not merely contingent but, rather, inevitable – *without* relying on such conceptual stipulation.

Centrally, this dilemma calls into question the constructivist's notion of *validity itself*. Consider the case of Habermas's

transcendental argument for democratic principles. While Rawls and Korsgaard aim to defend a set of principles *as* valid, Habermas (1990; 2003) deploys a transcendental argument to show that the notion of validity itself implies the adoption of democratic principles, such as his principle of discourse ethics. By this argument, participating in communicative interaction presupposes that one aims to derive a shared opinion with others involved by way of reasoning and argumentation. However, again, the success of this argument relies on the contention that this is what it *means* to partake in such a communicative interaction. What of those who have no interest in convincing others, or rest content with the agreement of a small group of peers – those who do not even wish to “communicate” in Habermas’s terms? The aim of deriving a shared opinion that underlies the constructivist notion of validity is not itself shared by everyone – at least unless the scope of “everyone” is not artificially limited. It is in this vein that the constructivist line of argument begins to undermine its own notion of validity: concrete examples show that even this notion is not itself shared across all inquirers or agents.

6. Pragmatism and the aim of inquiry

The proposal explored here is that a much more workable solution to the problem of historicism is to be found in pragmatism. Philosophical perspectives already explored in the foregoing could well be called pragmatic or pragmatist. One is the expressivist view that our assertions express functional states or dispositions which in turn have consequences in our conduct. Another is the way in which views on central philosophical notions – such as that of objectivity – have been articulated by drawing from the features of our assertoric practices. The particular notion of pragmatism that I intend to advance, however, is its more traditional version, a distinctive approach to *truth* in terms of the *aim of inquiry*. In [3] and especially [4] I argue that this pragmatist perspective – as developed by Charles S. Peirce in particular – can be used to complement the expressivist position in a way that enables us to solve the problem with relativism:

it allows us to develop a notion of realism that goes along with expressivism.

In the contemporary philosophical debate over truth, there are two main contenders: the correspondence theory and a variety of deflationary or minimalist accounts. The former maintains that truth is a fit between a truth-bearer (idea, proposition, belief) and a truth-making reality. This account is often presented as an intuitively plausible *analysis* of the predicate “true”. Instead of setting about to uncover the meaning of truth, the deflationary view attempts to give an account of the *use* of the truth predicate in our assertoric practices, an account that the deflationist argues is exhaustive of the predicate itself (Horwich 1990). A somewhat less popular third alternative is a variety of epistemic accounts of truth, which attempt to analyse the concept of truth in terms of epistemic notions such as justification, warrant and belief.

The pragmatist perspective on truth should not be simply identified with any of these alternatives; rather, it amounts to an independent approach. Traditionally pragmatists have viewed the correspondence account critically by raising the suspicion that “correspondence” will, in practice, either turn out to be meaningless or mean too many things to be helpful as an account of what it is for a claim or thought to be “true”. However, it would be a mistake to think that the pragmatists attempted to offer a competing analysis, or otherwise participated in the analytic project.¹⁵ In turn, drawing from notions such as *use* and *practices* has led many to assimilate the deflationary position with the pragmatist one. But while the classical pragmatists would likely have no objections to the deflationary accounts of the use of the truth-predicate, they would not agree with the deflationist that such an account leaves no important

¹⁵ James’s (1907; 1909) elucidations of truth in terms of what would be useful to believe have been used to ridicule the pragmatist position, as if James had aspired to uncover the conceptual content of the truth-predicate. The starting point of such reception of James is in Russell’s harsh criticism (see e.g. Russell 1966 [1910]). In part, James himself is to be blamed for the confusion. For some reason, he decided to title his 1909 collection of articles on the topic *The Meaning of Truth*.

philosophical work on truth undone. From their point of view, the most interesting questions about truth are those concerning its relation to other concepts and practices, especially inquiry and belief (see Misak 2000, 57–66; Misak 2007).

Indeed, rather than focusing on the conceptual content or the use of the truth predicate, the pragmatists approached truth in terms of the sort of *beliefs* that we should have. In James's dictum, truth is just the "good in the way of belief". The pragmatist perspective on truth is in one sense deeply epistemic: its notion of truth is indistinguishable from the notion of inquiry: truth is the *aim* of inquiry or belief (cf. Rydenfelt 2009). During the past decades, the pragmatist perspective has been sometimes assimilated to the epistemic conception of truth largely due to the influence of Hilary Putnam (1981; 1990). Unlike with many contemporary epistemic accounts, however, the pragmatist does not maintain that the notion of truth can be analysed in terms of any particular aim of inquiry.¹⁶

Importantly – as I argue in detail in [4] – the perspective on truth as the aim of inquiry entails that the pragmatist is not wedded to the standard representationalist picture. Instead of attempting to explicate what it means for our thoughts or claims to match an independent reality, the pragmatist entertains no such assumption of correspondence. Truth is rather conceived of along *criteria* lines. As I will now proceed to suggest, the pragmatist account ultimately does lead to a particular view of truth that entails realist assumptions: the account of truth codified in Peirce's *scientific method*. But this is not to be taken as a reversal to the idea that our claims or thoughts

¹⁶ Because of Putnam's one-time proposal of such a view, pragmatists are often considered to have advanced an epistemic account of truth in terms of idealized justification. But the story of the development of Putnam's views and his reception of the classics of pragmatism is famously complex. In the 1980s Putnam advanced the view that truth is to be identified with idealized justification (e.g. Putnam 1981; 1990, 41, 114–5). Later, however, he criticized the classical pragmatists for a suggestion along these lines and argued that truth cannot be *defined* in terms of verification (Putnam 1995, 11). However, it would be a mistake to think that the classical pragmatists attempted to define truth in terms of (or identify truth with) any epistemic notions.

“represent” an independent reality. For the pragmatist, realism does not simply fall out of a representationalist picture; it is instead the outcome of a substantial development of the aim of inquiry.

7. The scientific method and hypothetical realism

The founding pragmatist text on truth is Peirce’s classic piece, “The Fixation of Belief” (1877); it is also the key pragmatist source for the argument of all of the five articles included in this thesis. Peirce’s starting point is the pragmatist notion of *inquiry* as the move from the unsettling state of doubt to the settlement of opinion, or belief.¹⁷ “Fixation” then discusses four aims of inquiry, or methods of settling opinion, in effect four different notions of truth from the pragmatist perspective. The first of the methods is tenacity, the steadfast clinging to one’s opinion. However, under the influence of what Peirce calls the social impulse, this method is bound to fail. The disagreement of others begins to matter, and the question becomes how to fix beliefs for *everyone*.

The three latter methods Peirce discusses are ones attempting to reach such a shared opinion across believers. By the method of authority, a power such as that of the state forces a single opinion upon everyone, by brute force if required. However, a “wider sort of social feeling” will show that the opinions dictated by the authority are mostly arbitrary (Peirce 1877, 118). The third, a *priori* method

¹⁷ Peirce points out that we might think this is not enough but insist that “we seek, not merely an opinion, but a true opinion”. However, this “fancy” is immediately dispelled: “we think each one of our beliefs to be true, and, indeed, it is mere tautology to say so” (1877, 115). This remark can be taken as anticipating the deflationary account of truth (cf. Short 2007, 332–3). The “tautology” Peirce would have in mind would be that to assert or to believe that p is to assert or believe that p is true simply because this is how “true” operates as a linguistic or grammatical device. This operation of the truth predicate as a *linguistic device* has no implications on what the aim of inquiry is or should be. As I argue at length especially in [3], these two perspectives on truth, although mutually compatible in the pragmatist view, are to be kept distinct.

attempts to rectify this problem by demanding that opinion is to be settled, under conditions of liberty, by what is agreeable to joint human reason. However, this method “makes of inquiry something similar to the development of taste; but taste, unfortunately, is always more or less a matter of fashion” (1877, 119). It is required to develop a method which does not make our belief dependent of our subjective opinions and tastes altogether, “by which our beliefs may be determined by nothing human, but by some external permanency” (1877, 120). This method is the scientific one. Truth, from its point of view, is the opinion which accords with a reality independent of our opinions of it. The hypothesis that underlies the scientific method is that there is an independent reality which “affects, or might affect, every man” (1877, 120). This assumption of *hypothetical realism*, as I will call it, finally makes intelligible the attainment of a single answer to any question across inquirers.

Peirce’s discussion of the different methods reflects our lessons so far. The move from tenacity to the notion of truth as *public* incorporates the aspects of objectivity that expressivists such as Price have later reflected upon. Tenacity turns out to be untenable, as the “social impulse” points to a standard beyond one’s own opinion and demands that opinion is to be shared by inquirers. The three latter methods attempt to settle such a shared opinion by offering criteria by which opinion is to be fixed for all. The affinities between the constructivist view and the third, *a priori* method are evident. This method relies on the notion of a node of consensus common to all inquirers, such as a common human reason. But eventually this method is not sustainable: it leads to no lasting results, which is the problem of historicist relativism.

The scientific method solves this problem by rendering that our opinions answerable to an independent reality. However, the account of truth entailed in the scientific method is not a naïve correspondence view insisting that we should somehow be able to compare our beliefs with reality. Neither is it an explication of how an in-built fit between our beliefs and the world can be achieved or recognized. Rather, what it practically speaking *means* for our opinions to accord with an independent reality is itself to be worked out in a concrete fashion. Here epistemic notions are employed, although

truth is not identified with any set of such notions.¹⁸ Science is conceived of as the project of attempting to uncover ways to make our opinion accord with reality. In scientific practice, the opinions expressed are not merely open to criticism from a point of view with transcends the speaker's subjective opinion, but more specifically answerable to the standard of an independent reality.

As a first approximation, Peirce suggested that truths are those opinions that would continue to withstand doubt were scientific inquiry pursued indefinitely (1878, 139). However, in distinction to the other methods of settling opinion in a public fashion, scientific inquiry is not just *any* investigation that would bring about an agreement in opinion, but one that has finding out how things are independently of us as its aim. While the aim of meeting an external standard is (unavoidably) internal to this practice, the standard itself remains external. We may say that, instead of a *consensus* which may be arbitrarily or contingently formed among inquirers, it is hoped that scientific inquiry will lead to a *convergence* of opinion due to the influence of an independent reality.¹⁹ Accordingly, *hypothetical* realism

¹⁸ Implicitly, these remarks respond to two traditional objections to the Peircean approach. The first criticism is that truth again becomes mystical correspondence, an idea which has in turn been the subject of much well-rehearsed philosophical criticism. The second, *converse* criticism is that this method identifies truth with justification at an idealized end of inquiry, which will not satisfy our intuitions about truth: we may imagine something being ideally justified, but still untrue (cf. Price 2003). Against the first objection, Peirce maintains that "correspondence" is merely the "nominal definition" of truth (for scientific inquiry). What it means for our opinions to accord with an independent reality is to be worked out in a practical fashion. The second objection is substantially answered by the same token. Peirce nowhere *identifies* truth with justification, no matter how ideal. This objection confuses Peirce's notion of truth with what he took to be its hallmark in practice.

¹⁹ Another objection maintains that it is impossible to grasp what it would be for an opinion to withstand all future inquiry. This objection, however, rests on a confusion between the abstract and the particular. It is not inherently difficult to abstractly conceive of what it would mean for an opinion to be sustained even at the end of inquiry pushed indefinitely. On

does not entail a commitment to any particular ontological picture: it is not a realism about the results of science, past, contemporary or future. Rather than defining what there *is* in terms of science, it is the science that is defined in terms of reality.²⁰ The hypothesis underlying science merely assumes that there is a reality independent of our opinions. Again, it is this assumption that sets the scientific method apart from the others, and renders the attainment of agreement across inquirers intelligible.

8. Moral inquiry and democracy

Pragmatism as presented here does not rely on the received notion of truth as correspondence with reality; instead, it approaches truth in terms of the aim of inquiry. And despite its realist underpinnings, the scientific method as suggested by Peirce does not hinge on the idea that our claims or thoughts “mirror” an independent reality. Instead, that method is to be seen as the practice of settling opinion defined by the aim of meeting such an external standard. This aim cannot be elucidated in conceptual or representational terms; rather, what suggests that this standard is being met is up to the norms of science developed within its practice. Indeed, if Peirce relied on the idea that beliefs or claims “represent” an independent reality and it is *hence* that the scientific method is successful, his discussion of the different methods of fixing belief would be moot: science would win as if by default.

Why, then, is the scientific method successful? Many pragmatists have attempted to devise (based on Peirce’s texts or otherwise)

the other hand, however, there is no way for us to tell that we have, on any particular question, reached the end. But this is only to be expected: the scientific method implies a thoroughlygoing *fallibilist* attitude towards any hypothesis. The scientific method *unfixes* our opinion: as James put it in describing the empiricist’s attitude, “no bell in us tolls to let us know for certain when truth is in our grasp” (James 1897).

²⁰ This Peircean direction of understanding scientific realism is not prevalent today, but has its staunch defenders (e.g. Niiniluoto 2002).

arguments that would show that belief is to be fixed by the scientific method. Some contemporary Peircean pragmatists – most notably Cheryl Misak (1991; 2000) and Robert B. Talisse (2007; 2010) – have used the pragmatist approach to truth and Peirce’s discussion of the scientific method as stepping-stones in a defence of democracy. Their arguments, which I criticize in detail in [1] and [2], involve two main steps. The first is that, due to the nature of belief, inquiry must be conducted, or at least is best conducted, in a scientific fashion. The second is that a democratic setting is required or at least the best societal framework for such an inquiry. In Talisse’s view, democratic processes and institutions are required for beliefs to be tested against the full range of reasons, arguments and evidence. Misak, in turn, argues (more specifically) that our moral opinions are sensitive to the experience and argument of others, and consequently inquiry into moral questions can be most successfully pursued in a framework of liberal democracy. In order to justify the first step, both Misak and Talisse rely (not on an analysis of the concept of truth but) on an account of the concept of *belief*. They argue that belief is by its nature responsive to reasons, evidence and experience – that belief “aims at truth”. In particular, Talisse maintains that as epistemic agents or believers we are (at least implicitly) committed to the scientific method; for Misak, beliefs are sensitive to reasons, including the experience of others.

This line of argument however turns on an equivocation of its central terms. Merely arguing that belief is always sensitive to evidence, reasons and argument (or “experience”) will not suffice to distinguish between the different methods Peirce discusses: what counts as evidence (or the relevant kind of “experience”) depends on the particular method or aim of inquiry that the believing individual or group follows. If the scope of the central terms – “evidence”, “reasons”, “argument” and “experience” – is in no way defined or restricted, this view amounts to nothing more than the trivial claim that our beliefs are sensitive to whatever our beliefs are sensitive to. If however the aim of truth is understood more narrowly as it is by the scientific method, the notion of belief proposed turns out to be simply implausible. Certainly there are those whose beliefs are not (at least always) sensitive to *scientific* reasons, evidence and argument,

such as the followers of Peirce's method of authority – say, religious fundamentalists.

We might of course argue that such non-scientific opinions amount to something other or less than full-fledged beliefs; indeed, this is exactly what Misak and Talisse at points suggest. However, then the conclusion that beliefs are sensitive to evidence as understood by the scientific method follows simply because we have *defined* beliefs as just such opinions. Such a stipulation seems too restrictive; in any case, it will not be a viable argument against those who do not follow the scientific method to simply insist that their opinions are not genuine beliefs. Here these pragmatists' difficulties parallel those of the constructivists. Indeed, their argument for democracy turns out to be an application of the *a priori* method. It maintains that a certain notion of evidence and argument – a certain notion of what counts for or against an opinion – would be shared by all believing agents. When concrete examples of fixing opinion cast this view into doubt, these pragmatists can only rely on an artificially restricted notion of belief.

The pragmatist should not resort to such conceptual maneuvers; indeed, Peirce nowhere suggests that the opinions fixed by methods other than the scientific one are less than genuine beliefs. There is no non-circular argument available for the method of science: the choice of the method – the choice of what counts as the relevant kind of evidence or argument – is itself a substantial normative issue, which allows for no such simple resolution. But the defender of the scientific method is not left completely empty-handed: he may argue that the scientific method – its normative principles concerning the fixation of opinion – are those imposed upon us by reality itself.

9. Normative science and the norms of science

Equipped with the representationalist picture, the traditional cognitivist has been looking for a match between normative claims (or their conceptual contents) and the objects or “facts” of the naturalist world-view. The problems of this project have been prone to fuel scepticism. The cognitivists have not managed to supply a

plausible account of the conceptual content of normative claims and terms, and the “facts” our normative claims are “about” seem to fall out the scope of the scientific image of reality.

Pragmatism as presented here is able to escape these difficulties by eschewing representationalism. But it also evades the most formidable problem of expressivism, that of historicist relativism. As I argue in [4] – pragmatism may exploit (global) expressivism in bringing normative and non-normative claims under the same fold: the difference between these claims and thoughts concerns their functions in discourse and action rather than in their “representational” capacities. Neither is by its very nature more “cognitive”: by adopting the scientific method, *both* kinds of opinions may be settled to accord with an independent reality. The pragmatist notion of science supplies a view of how our thoughts and claims can be made answerable to an independent reality in the criterial terms of scientific practice instead of the conceptual terms of representationalism. In this way, the pragmatist approach can accommodate the objectivity of normative claims. It both makes intelligible the hope of a lasting agreement over normative ideas and makes good on our intuitions that such claims are responsible to something independent of what we may or may not think.

Among the benefits of this perspective is that it enables us to fit normative inquiry in a broadly speaking naturalist framework, where science is conceived of not merely in terms of its current image but in the broad terms of the inquiry into an independent reality. The pragmatist does not assume an ontology based on our current conception of science: at the outset, no domain of inquiry can be disclosed from the purview of scientific inquiry. A particularly interesting application of such inquiry leads to a novel understanding of philosophical naturalism. As I argue throughout this thesis, the scientific method itself cannot be defended on *a priori* grounds: the choice of the method is a substantial normative issue. Normative science enables us to inquire and defend the norms, aims and

methods of science *by* scientific inquiry.²¹ As developed in [5], normative science is not a “first philosophy” that attempts to lay a foundation for science that is, in Quine’s phrase, “firmer than the scientific method itself”. This picture is circular, but not viciously so.

Abandoning the representationalist assumptions while reconceptualizing realism, pragmatism may then give rise to a newly conceived normative realism. Although for the purposes of the argument developed in this thesis the mere possibility of hypothetical realism concerning normativity will suffice, the pragmatist will inevitably be asked for an account of the sort of reality that our normative opinions can be made to accord with, and how that reality may affect us as inquirers. While both scientific discovery and (philosophical) conceptual work will be required to outline hypothetical realism concerning normativity, the beginnings of such an account are fortunately at hand in Peirce’s later views, which have been further developed and elaborated by T. L. Short (2007).

According to Short, Peirce recognized that teleology had been reintroduced to modern science in that some forms of statistical explanation are not reducible to mechanistic causation.²² As an extension of this naturalistic view of final causation, he suggested that certain ideas (or ideals) themselves may have the tendency of becoming more powerful by gaining more ground: that there is an irreversible tendency toward affirming certain ends instead of others. Such tendencies are the natural “facts” that our normative opinions may be settled to accord with, independent of but affecting our particular inclinations and desires. While this picture may seem outlandish, the historical development and spreading of certain ideals – say, concerning human rights and the freedom of opinion – may be

²¹ The fact that scientific practice is inevitably norm-laden is a partial motivation to Putnam’s criticism of what he calls the “fact/value dichotomy” (Putnam 2002, 30–31; see Pihlström 2005).

²² More specifically, Short (2007, chs. 4–5) argues that there is a class of statistical explanation which is not mechanistic: the explanations of anisotropic processes of (practically irreversible) evolution of systems toward final states, which encompass a part of statistical mechanics and natural selection in biology.

taken as evidence of the power of certain ideals gaining more ground, of progress rather than mere change. As Short (2012) construes Peirce's later semiotic view, these ideals can affect us through experience by eliciting feelings of approval and disapproval, satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Experience may correct our feelings, and eventually force convergence among inquirers.

Of the methods (and norms) of *normative* science, very little can (as of yet) be said. It seems plausible that normative claims, unlike some other claims, cannot be tested based on evidence constituted by their predictive power and success (indeed, I say as much in [2]). But perhaps this is due to a lack of scientific (and philosophical) imagination in this area.²³ Here as elsewhere, normative science may be simply less developed than other branches of science and common sense.²⁴

10. Conclusion

Traditionally, normative realism is assumed to entail the semantic view that normative (or moral) judgments are fact-stating, or describe ways things are. This cognitivist stance however faces major difficulties in accounting for the conceptual content of normative terms as well as for the phenomenon of moral motivation. Initially conceived of as non-cognitivism, contemporary expressivism contests the idea that our thoughts and claims attempt to describe or

²³ Indeed, an extension of this sort of Quinean holism and thus empirical testability to normative claims by moral feelings or emotions has been proposed by Morton White (1981; 2002) in his hitherto largely neglected work. For discussion, see Pihlström (2011) and Short (2012).

²⁴ That is, perhaps we can learn to understand the predictive power of normative ideas (in terms of feelings such as those of approval and disapproval) in a manner analogous to the development of other fields of science. To disclose this alternative at the outset would be against the thoroughgoing *fallibilism* that is part and parcel of the scientific method. A Peircean fallibilist maintains that (in principle) any of our theories may turn out to be wrong; this fallibilism extends to all particular methods applied in scientific inquiry.

“fit” something in the world. When extended to all of assertoric language, the result is a global expressivism (or non-representationalism). The most difficult problem of this view is the unsettling implication of a form of relativism, historicism. While the Kantian tradition of constructivism and its criterial notion of validity might otherwise be of assistance here, this perspective leads to a difficult dilemma of its own. Constructivists attempt to show that some normative principles are valid when they are shared by all agents; but to escape historicist relativism, their arguments to this effect have resorted to artificial stipulations, or what I have called conceptual chauvinism.

The views of the classical pragmatists, especially Charles S. Peirce’s account of the scientific method and its commitment to realism, are not derived from a representationalist picture or other *conceptual* considerations. The scientific method is the outcome of a substantial development of *criteria* for the sort of opinions we should have. It assumes *hypothetical realism* about an independent reality which our claims may accord with. Such realism is not committed to any particular ontological picture: rather than defining reality in terms of science, science is defined in terms of reality. Hypothetical realism is thus compatible with the non-representationalist view: it is a realism without representationalism. This pragmatist approach enables us to reconceptualize normative realism. Once we have adopted the global expressivist perspective, there is no principled, “representational” difference between normative and non-normative claims or opinions. The pragmatist may argue that both kinds of opinion are to be fixed by the same – scientific – means. This is the possibility of a normative science.

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EPISTEMIC NORMS AND DEMOCRACY: A RESPONSE TO TALISSE

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Abstract: John Rawls argued that democracy must be justifiable to all citizens; otherwise, a democratic society is oppressive to some. In *A Pragmatist Philosophy of Democracy* (2007), Robert B. Talisse attempts to meet the Rawlsian challenge by drawing from Charles S. Peirce's pragmatism. This article first briefly canvasses the argument of Talisse's book and then criticizes its key premise concerning (normative) reasons for belief by offering a competing reading of Peirce's "The Fixation of Belief" (1877). It then proceeds to argue that Talisse's argument faces a dilemma: his proposal of epistemic perfectionism either is substantive and can be reasonably disagreed about or is minimal but insufficient to ground a democratic society. Consequently, it suggests that the Rawlsian challenge can only be solved by abandoning Rawls's own notion of reasonableness, and that an interesting alternative notion of reasons can be derived from Peirce's "Fixation."

Keywords: democracy, epistemology, normativity, reasons, Charles S. Peirce, Robert B. Talisse, John Rawls.

1. Introduction

John Rawls, in his later work, argued that democracy must be justifiable to all citizens; otherwise, a democratic society is oppressive to some of its members. In his book *A Pragmatist Philosophy of Democracy* (2007) as well as several related articles, Robert B. Talisse attempts to meet this Rawlsian challenge of justifying democracy by drawing from Charles S. Peirce's pragmatism, especially his famous 1877 article "The Fixation of Belief." In Talisse's reading, it is a prerequisite for our functioning as epistemic agents that we subscribe to what Peirce calls the scientific method of fixing belief. In turn, the proper functioning of the scientific method requires the advancement of several liberal democratic ideals, including free speech, open access to information, and freedom of opinion. Taken together, according to Talisse, these requirements amount to a social ideal of *epistemic perfectionism*, which is minimal enough to be endorsed by all while substantive enough to ground a democratic society.

In what follows, I briefly canvass the argument of Talisse's book and then criticize its key premise concerning (normative) reasons for belief

by offering a competing reading of Peirce's "The Fixation of Belief." Moreover, I suggest that Talisse's argument faces a dilemma: his proposal of epistemic perfectionism either is substantive and can be reasonably disagreed about or is minimal but insufficient to ground the democratic ideals that Talisse proposes. Based on my reading of Peirce, I then proceed to argue that the Rawlsian challenge may ultimately be misconceived at the outset, and that a Peircean view might ultimately solve the problem of justifiability by abandoning Rawls's notion of reasonableness.

2. Talisse's Argument

It is obviously impossible here to do justice to the complexity and detail of Talisse's arguments for a Peircean view of democracy. I will first canvass the central argument that runs through his 2007 book, *A Pragmatist Philosophy of Democracy*, and then consider some possible criticisms of that argument. For the sake of clarity, in what follows I have split Talisse's argument into premises and conclusions:

- (P1) Democracy has to be justifiable to all citizens; otherwise it is oppressive.

Talisse's first premise is derived from John Rawls's later account of democratic theory (Rawls 1996). According to Rawlsian liberalism, the coercive power of the state is legitimate only when it is justifiable to all citizens. If democracy is not justifiable to everyone, it is oppressive to those who disagree with it (Talisse 2007, 35–36).

- (P2) Members of a society reasonably disagree about substantive doctrines, including most substantive theories about democracy.

According to what Talisse, following Rawls, calls the "fact of reasonable pluralism," there is prolonged and possibly intractable but reasoned disagreement over big questions, especially such questions that concern ethical views (2007, 82–83).

- (C1) Most substantive conceptions about democracy are oppressive.

From the first two premises, Talisse draws the conclusion that most substantive accounts of democracy are reasonably rejectable, and thus cannot satisfy the Rawlsian demand (2007, 37). In Talisse's hands, such is the fate of John Dewey's proposal of democracy as "a way of life": the Deweyan view is oppressive, as it is "imbued with too many reasonably rejectable philosophical commitments" (2007, 88).

(P3) Reasonable disagreement requires reasons.

However, as Talisse points out, to *reasonably* disagree about comprehensive doctrines about democracy, we must do so for reasons.

(P4) We are all committed to the same conception about what count as (normative) reasons for belief.

The gist of Talisse's argument is his reading of Peirce's "The Fixation of Belief," which Talisse takes to show that *as* epistemic agents or believers we are committed to what Peirce called the scientific method of inquiry. For Talisse, this method involves at least an implicit commitment "to the processes and institutions that would enable those beliefs to be tested against the full range of reasons, arguments, and evidence" (2007, 67).

(P5) We can only advance reasonable belief in a liberal democratic society.

In turn, Talisse argues that scientific inquiry can be advanced only under liberal democratic conditions, such as free speech, access to information, and freedom of opinion. This leads to a *substantive* theory about democracy that Talisse advances, his *epistemic perfectionism*, which involves a "politics that aspires to a specific mode of democratic practice by cultivating a certain epistemic character among its citizens" (2007, 72).

(C2) Thus, a substantive conception of liberal democracy is justifiable to all citizens.

Hence, Talisse argues, there is a substantive (although "minimal") view of democracy that satisfies the Rawlsian demand of justifiability.

Many points in Talisse's argument would deserve further discussion. First, it might be asked in what sense the account of democracy has to be "justifiable" to all citizens (P1). While this is the moral Talisse draws from Rawls's later work, the extent of such justifiability is questionable—indeed, to anticipate my discussion near the end of this article, it is hardly obvious what it would mean for a view to be justifiable to everyone. Similarly, it is not at all clear what it means to disagree reasonably, or *for reasons* (P3). The central concept of reasons requires elucidation; and there are many pitfalls in such a project. Most important, the threat is that any argument founded on the concept of reasonableness itself will beg the question against those who disagree with *that* conception.¹ Thus the

¹ In *A Theory of Justice* (1971), Rawls argued that reasonable people will agree with the basic democratic principles he suggested. However, this argument seems to hinge on Rawls's conception of reasonableness: reasonable people will agree with Rawls's democratic principles, to quote from Cheryl Misak, "for that is exactly what it is to be reasonable" (2000, 25).

concept of reasonableness must be explicated in a noncircular manner: reasonable disagreement cannot be just such disagreement that happens to somehow agree with *our* (or *my*) conception of reasons. To be fair, this is exactly the notion that the next premise in Talisse's argument (P4)—the one I will concentrate on—is supposed to supply. Before that discussion, however, a couple of considerations of Talisse's other premises is in order.

Talisse argues that a liberal democratic society is a necessary condition of the advancement of scientific inquiry (P5). But the connection between epistemic perfectionism, inquiry, and liberal society could easily be questioned. Most forms of *perfectionism*, to be sure, have had an individualistic bent: as the virtues of virtue ethics, "perfections" have been considered traits of an individual. Against Talisse's premise, it could be argued that even a society advancing the goals of epistemic perfection might involve such a division of epistemic labour that does not entail the characteristics of a liberal democracy. Perhaps epistemic perfections are the privilege of the few and not of all. The development of science and the specialization it has involved surely give us reason to think that not all people can form their opinions based on their own inquiry performed in conditions of liberty; indeed, serious science on any particular topic is the business of a precious handful, and the rest of society largely relies on expert opinion.

However, against this threat of scientific elitism, we could (on Talisse's behalf) argue that the liberality of the epistemically perfectionist society is only to be taken in the abstract sense that, at least *in principle*, anyone might acquire the sufficient education and background experience to confirm and criticize the results of the inquiry so far performed, and that this is what is meant by the openness and freedom of opinion in such a society. And while those of us who are not scientific specialists will need to resort to the work of such specialists in settling our opinion, it is because of the open method of inquiry they advance and *not* because of their position as techno-scientific elite that we rely on their testimony. Although more should be said about this question, I think an answer along these lines should be enough to defuse the challenge of elitism.

There is still a further point about perfectionism that deserves attention—namely, perfectionism about epistemic matters would arguably require more than just our commitment to a set of norms *of* inquiry: it would require commitment *to* inquiry. An epistemically perfectionist society would be one in which truth and knowledge—the advancement of inquiry into all questions that merit scientific interest—is taken as a central goal of the whole social enterprise. Inquiry is not just a part of scientific project inside such a society; nor is it concentrated merely on issues of short-term practical interest to the community. Instead, the epistemically perfectionist society as a whole would be committed to scientific exploration, which the members of that society would need to take as an important aim of their communal enterprise—indeed, for them,

inquiry is “a way of life.” Here Talisse’s epistemic perfectionism verges on turning the goal of truth and knowledge to something quite substantial. It is easy to see how Talisse’s critics—especially Deweyan ones—might plausibly charge him with exactly the sort of robust commitments that underlie Talisse’s own criticism of Deweyan democracy.

Although all of these points would deserve some extended discussion, there is no room for that here. Instead, these preliminaries done, I will concentrate on what I take to be the most central premise in Talisse’s argument, the premise that claims that we are (minimally) committed to the scientific method of inquiry.

3. Five Points About “Fixation”

In a central premise of his argument, Talisse claims that everyone at least implicitly shares a commitment to certain norms of belief or inquiry (P4). This premise maintains that *qua* believers, we are already committed to minimal norms of inquiry; these norms, then, are foundational to our conception of what sort of disagreements are reasonable, and how disagreements are to be solved. In what follows, I will argue against Talisse that there indeed can be disagreement about such epistemic norms. This counts against Talisse’s key contention that such norms are minimal and shared by all.

Talisse’s argument for this premise is based on his reading of Peirce’s “Fixation of Belief.” Peirce famously presents four methods of inquiry, the first three of which turn out unsuccessful in fixing belief, while the fourth, the scientific method, is successful. Unlike the methods of tenacity, authority, and *a priori*, the scientific method fixes belief so that it would be “caused by nothing human, but by some external permanency,” that is, Reality (Peirce 1877, 120). Thus, Peirce offers an explication of the concept of truth by reference to those beliefs that would eventually continue to be confirmed by scientific inquiry.

Why is only science successful in fixing belief? Talisse argues that Peirce does not evaluate the success of the different methods of inquiry with reference to some purpose *external* to inquiry itself. Rather, Peirce wishes to point out that we simply *cannot* follow methods of fixing belief other than the scientific one: we cannot “deliberately and self-consciously inquire in any way but the scientific way” (Talisse 2007, 61). Hence, only such reasons that are reasons *by the scientific method* can be reasons for belief. If this is so, we are all committed to a certain, although perhaps vague, conception of what counts as reason for belief. Talisse offers no single argument in support of this view. Instead, drawing from Peirce’s essay, he makes several interrelated points to ground his premise.

While I am in agreement with this general idea about “Fixation,” I think the point of the essay is not to show that the three non-scientific

methods *cannot* be followed in a self-conscious manner. Instead, we can genuinely disagree about method. In what follows, I will distinguish five points Talisse draws from Peirce and attempt to show that there is enough in Peirce's text to support a competing reading. On each of these points I readily admit that Peirce was less than clear. However, I am not as interested in finding out what Peirce actually meant as in the question of whether Talisse's view indeed can be defended in the way he does.

- (1) It is rational to adopt the method that fixes belief so that it is most unlikely to be doubted.

One suggestion that appears early in Talisse's book is that if inquiry is there to replace doubt by belief, then the best method of inquiry is the one that produces such beliefs that are "unlikely to occasion doubt" (Talisse 2007, 13). However, this suggestion merely as such does not recommend any particular method. Probably because of this, Talisse further suggests that the scientific method is the best method because it produces beliefs that "can *withstand* the test of ongoing experience" (2007, 13). But this already assumes that our beliefs are to be tested by "ongoing experience" instead of some other criteria. More has to be said about why this is so.

- (2) Beliefs by their nature dictate the method.

Talisse argues that only the scientific method can fix belief simply by virtue of what our beliefs are like (2007, 13–15, 60).² According to Peirce's pragmatism, our beliefs involve habits, which, in turn, entail certain conditional expectations about future experiences. As the method of science is the only method sensitive to such experience, it is the only method suited to fixing such beliefs that we may want to have. For example, consider again someone following the method of tenacity. Surely, we might think, beliefs fixed by tenacity are prone not to meet the expectations entailed by those very beliefs, and this already seems to count against the viability of any such method.

However, again, this is not what Peirce suggests. Instead, according to him, following the method of tenacity "may, indeed, give rise to inconveniences, as if a man should resolutely continue to believe that fire would not burn him [. . .]. But then the man who adopts this method will not allow that its inconveniences are greater than its advantages. He will say, 'I hold steadfastly to the truth, and the truth is always wholesome'" (1877, 116). For the tenacious person, even massive failure does not count as counterevidence to those beliefs. And who says it should? Again, any response to the tenacious person simply begs the question of why she should apply methods that are more responsive to external

² Here Talisse follows Misak's (2000) interpretation of "Fixation."

circumstances.³ Indeed, instead of naming the habitual nature of beliefs as the cause of the breakdown of tenacity, Peirce refers to what he calls the “social impulse” as counting against this method: we inevitably are dissatisfied with a method that fixes belief only for one and not for all. It is due to the social nature of man that the tenacity fails—not because of its potentially massively unsuccessful results. Thus the nature of beliefs alone does not dictate which method we are to use in fixing belief.⁴

(3) The non-scientific methods are not methods of fixing belief.

Talisie also argues that the three non-scientific methods are methods not of fixing belief but, rather, of avoiding doubt (2007, 57, 61–62, 67–68).⁵ Some of Peirce’s wording indeed suggests this interpretation. For example, Peirce’s second method, the method of authority, lets the state decide the correct doctrine and ruthlessly force it upon its citizens. Peirce, however, adds that this method follows the following maxims: “Let all possible causes of a change of mind be removed from men’s apprehensions. Let them be kept ignorant, lest they should learn of some reason to think otherwise than they do” (1877, 117). Similarly, the method of tenacity is the “taking as answer to a question any we may fancy, and constantly reiterating it to ourselves, dwelling on all which may conduce to that belief, and learning to turn with contempt and hatred from anything that might disturb it” (Peirce 1877, 115). Here Peirce’s wordings suggest that these methods are designed to keep the actual reasons to revise one’s belief outside of one’s reach, and hence, these methods avoid doubt rather than fix belief.

However, despite Peirce’s formulations, there is no suggestion in his essay to the effect that the non-scientific methods “fix” something other than belief.⁶ It is far from inconceivable that some people might self-consciously fix at least *some* of their beliefs by methods other than the

³ Also, it might be pointed out that such an account may also involve a thick notion of the nature of such expectations, as well as “experience” as that which those expectations concern. It is this kind of robust and therefore reasonably rejectable account of experience Talisie presents as the foundation of Dewey’s account of inquiry.

⁴ Indeed, if the point of “Fixation” was merely that the scientific method is the only method suited to fix our beliefs *because* (?) our beliefs involve such expectations, Peirce could have just added this argument as a corollary of the account of belief presented in his second paper of the *Illustrations* series, “How to Make Our Ideas Clear” (Peirce 1878). I’m indebted to T. L. Short for several discussions on this point.

⁵ Again, Talisie draws this idea from Misak (2000). Much of the criticism of Talisie presented here is, by extension, also criticism of Misak’s argument for a deliberative conception of democracy.

⁶ It seems certain that Peirce thought the non-scientific methods (also) fix belief. In a harsh description of the method of authority he notes that for the mass of mankind “there is perhaps no better method than this,” adding that “[i]f it is their highest impulse to be intellectual slaves, then slaves they ought to remain” (Peirce 1877, 118).

scientific one. I will postpone my argument to this effect for a few paragraphs, as I will argue in a moment that at one point Talisse himself seems to admit this much.

(4) The scientific method is unavoidable.

Talisse also argues that fixing belief based on the scientific method is unavoidable for all inquirers (2007, 61–62). In Talisse’s example, even the most ruthless tyrant is, at bottom, a democrat: when a tyrant “sets about terrorizing or propagandizing or oppressing his people, he seeks after the *best* or *most* effective means to his tyrannical ends; he wants the *truth* about potential conspiracies against him, the *truth* about how best to eliminate opposition, and the *truth* about how best to keep people in line” (Talisse 2007, 68).⁷ But again, this is not what Peirce seems to be saying. Instead, exactly when discussing the method of authority, he points out that “the state may try to put down heresy by means which, from a scientific point of view, seem very ill-calculated to accomplish its purposes; but the only test *on that method* is what the state thinks; so that it cannot pursue the method wrongly” (1877, 121; emphasis in the original). And even if it is the case that with many or even most issues we are simply forced to rely on the scientific method, nothing precludes authority from being our method of choice when it comes to some particular questions.⁸ Even though everyone may use the scientific method “about a great many things,” as Peirce (1877, 120) pointed out, that method is not unavoidable.⁹

(5) The non-scientific methods cannot be adopted self-consciously.

Talisse’s most central point is his reading of “Fixation” as an *internal* or *immanent* criticism of methods other than the scientific one (Talisse 2007, 61, 67, 96, 98). First, Talisse argues that truth is a *constitutive norm* of belief, pointing out that “[p]art of what it is to hold that a proposition is true (that is, to *believe* it) is to take it to be able to withstand the scrutiny of inquiry, to prove itself worthy in the test of the ongoing exchange of

⁷ Talisse also argues that those who *do* use non-scientific methods must use the scientific method as well (e.g., 2007, 67–68, 86). However, this already entails tacitly admitting that the non-scientific methods *can* be used in fixing belief. I will return to this issue in discussing point (5) below.

⁸ It may be added that, according to Peirce, the method of science is the only method in which the method and its correct application are separated. But even the “correct application” of this method cannot be dictated by anything except more science: there is no Archimedean point either internal or external to the method from which to evaluate instances of its application.

⁹ Peirce immediately adds that everyone “only ceases to use it [the scientific method] when he does not know how to apply it” (1877, 120). The crucial point is that we *may* cease to follow the scientific method.

reasons, evidence, and argument” (2007, 67; cf. 2010). Then, Talisse points out that the scientific method is the only method that is responsive to such reasons, or, in Talisse’s words, “pursues truth” (2007, 61). Thus, no method other than the scientific one can be *self-consciously* adopted for fixing belief.

However, I don’t think this argument is successful. This is for the simple reason that Talisse uses the concept of truth equivocally. The crucial point to notice is this: the disagreement between the methods is *not* about whether to believe what is supported by evidence. By any method, we cannot believe what we think is unsupported by reasons, or what we think is untrue (cf. Rydenfelt 2009). This is exactly what Peirce suggests, prefiguring later deflationist conceptions of truth: “The most that can be maintained is, that we seek for a belief that we shall *think* to be true. But we think each one of our beliefs to be true, and, indeed, it is mere tautology to say so” (1877, 115). However, it is only in this abstract, *minimal* sense that truth is “constitutive” of belief. Instead, the disagreement between the methods is about what *counts* as reasons for belief. If the notions of truth, reasons, or evidence are given any more substantial content, it is evident that they are no longer “constitutive” of belief. In a substantive, non-minimal sense, each of the methods Peirce discusses involves its *own* conception of truth.¹⁰

It is interesting to note that, perhaps somewhat surprisingly, at one point Talisse points out that his view “does not involve the claim that individuals do not in fact practice non-scientific methods of inquiry” (2007, 67). (This brings us back as well to the point anticipated in (3) above.) In Talisse’s own example, even a “close-minded fundamentalist” thinks he is “deferring to epistemically *appropriate* and *reliable* sources of belief” (Talisse 2007, 67–68). But here Talisse in effect admits the point just developed: that there are non-scientific believers, and, moreover, that their beliefs are also responsive to what *they* view as reasons. While we are all committed to reasons, those reasons are not necessarily “scientific” ones. Indeed, it would be extremely difficult to argue otherwise. Surely there are exactly such close-minded fundamentalists who have self-consciously adopted methods of fixing belief—at least when it comes to certain questions—other than what would by any standards count as *scientific*.

4. A Fact of (Un)Reasonable Disagreement?

The crucial lesson of the preceding discussion is simply this: it is possible to fix belief by methods other than the scientific method. Nothing about

¹⁰ Cf. Short (2000). It is also to be noted that the difference between a belief being true and belief being justified only appears with the scientific method. This does not imply that the non-scientific methods only “aim at” justification; rather, on the “minimal” level the scientific method adds the notion of justified belief *in addition* to true belief.

believing *as such* precludes following some other method. Indeed, examples of just such believers are ample. And as we have just seen, even Talisse's own account seems to admit as much. Moreover, it is safe to assume that we actually are, at least sometimes and about some issues, faced with exactly this kind of disagreement with others—say, when engaging with people like Talisse's close-minded fundamentalist. Such disagreement is then a *fact*.

Is this fact of disagreement a fact of *reasonable* disagreement? Is the person who rejects the scientific method—let's call her the “non-scientist”—reasonable in this rejection? This seems a strange question to ask, as reasonable disagreement seems to assume reasons. As we saw, a key twist in Talisse's argument was exactly this: if there is reasonable disagreement, competing views must be supported by reasons (cf. Talisse 2007, 87). However, as I will presently propose, Talisse's account is faced with a dilemma: either of the two possible answers turns out problematic for his argument.

Consider first the option that the non-scientist is indeed reasonable in disagreeing with those who follow the scientific method. For example, we may say that even though his views are not based on what we think are reasons, he has his *own* reasons, and thus his rejection of the scientific method is (we could say *minimally*) reasonable. But if this is the case, the scientific method itself can be reasonably rejected; indeed, the non-scientist does so for his own, non-scientific reasons. Then, it immediately follows that a society centered on the scientific method or an epistemic perfectionism devised in terms of that method is oppressive and does not satisfy the Rawlsian demand. In Talisse's own words, such a society forces “all to live in accordance with a comprehensive doctrine that may be reasonably rejected [...] and therefore *oppresses* reasonable people” (2007, 84).¹¹ This is the first horn of Talisse's dilemma: if the substantial view held by the non-scientific believer can be considered reasonable, Talisse's epistemic perfectionism is not justifiable to him.

Then, consider the option that we refuse to count the non-scientist as disagreeing for reasons. The non-scientist, we say, is simply unreasonable in fixing her beliefs. However, such a solution seems obviously problematic. As there is no external, method-independent way of evaluating the reasonableness of the methods themselves, such a view would make it a simple matter of definition that those who disagree with the scientific method *are* unreasonable. In part, this is because we may always ask: If we are allowed to do this in the case of the non-scientist, why not do the same with anyone disagreeing with us—say, someone who disagrees about our democratic principles?¹² Such writing off of

¹¹ This parallels Talisse's view of Dewey's notion of inquiry (Talisse 2007, 46–48).

¹² Recall, this was exactly the problem with Rawls's earlier notion of reasonableness (cf. footnote 1 above).

dissenters as unreasonable is exactly the mistake with which Talisse charges Deweyan democrats. The problem is that this puts Talisse on a par with anyone who says that those disagreeing with his substantive doctrine are just unreasonable. This is because the question of what counts as reason for belief is itself a substantial issue, one that we may disagree about. Here is the second horn of the dilemma. Perhaps it could be argued that the non-scientific believer is unreasonable. But then Talisse's premise would simply beg the question against the non-scientist: it would be founded on the assumption that reasonable views *are* the products of the scientific method.

None of the preceding discussion would deny the novelty and interest of Talisse's attempt to ground democracy in *epistemic* normativity.¹³ But if what I have said is on the right track, Talisse cannot escape the dilemma just presented. While in the minimal sense our beliefs indeed are responsive to "reasons," any attempt to say what counts as reason for belief already entails a substantive view about truth (or evidence, justification, and so on), comprehensive enough to invite disagreement. This is because the "constitutive" features of belief are simply minimal and not substantive. Hence, substantive epistemic norms are not minimal enough not to be disagreed upon, and a society grounded on such norms either is oppressive and does not meet the Rawlsian demand or writes off dissenters as simply unreasonable.

5. Reasonableness Revisited

So far, I have argued that questions of which views are reasonable are themselves substantial questions which we may disagree about and which, moreover, are not solved by merely conceptual points about central epistemic notions, or normative notions in general. And if there is no substantial agreement on such normative notions, it immediately follows from the Rawlsian point of view that there may be no way of justifying any particular view concerning *reasons themselves* to everyone.

The underlying reason for this predicament is that there is no way of reconciling Rawlsian reasonable pluralism and the idea that some substantive or comprehensive view would be justifiable to all: the fact of reasonable pluralism is at bottom the *denial* of just such justifiability. Rawls writes: "Under the political and social conditions secured by the basic rights and liberties of free institutions, a diversity of conflicting and

¹³ Perhaps there is, e.g., less disagreement about certain epistemic norms than about moral ones. As Talisse argues, most of us do not self-consciously adopt any of the non-scientific methods of fixing belief (although, as I've argued, some do, and thus we all may). Moreover, while it is beyond the scope of this discussion whether Talisse's arguments for democracy based on epistemic perfectionism are successful—that is, whether (P5) above is acceptable—there clearly is reason to think that the scientific method supports at least some minimal idea of democracy.

irreconcilable—and what's more, reasonable—comprehensive doctrines will come about and persist if such diversity does not already obtain" (Rawls 1996, 36). What makes differing comprehensive doctrines reasonable is, for Rawls, that they are not the mere upshots of people's limited and momentary interests but "in part the work of free practical reason within the framework of free institutions" (Rawls 1996, 37). What makes them irreconcilable is, for him, that even the free working of practical reason will lead to differing and conflicting comprehensive doctrines. In effect, Rawls denies that it could be hoped that our opinions, even when developed under the framework of free institutions, could converge on a single such doctrine.¹⁴ Obviously, then, if it is so that the free operation of practical reason will lead to the development of irreconcilable comprehensive doctrines, it seems hopeless that any substantial view would be justifiable to all citizens—let alone some view comprehensive enough to ground a democratic society.

This Rawlsian background will, however, point towards an important consideration. As we have just seen, while comprehensive doctrines invite reasonable disagreement, Rawls still maintains that *reasonableness* itself can be pinned down by reference to the free operation of practical reason: it is the views that are products of that operation that count as reasonable. Although comprehensive doctrines may be reasonably rejected, then, there is still something to be said about what it is to be reasonable. From this perspective, it is easy to see how Talisse's argument is closely motivated by Rawls's discussion. However, a point seemingly underappreciated by Talisse is that his epistemic perfectionism in effect attempts to solve Rawls's problem exactly by eschewing his *notion of reasonableness*. Talisse already rejects the view that products of free institutions are reasonable when he maintains that reasonableness only pertains to the products of the scientific method.

I think the solution to the Rawlsian problem is indeed such a *dissolution*: it involves abandoning Rawls's notion of reasonableness, the notion that quite explicitly makes it impossible to develop a notion of reasons that would enable justifiability (even in principle) to everyone. However, whereas Talisse (like Rawls with his competing notion) thinks that his scientific notion of reasons is a conceptual point about belief, truth, evidence, and the like, I have attempted to show that the question is far more substantive. Developing a notion of reasons and reasonableness should be done in a manner that does *not* beg the question against competing views

¹⁴ Accordingly, of course, Rawls's political liberalism is founded not on a comprehensive doctrine but on the citizens' sharing a public conception of justice, which is then differently related to their differing comprehensive or substantive views. Whether the Rawlsian hope for an "overlapping consensus" on the public conception of justice is really intelligible must here remain an open question; however, it deserves to be noted that projects such as Talisse's attempt to ground democracy without resorting to such notions.

of reasonableness, such as that of the non-scientists; it cannot be based on a mere conceptual point about belief. The Peircean account, I will now finally proceed to suggest—albeit briefly—will give us a more substantial view of how the “scientific” conception of reasons can develop out of the Rawlsian fact of reasonable pluralism.

To begin with, if, as Rawls holds, reasonable views are those developed in a framework of free institutions, it seems (as we have anticipated above) that several views about reasons themselves can be so developed. This should already give us pause. To put this point differently, if we accept the Rawlsian conclusion that free institutions give rise to irreconcilable views about substantive questions, there will be irreconcilable views about reasons themselves. The fact of pluralism throws the underlying notion of reasonableness into question. This last point, I think, is reflected in Peirce’s “Fixation.” The second method Peirce discusses, the method of authority, ultimately becomes questionable because of the arbitrariness of its results. A “wider sort of social feeling,” Peirce argues, will show that the opinions dictated by the authority are mostly accidental: different peoples at different ages have held differing views. By the third, *a priori* method, we come to fix belief so that the content of the belief is not arbitrary but settled, under conditions of freedom, by what is agreeable to reason: “Let the action of natural preferences be unimpeded, then, and under their influence let men, conversing together and regarding matters in different lights, gradually develop beliefs in harmony with natural causes” (Peirce 1877, 118). This method in effect equals the condition of reasonableness posed by Rawls, the operation of reason in a framework of free institutions. The *a priori* method attempts to avoid the accidental, capricious elements of our comprehensive views by insisting that these views be not the products of contingent conditions or short-term self-interest but those dictated by reason itself.

However, as Peirce points out—anticipating Rawlsian pluralism—this method will not ultimately succeed in fixing any single comprehensive view. Here it is worth quoting Peirce at length:

We have examined into this *a priori* method as something which promised to deliver our opinions from their accidental and capricious element. But development, while it is a process which eliminates the effect of some casual circumstances, only magnifies that of others. This method, therefore, does not differ in a very essential way from that of authority. The government may not have lifted its finger to influence my convictions; I may have been left outwardly quite free to choose, we will say, between monogamy and polygamy, and, appealing to my conscience only, I may have concluded that the latter practice is in itself licentious. But when I come to see that the chief obstacle to the spread of Christianity among a people of as high culture as the Hindoos has been a conviction of the immorality of our way of treating women, I cannot help seeing that, though governments do not interfere, sentiments in their development will be very greatly determined by accidental causes. (1877, 119)

The problem of the *a priori* method is exactly the Rawlsian one. The method, Peirce maintains, “makes of inquiry something similar to the development of taste; but taste, unfortunately, is always more or less a matter of fashion” (1877, 119), a result that we will ultimately find dissatisfying. Of course, neither the fact that no single view is arrived at by that method nor the dissatisfactory nature of that method is something that can be shown *a priori* (or by the method itself). Instead, it is our actual experience of the practical development of substantial views or comprehensive doctrines that shows it to be so, and this realization already gives us an idea of where to head next.¹⁵ To avoid the problems of the *a priori* method, Peirce suggests that it is required to develop a method “by which our beliefs may be determined by nothing human, but by some external permanency” (1877, 120). This method is, of course, the scientific one: it depends on the assumption that there is an independent reality, which “affects, or might affect, every man” (Peirce 1877, 120), and one true conclusion about any question. With these assumptions at hand, the scientific method of inquiry solves the problem faced by the *a priori* method, the development of several irreconcilable views.

To repeat, Rawls assumes that there are several irreconcilable but quite as *reasonable* views. The Peircean conception of the scientific method involves no such assumption; on the contrary, according to this view there is one correct solution to any question—or so we may at least hope. It does not follow, however, that the point about reasonableness just developed—or Peirce’s defence of the scientific method—is a conceptual one. The proposal here is not that the non-scientist is by definition unreasonable. Accordingly, in “Fixation” Peirce does not argue that the first three methods are unsuccessful because they cannot genuinely fix belief, or that believing as such already assumes the scientific method. Instead, as I have argued, all of these methods are genuinely possible, and moreover, there is no method-neutral way of solving the question of which method to follow: any such view about reasons already assumes one or another method. Obviously, the scientific method is the correct method by that very method; but such an answer would beg the question against other conceptions of reasons, which people might and do actually apply.

Indeed, this conclusion is reflected in “Fixation,” where Peirce simply contends: “Now, there are some people, among whom I must suppose that my reader is to be found, who, when they see that any belief of theirs is determined by any circumstance extraneous to the facts, will from that moment not merely admit in words that that belief is doubtful, but will

¹⁵ Put differently, this is not to say that the *a priori* method is self-undermining: there is no *a priori* proof that we cannot arrive at any one single view by that method. It is only to say that experience shows us differently; but relying on such experience is, of course, already moving us to the scientific method.

experience a real doubt of it, so that it ceases to be a belief" (1877, 119–120). This is as much as can be *said* in favour of the scientific method: the reader, Peirce assumes, will simply feel inclined to approve of it. Moreover, Peirce maintains—or at least hopes—that the scientific method is the view about reasons for belief that everyone, dissatisfied by the alternatives, would ultimately accept.¹⁶ The reader may of course be dissatisfied with such a defence of such a fundamental position; but it is exactly because the question of method is so fundamental that offering any seemingly method-neutral argument or reason for choosing one method over another would simply lapse into either circularity or regress. All Peirce can do is point out the relevant features of the methods he discusses, and hope his reader will join him in condemning the non-scientific ones.

6. Conclusion

Talisse argues that our shared epistemic norms involve an implicit commitment to democratic principles. These principles are thus justifiable to all citizens, and meet the Rawlsian challenge of justification of democracy. The crucial premise of Talisse's argument, as I read it, is questionable, however. That premise maintains that there are constitutive or minimal norms of belief that we all, *qua* believers, share. These norms of belief Talisse then exploits in showing that genuine believers require democracy.

Drawing from my alternative reading of Peirce's "Fixation," I have argued that belief can genuinely be fixed by different methods, some of them not at all scientific, and thus that the question of which method to choose is also a substantial one. Minimal or constitutive norms of belief, if there are such things, are not substantial enough to differentiate, let alone decide, between different methods. For example, belief may always be responsive to evidence, but the difference between the methods lies exactly in what counts as evidence—the testimony of the Holy Book or that of the telescope? For this reason, I have argued, Talisse's argument is faced with a dilemma. Either those who fix their belief in a non-scientific manner—the non-scientists, as I called them—are reasonable, and hence

¹⁶ Obviously, much more about how and why the scientific method will ultimately prevail should be said; that would, however, take this discussion far beyond the confines of "Fixation" and to Peirce's later views about the normative sciences (cf. Short 2007, chap. 12, sec. 8). Here it has to suffice to note that, following the method of science itself, it is an empirical question which method will ultimately prevail. An idea that underlies the Peircean view is that there is an irreversible tendency toward affirming certain aims instead of some others (Short 2007, 148–50). The implication of applying the scientific method to normative questions is, after all, a normative realism: there must be an independent reality which the normative inquiry is answerable to. As I have argued elsewhere (Rydenfelt 2011), the circularity here is again obvious but hardly vicious, unless the application of the method itself is taken as a method-neutral proof of the method.

the democratic principles derived from the scientific method are oppressive to them by Rawlsian principles; or they are considered unreasonable, which, however, begs the question by simply assuming a particular notion of reasonableness.

If questions about epistemic norms too are substantive and can genuinely be disagreed about, Rawlsian reasonable pluralism would entail that there is no hope of deriving any principles justifiable to all citizens from such norms. Indeed, it seems that no view whatsoever can satisfy the Rawlsian challenge of justifiability. The only way the Rawlsian challenge can be met, I have argued, is to abandon one of its key assumptions, the idea that reasonableness equals being the product of the operation of practical reason under conditions of liberty. There may very well be many irreconcilable comprehensive doctrines that are reasonable by *those* standards. From the Peircean perspective, however, this is the problem of the *a priori* method in general, a problem that the scientific method of fixing belief will solve by attempting to derive one true answer to all questions.

Abandoning the Rawlsian notion of reasonableness will open the possibility of a scientifically oriented conception of reasons. While Talisse's proposal of solving the Rawlsian problem already amounts to the (at least implicit) denial of the *a priori* notion of reasonableness, it attempts to derive the scientific notion of reasons from a mere conceptual consideration of belief, truth, evidence, and the like. Talisse's argument still involves the attempt to answer the key challenge of the justifiability of a certain conception of reasons by *a priori* means. I have instead argued that there is no conceptual or method-neutral argument for the scientific method: the followers of any method are reasonable by their own lights. Accordingly, Peirce's story in "Fixation" involves no attempt at such an argument. However, even admitting as much, perhaps we are no less prepared to accept its conclusion.

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Democracy and Moral Inquiry: Misak's Methodological Argument

1. Introduction

In her book *Truth, Politics, Morality – Pragmatism and Deliberation* (2000), Cheryl Misak argues for a deliberative conception of democracy. Misak's argument revolves around a methodological principle she derives from a consideration of the pragmatist approach to truth, especially the truth of moral views. This principle holds that maintaining a moral view involves a commitment to the truth of that view, which in turn implies a requirement to give evidence and reasons for it, such evidence including the experience and arguments of others. Based on this methodological principle, the upshot of the argument is that, as everyone's experience and reasoning may be evidence for or against moral opinions, inquiry into moral questions can be most successfully pursued in a framework of liberal democracy.

In what follows, I will first briefly canvass Misak's argument for liberal democracy and then concentrate on inspecting the merits of the methodological principle. This principle I will argue is questionable in light of counterexamples of individuals whose belief is *not* responsive to the evidence and argument of others; indeed, these are often exactly the sort of individuals who promote illiberal views. I will argue that the initial plausibility of the methodological principle is based on three considerations concerning the connection between belief and evidence on the one hand and belief and experience on the other. All of these considerations will however turn out to yield insufficient backing to the principle. Finally, I will suggest that the problems with Misak's methodological argument are only to be expected in light of her own criticism of the arguments for democracy proposed by Karl-Otto Apel and Jürgen Habermas as well as John Rawls.

2. The methodological argument

Misak sets out to show that pragmatism not only offers a plausible epistemology – or a viable notion of truth – for moral questions, but that this epistemology has societal implications. She intends to counter the view of those to whom the opinions, experiences and arguments of others do not matter in (moral) deliberation and (political) decision-making, those who “denigrate the experiences of others” (2000, 6). While Misak does not profess to offer a “knock-down argument” against illiberal views of this kind, her argument is supposed to give us an idea of where those holding them are mistaken (2000, 6). Misak’s main claim is that the pragmatist perspective on notions such as truth, belief and assertion result in a methodological principle of moral inquiry that “insists upon the inclusion of those who are or might otherwise be excluded” (2000, 7). Moreover, this principle, she argues, is binding over even those who otherwise uphold illiberal views.

Misak’s starting point is the pragmatist approach to truth as the *aim of inquiry*, which she contrasts with the traditional correspondence account of truth as well as contemporary deflationist views, especially disquotationalism. Against the correspondence theory of truth, Misak levies the common criticism of spuriousness, claiming that the notion of truth as correspondence is practically empty when not spelled out in terms of tangible results for inquiry. The correspondence account envisions the possibility “that ‘*p*’ fails to correspond to reality, despite its being the best that a belief could be” which “is such that nothing could speak for or against it”, which, from the pragmatist point of view, verges on the meaningless (2000, 57). In particular, in moral and political questions, we cannot assume that truth is a correspondence or “fit” between our ideas and some (believer-independent) “facts”: with normative claims and beliefs, “truth and objectivity cannot be anything like that” (2000, 2).

For many, the problems of the correspondence account have suggested a retreat to a deflationary view of truth, which – instead of giving the concept any substantial content – approaches truth as a

linguistic or grammatical device. While the pragmatist can appreciate the idea motivating the deflationary view, she will not rest content with it (Misak 2000, 60–64; see Misak 1991, 127–130; Misak 2007, 68–70). In Misak’s view, deflationism leaves open issues concerning the role that truth plays in inquiry and belief; but for the pragmatist, “the important work is in spelling out the relations between truth on the one hand and assertion, verification, success, etc. on the other” (2000, 63). In particular, Misak argues, our assertoric practices show that many of our opinions aspire to *objectivity*, a standard that goes beyond one’s subjective approval. The marks of objectivity include the distinction between one’s thinking that one is right and *being* right, our using such statements as premises in inferences, and our perceiving them as open to improvement for example by way of argumentation (2000, 52). At least by and large, also our *moral* opinions bear the marks of objectivity, and should be approached as possible candidates for genuine knowledge or objects of inquiry. The deflationary view of truth, however, leaves us unable to deal with issues concerning epistemic standards and evidence (cf. 2000, 103–4).¹

The pragmatist account of truth that Misak proposes is put in terms of notions that enable us to deal with exactly such issues, the most central ones being those of inquiry and belief. As Misak’s puts this pragmatist position in brief, “a true belief is the best that inquiry

¹ Misak’s criticism of moral non-cognitivism proceeds along similar lines; and indeed, many contemporary non-cognitivists follow Simon Blackburn’s (1998) lead in arguing that the truth of moral claims amounts to nothing more robust than the truth predicate of the deflationary view along the lines suggested by the champion of the latter position, Paul Horwich (1990). However, at one point Misak argues against non-cognitivism as advanced by Horwich on the grounds that the non-cognitivist or emotivist view would amount to the implausible suggestion that (in her words) “‘Good’ amounts to ‘Y believes that x is good’” (2000, 72). But this is an uncharitable reading of non-cognitivism: by that view, moral claims *express* the speaker’s mental states, such as those of approval and disapproval. Non-cognitivists have taken pains to argue that this position is distinct from the view that Misak imputes to them that moral terms *refer* to the speaker’s subjective (mental) states.

could do” (2000, 60). Drawing from Charles S. Peirce’s discussion of inquiry, Misak argues that the “core of the pragmatist conception of truth is that a true belief would be the best belief were we to inquire as far as we could on the matter”, where “best” is understood as the belief that “best fits with all experience and argument” (2000, 49). This account of the “goodness” of belief has bearings on the sort of inquiry we are to pursue: to gain “beliefs which would forever fit with experience and argument”, the best means “is clearly a method by which we test our beliefs against experience” (2000, 82).

This explication of the pragmatist view of truth gives Misak her main device in drawing her liberal democratic conclusion: the *methodological principle* that “the experience of others must be taken seriously”. If belief is to be fixed so that it would withstand the experience and argument of potentially everyone, the views of all may be relevant to our inquiries. A direct implication of this principle is that everyone must have the chance to express their opinion in moral debates: the methodological principle “requires a democracy in inquiry” (2000, 6). As corollaries of this principle, Misak lists many central democratic virtues, such as the respect for other persons and their autonomy, tolerance, and public and open deliberation. For example, she argues that the “preservation of autonomy, equal moral worth, and respect for persons” are required as “preserving these things is a vital part of deliberation aimed at the truth” (2000, 115). The pragmatist perspective on truth and belief thus lays the ground for an argument against the illiberal stance and for a liberal democratic society: it is in such a society that our inquiries, including our moral inquiries, may be most fruitfully pursued.²

² Misak sets out to defend the idea that *moral* inquiry (in particular) requires “democracy in inquiry”. But if her methodological principle holds, the argument could be made that *any* inquiry presupposes a democratic setting. The advantage of this more general line of argument would be that some troubling issues concerning the particular nature of moral opinion (or moral “belief”) and its connection with scientific inquiry could be avoided. In recent years, Robert B. Talisse (2007; 2010) has been advancing just such a defence of democracy, which bears great resemblance to Misak’s methodological argument. For a detailed criticism of Talisse’s position, see Rydenfelt (2011b).

3. Belief and evidence

The pragmatist perspective on truth as the aim of inquiry – as developed by Misak, among others – offers an interesting and potentially fruitful alternative to the debate between standard meta-ethical alternatives. However, Misak's particular pragmatist account of the aim of inquiry and truth more generally is problematic. While this account does not rest on an analysis of the concept of *truth*, it still relies on an analysis of our concept of *belief*. In Misak's view, a believer "must simply take her belief to be responsive to reasons, for that is what is required of a prepositional [*sid*] attitude that is aimed at truth". Such responsiveness to reasons is distinctive of beliefs as opposed to other mental states: "We might have other attitudes toward propositions – for instance, we might, against the evidence, hope or wish that *p* is true. But whenever a mental state is sensitive to reasons, it is a belief". This view, Misak maintains, is "really very accommodating of what we usually call belief" (2000, 76).

The notion of belief as sensitive or responsive to reasons and evidence of the sort Misak envisions underlies the methodological principle. As I will now proceed to argue, this notion is however questionable, and *not* very accommodating of the variety of attitudes (or "mental states") we usually call belief. It is vulnerable to salient counterexamples; moreover, such counterexamples can be derived from Peirce's discussion in his classic piece, "The Fixation of Belief" (1877), which Misak herself employs in setting up her methodological argument.

The first of the methods Peirce discusses in the "Fixation" is tenacity, or the steadfast clinging to one's opinion. By this method, the aim of inquiry (or belief) is not to fit any (external) "evidence"; indeed, it appears that this method lacks a notion of evidence (at least aside that of one's already fixed opinion). As such, it appears to be an immediate counterexample to Misak's notion of belief, and against this light it comes as no surprise that in Misak's reading, Peirce maintains that there is a *distinction* between "genuine belief" and tenacity, the latter being a sort of state which is *not* open to revision in

light of evidence and argument (Misak 2000, 74, 87, 94).³ Here Misak however diverges from Peirce's original discussion: he nowhere argues that belief cannot be fixed by tenacity, or that the results of the application of this method are anything other than beliefs. Instead, he admires the method of tenacity for its "strength, simplicity, and directness", and clearly maintains that this method may be and is concretely applied by many: "Men who pursue it are distinguished for their decision of character, which becomes very easy with such a mental rule" (1877, 122). Even if tenacity is a crude way of fixing belief, it is distinct from psychological compulsion, or the inability of settling one's opinion in the first place. It is only under the influence of what Peirce calls the "social impulse" that this method is bound to fail. Then the disagreement of others begins to matter, and the question becomes how to fix belief for everyone instead of merely for oneself.

Of course, there is much to be said in favour of the assumption, central to Misak's discussion, that our opinions – including our moral opinions – aspire to be *objective*: we assume that there is a standard of opinion beyond one's mere preferences, one that is moreover common to all of us as believers and inquirers. But even if we were to disclose the opinions arrived at by mere tenacity from the purview of genuine belief on the grounds of objectivity, another problem for Misak's methodological principle is posed by beliefs which appear to be sensitive to evidence of *some* kind, but not of the kind that Misak envisions – that is, to experience and argument, including that of others. Consider the second method in Peirce's discussion, the method of authority. This method attempts to solve the problem faced by tenacity by imposing the opinion decided upon by an authority on everyone by any means, however ruthless. While the method of authority then renders belief sensitive to *something*, its

³ At one point, Misak also likens tenacity to deciding to believe at will: "I cannot get myself to believe that *p* by deciding that if the coin I am about to flip lands heads, I will believe it, and if it lands tails, I will not" (2000, 74). However, tenacity does not equal the wilful selection of one's beliefs, which we may think impossible; it is rather the stubborn sticking to one's current beliefs, come what may.

conception of evidence is not the same as that required by the methodological principle. Instead of experience and argument, the follower of this method fully relies on the testimony of the authority.

Again, Misak attempts to avoid such counterexamples by drawing from conceptual considerations. As Peirce points out, religious belief is often a concrete example of such belief that is fixed by the method of authority. Misak recognizes that the lack of experiential evidence for religious beliefs might be considered to run against her methodological principle. In response to this potential concern, she denies that religious beliefs amounts to *genuine* beliefs: “these prepositional [*sic*] attitudes, if they really are not keyed to reasons, must also not be genuine beliefs” (2000, 75). Relying on the Wittgensteinian idea that demanding evidence or reasons for religious belief is to misunderstand the whole nature of such belief, she first argues that “the religious do not believe, but rather, have faith” (2000, 75). But delimiting religious belief as being outside the scope of “genuine” belief on the grounds that it is not responsive to the *sort* of evidence one thinks it should appear exceedingly artificial. Religious belief is, after all, responsive to the sort of evidence that the religious *himself* deems relevant. Accordingly, in Peirce’s view, it is not considerations of this conceptual sort that speak against the method of authority. Rather, a “wider sort of social feeling” will count against the method by showing that different peoples at different ages have held differing views and that the opinions dictated by the authority are at bottom arbitrary (Peirce 1877, 118).

Indeed, even Misak does not follow the Wittgensteinian road to the conclusion that religious belief is (always) unsupported by evidence. Instead, she admits that “the theist might, [...] offer reasons for her belief – she has had a spiritual revelation, or takes some great revelatory book to be keyed to the evidence” and that “these reasons can be such that if stronger reasons are presented, the belief will be shaken and perhaps revised or abandoned”. Under such circumstances, Misak holds, we are after all “presented with a case of genuine belief” (2000, 76). But the admission that the theist’s belief *is* sensitive to “reasons” (of its own kind) is problematic for the methodological argument: the “theist’s” reasons or evidence for his belief is *not* the experience and argument of others, as the

methodological principle maintains. Rather, among the theist's reasons may be spiritual revelation or the testimony of a great revelatory book; if anything, the former amounts to tenacity where, as Peirce puts it, "the conception of truth as something public is not yet developed" (1877, 120), while the latter is a paradigmatic case of the method of authority. Consequently, also what would count as *stronger* reasons for such an individual – what would make the "theist" revise his belief – would not be the experience and argument of others, but further "evidence" of the *same* kind.

In light of counterexamples such as those of Peirce's tenacious believer and the follower of the method of authority, it appears that Misak's concept of belief is too limited to be plausible, or to match our usual understanding of belief. The methodological principle itself, relying on this account of belief, will inevitably face problems. Crucially, it is these sort of problems that we may expect when contesting the sort views that Misak's argument is intended to counter. Those who maintain illiberal views after all claim exactly that the experience and argument of others does *not* count as evidence or reasons. If differing conceptions of evidence, or of reasons for belief, are available in the manner suggested by Peirce, the methodological principle will lose its bite against the illiberal stance. As Peirce puts this point (in connection with the method of tenacity): "It would be an egotistical impertinence to object that his procedure is irrational, for that only amounts to saying that his method of settling belief is not ours" (1877, 116). Criticism from the liberal point of view – such point of view that does take the experience and argument of others seriously – will not be considered relevant by those who do not already share the same view of evidence and reasons.

4. The aim of belief

The criticism of Misak's argument just presented is that the methodological principle faces salient counterexamples – cases where belief is *not* sensitive to the experience and argument of others, as that principle maintains, of which Peirce's discussions give examples. The fact that the problems of Misak's argument seem so evident invites

the question of why the methodological principle initially appears plausible. I think we can distinguish three considerations – all of which appear in Misak’s discussion – that might be taken to support the methodological principle but on closer inspection turn out to be insufficient to show the feasibility of the principle..

A first reason for the appeal of the methodological principle is an equivocation of the central pragmatist notion of truth as the aim of inquiry. In a sense, the pragmatist – we may agree with Misak – considers truth to be the aim of inquiry: if anything, this is the pragmatist’s concept of truth (cf. Rydenfelt 2009b). This notion, as we have seen, figures prominently in Misak’s discussion. However, it should not be taken to imply that truth is to be conceived of as any *particular* such aim. As the examples of the methods of tenacity and authority already considered show, the aim may be differently conceived of: in effect, the four different methods of “Fixation” amount to four *different* accounts of truth from the pragmatist point of view.

A second source for the appeal of the methodological principle is a stretching of ideas motivating the deflationary account of truth. Arguing for the principle, Misak employs the idea the deflationists are fond of: that to assert or believe that *p* is to assert or believe that *p* is true. For Misak, this suggests that belief (and assertion) are aimed at truth, or sensitive to the test of experience:

*If we want to arrive at true beliefs, we ought to expose our beliefs to the tests of experience. There is a whiff of circularity here: we test beliefs because we want beliefs which are true – beliefs which will stand up to testing. The circularity, however, evaporates once the pragmatist is explicit that we in fact value the truth. We can see that this is the case when we see that the assertion that *p* is the assertion that *p* is true. Belief and assertion aim at truth. (Misak 2000, 83, paragraph break omitted)*

And elsewhere:

*A belief aims at truth – if I believe *p*, I believe it to be true. But if this is right, then the belief that *p* must be sensitive to something – something must be able to speak for or against it. (Misak 2000, 51)*

Such a defence of the methodological principle is however clearly problematic for two reasons. Firstly, from the deflationist platitude that the assertion (or belief) that p is the assertion (or belief) that p is true, it does not follow that belief and assertion “aim at truth”.⁴ The deflationists, after all, have argued exactly that that the locution “is true” adds nothing to the original assertion of p . (By analogy, perhaps to dream that p is to dream that p is true, but it does not follow that dreaming “aims at truth”, or that we want to have “true” dreams.) Secondly, even if it were the case that belief “must be sensitive to something” it is exactly this *something* – a conception of evidence, or reasons for belief – that distinguishes between the liberal and the illiberal.

The same points can be made by comparing Misak’s account with Peirce’s reaction to the same issue, which is briefly touched upon in the “Fixation”. At the outset of his discussion, Peirce supplies a pragmatist account of inquiry as the move from the unsettling state of doubt to the settlement of opinion, or belief. Then he points out that we might think this is not enough but insist that “we seek, not merely an opinion, but a true opinion”. However, this “fancy” is immediately dispelled: “we think each one of our beliefs to be true, and, indeed, it is mere tautology to say so” (1877, 115).

Peirce’s remark here allows for at least two different interpretations. As a first possibility, it can be taken as anticipating the deflationary account of truth (cf. Short 332–3). The “tautology” Peirce would have in mind would be that to assert or to believe that p is to assert or believe that p is true simply because this is how “true” operates as a linguistic or grammatical device. By this interpretation, Peirce is pointing out that this function of the concept of truth leads to no substantial results concerning the aim of belief and inquiry. On the other hand, Peirce may here be read as arguing that when we believe, we consider our belief to be supported by evidence, whatever

⁴ Elsewhere, Misak similarly suggests that “truth is also internally related to inquiry, reasons, and evidence” on the grounds that “reading the *DS* biconditional in the other direction, we get the thought that when I assert p , I assert that it is true” (73). Also see Misak (2007).

our conception of evidence might be: otherwise we would cease to believe. By this interpretation, then, it is a tautology that *if* we believe that *p*, we *think* that *p* is true by whatever conception of “true” we might entertain.⁵

Whichever of the two possible interpretations we choose, the result concerning the connection of the platitude Peirce enlists and our notion of truth will be the same: from the tautology that we think our beliefs to be true nothing substantial follows concerning the concept of truth, nor the aim of inquiry. Indeed, this points towards the most crucial difference between Misak’s argument and Peirce’s discussion. Misak’s defence of the methodological principle is founded on a slippery slope from the deflationary platitudes – such as that to believe that *p* is to believe that *p* is true, *via* the pragmatist perspective on truth, which maintains that truth is the aim of inquiry, to a particular interpretation of this aim in terms of experience and argument (including that of others), finally leading to the conclusion that to believe that *p* is to believe that *p* would be supported by experience and argument (including that of others). Peirce however does not argue that some of the methods of fixing belief – such as those of tenacity and authority – cannot be followed on such *conceptual* or *linguistic* grounds. The operation of the truth predicate as a *linguistic device* – the use of the predicate from which the deflationist draws – has no implications on what truth, understood as *the aim of inquiry*, is or should be. These two perspectives on truth, although mutually compatible in the pragmatist view, are to be kept distinct.

5. Belief and experience

A third reason for the plausibility of the methodological principle differs somewhat from the conceptual arguments just considered. Namely, the pragmatist perspective on beliefs as habits of action may be seen to imply that beliefs by their nature involve *expectations* concerning experience and, moreover, that the fulfilment or

⁵ This reading brings Peirce’s notion closer to Crispin Wright’s (1992) pluralistic concept of truth. For further critical comparison, see Misak 2000, 64–67; Short 2007, 333.

disappointment of such expectations should be viewed as constituting evidence for or against that belief.

Consider, first, the pragmatist view that a genuine belief has consequences to the believer's conduct. This idea is reflected by Misak:

[W]hen I assert or believe that p , I commit myself to certain consequences – to having expectations about the consequences of p 's being true. Some of those consequences are practical. These will be specified in terms of actions and observations: 'if p , then if I do A , B will be the result'." (Misak 2000, 73)

While not crucial to Misak's discussion, this idea of *practical* implications of (genuine) belief is central to the pragmatist tradition. In "How to Make Our Ideas Clear" (1878) – the paper that follows "Fixation" in Peirce's series of articles, *Illustrations of the Logic of Science* – Peirce argues that the "essence" of belief is the establishment of a *habit*: "different beliefs are distinguished by the different modes of action to which they give rise" (1878, 129–30). Despite differing verbal formulations, two beliefs are one and the same if they give rise to the same rule of action, or habit. Moreover, Peirce maintains that "the occasion of such action [is] some sensible perception, the motive of it to produce some sensible result" (1878, 131). As our action thus has "exclusive reference to what affects the senses" (1878, 131), the pragmatist elucidation of the meaning of beliefs is put in terms of conditional expectations in experience – such as Misak's "if I do A , B will be the result" (cf. Rydenfelt 2009a).

The pragmatist view easily lends to the idea that the fulfillment or lack of fulfillment of the expectations entailed by a belief should be taken as *evidence* or *reasons* for or against the belief. Misak writes (without reference to the pragmatist view):

If there was nothing a belief had to be sensitive to, then we could not individuate it; we could not tell it from another. [...]. I can interpret or come to understand a sentence which is initially unintelligible to me only by coming to see what it is responsive to. (Misak 2000, 51)

Here Misak connects evidence for or against a belief (or what belief is “sensitive to”) and its meaning (or what “individuates” the belief). If the belief now is individuated in the pragmatist manner by the practical consequences it entails, including the conditional expectations it involves, then such conditional expectations can easily be taken to determine evidence for that belief.

However, there are two complications to this idea of an intimate connection between conditional expectations and evidence. The first concerns the nature of “conditional expectations”. It is to be noted that the pragmatist’s test of the meaningfulness of beliefs does not equal naive verificationism by which any meaningful statement can be reduced to statements concerning immediate experience, or what Quine called observation sentences. Rather, these expectations have to be understood in a holistic fashion. In a lucid discussion of holism, Misak first formulates its Quinean version, which maintains that our beliefs (or hypotheses) receive confirmation or disconfirmation only as parts of larger webs of beliefs (or theories): “Only when taken in conjunction with countless auxiliary hypotheses does a statement entail that ‘if we do *x*, we shall observe *y*’” (2000, 84). For the Quinean holist, meaningful sentences entail such observation sentences as parts of a theory. With all the countless auxiliary hypotheses in place, if the expectations entailed by one of our hypotheses are disappointed, at least some part of the larger theory – which may comprise all of our science – is to be revised.

Misak however argues that this is not the case with all meaningful statements. In particular, it is implausible to suppose that *moral* beliefs would entail conditional expectations, or moral “theories” would be receive confirmation from their predictive prowess (at least as usually conceived). For this reason Misak goes further than Quine. By the *radical holism* she proposes, meaningful statements are not required to entail observation sentences even as parts of a larger theory. Rather, the notion of experience and experiential consequences is to be understood far more broadly: “[W]e can accept the idea that a belief is constitutively responsive to experience without committing ourselves to anything as strong as the verificationism of the logical positivists, for the kind of experiential consequences required of various beliefs will turn out to be very broad indeed” (2000, 51).

Accordingly, Misak proposes that “for a subject matter to qualify for a place in our system of knowledge” or “as an objective area of inquiry”, it must pass the (empiricist) test “that it *answers to something*”. As with belief, meaningful statements are, by this view, “responsive to experience” (2000, 86).

It is clear that a broad holistic view such as that Misak proposes is required for us to bring moral questions into the fold of the sort of (objective) inquiry that is conducted in a (widely speaking) scientific fashion. However, radical holism brings with it a complication. If the notion of answerability is not tied up to anything quite as tangible as predictive power, we can no longer argue that meaningful statements or our beliefs are sensitive or responsive to the fulfillment or disappointment of conditional expectations. Even with holistic reservations taken into consideration, not all meaningful hypotheses can be expected to imply something like Quinean observation sentences. Thus the pragmatist view that beliefs involve practical consequences cannot be used to argue for the methodological principle simply by pointing out that all meaningful opinions entail conditional expectations of the type “if I do *A*, *B* will be the result”. As Misak herself points out, this is not the case with *moral* opinion.

In Misak’s view, of course, beliefs are by their nature sensitive or answerable to *experience*, construed more widely than in the Quinean picture. She argues that “in our deliberations about what is valuable”, all “we have to go on” is our experience, or “what we see as valuable and our refinements of those thoughts, in light of the arguments of others and in light of reflection” (81). But Misak doesn’t give this idea any more robust content. Indeed, this is only to be expected in light of the examples we have considered. If Misak attempts to *limit* the sort of “experience” that counts for or against some (moral) opinion, she in effect offers a normative account of what counts as *good evidence* or *good reasons* for belief – an account that will be readily contested by those who, say, maintain illiberal views. For some, say, spiritual revelation or the testimony of a holy book appears to count as the relevant sort of “experience”. For the notion of belief as sensitive to experience to be plausible, “experience” must be read in an extremely inclusive fashion. But the problem with this extreme is that “experience” becomes an objectionable fudge-word for *whatever* our

beliefs may be “answerable” to. This leads to a trivial – indeed, circular – account of belief as sensitive to whatever belief *is* sensitive to, an account that is not at all helpful in showing the merits of the methodological principle.

This brings us to the second, more general holistic complication, which concerns the identification of the fulfilment of conditional expectations with *evidence*. As the examples we have considered show, it does not appear that experience (of any sort) constitutes evidence for or against a belief in isolation from our norms for good evidence or reasons for belief. As what we could call a *Sellarsian holist* would maintain, in order for a kind of experience to be able to justify one’s opinion, the believer must hold it to fulfil a *normative* role, or consider it as meeting standards of correctness.⁶ For experience (of any sort) to be considered evidence for or against some hypothesis, our theory (or our science as a whole) must include an account of what *counts* as evidence or reasons. By such broader holism, this is the case even with beliefs that *do* involve conditional expectations of the type “if I do *A*, *B* will be the result”. Even with such beliefs – and even with all the Quinean auxiliary hypotheses in place – the fulfilment or lack of fulfilment of such expectations will not count for or against a hypothesis, unless we *take* them to have this normative role.

Accordingly, there is reason to pull apart the practical consequences central to the pragmatist elucidation of belief and the pragmatist’s notion of evidence or reasons for belief. Practical consequences, including expectations concerning experience, may *individuate* beliefs as the pragmatist maxim maintains. But these

⁶ A part of Sellars’s rejection of the “Myth of the Given” is that observational knowledge presupposes “knowledge of general facts of the form *X is a reliable symptom of Y*” (1963, 128). By contrast, for Quine, there is no similar *normative* issue about the connection between “observation statements” and knowledge – about, say, whether predictive prowess, at least with all the required auxiliary hypotheses in place, should be considered evidence for a theory (cf. Quine 1992, 19; Rydenfelt 2011a, 116–9). Here, of course, reliability is taken to be a normative term on its own right, or at least a descriptive term closely related to our normative account of what sort of beliefs to have (viz., that we *ought* to maintain such opinions that are due to reliable processes of perception, etc.).

expectations cannot be taken to (as if automatically) determine *evidence* for or against a belief. First, as Misak herself argues, *moral* opinions do not involve straightforward conditional expectations concerning experience of the type “if I do *A*, *B* will be the result”. Second, more generally, even in case of beliefs which involve such expectations, taking their fulfilment to count as evidence for that belief presupposes the acceptance of a (normative) account of evidence that maintains that these expectations determine evidence or reasons for belief.

6. Circularity and question-begging

The lesson of the preceding remarks is that Misak’s defence of her methodological principle depends on a questionable notion of *belief* and its “aim”. Interestingly enough, this conclusion is only to be expected based on Misak’s own criticism of alternative arguments which attempt to show the validity or truth of democratic principles. One such alternative is the argument advanced by Karl-Otto Apel (1980) and Jürgen Habermas (1990) which maintains that *communication* itself *presupposes* adherence to norms that lay ground to democratic principles. Misak’s criticism of this “transcendental” argument is that it is based on a too narrow notion of communication itself. It simply appears implausible that communication as such requires everything that is assumed by this argument: “it seems that some people do communicate – do speak and utter statements to others – without presupposing the things Habermas and Apel insist are undeniable” (2000, 41). Apel and Habermas may obviously define communication in such a manner to allow for their conclusion, but a stipulation of this sort is too narrow: “it seems simply wrong to define communication in the restrictive way in which Habermas does” (2000, 42).

The structural similarities between Apel’s and Habermas’s transcendental argument and Misak’s methodological argument are however striking. After all, Misak argues exactly that simply by *believing*, or *qua believers* we are sensitive to the experience and argument of others and, hence, inevitably committed to some core

democratic principles. While Misak perceives this structural analogy between the two arguments, she maintains that there is a relevant dissimilarity: although she has argued that “certain things are required for genuine belief”, her argument, unlike Apel’s and Habermas’s, is based “on a plausible and thin understanding of what is involved in the concept” of belief (2000, 106), and on “a conception of inquiry which is so thin that the *prima facie* assumption is that everyone is an inquirer” (2000, 151).

However, as we have seen, the concept of belief that Misak operates with simply fails to be thin enough: it is far from evident that believing as such entails being sensitive to the experience and argument of others. In light of a reality check of the counterexamples we have considered, it is implausible to suggest the methodological principle as a *meta-ethical* view about what it *is* to maintain a moral opinion. Of course, Misak may wish to limit the scope of our notion of belief to such opinions (or mental states) that *are* sensitive to the experience and argument of others in the manner she has suggested. But this alternative is simply to stipulate that only the opinions of those who are democratic in their inquiries count as genuine beliefs – exactly the sort of conceptual device that Misak herself finds problematic in Apel’s and Habermas’s arguments. Perhaps the liberal democrat can point out that the opinions that are not sensitive to the experience and argument of others do not count as genuine beliefs, for they do not fulfil this conceptual condition – but then the illiberal opponent will simply not *care* about having “beliefs”.

Indeed, Misak attempts to avoid such a transcendental cling to her argument, at one point suggesting that the methodological argument operates in a fashion which differs from the transcendental one: the former is not after a necessary truth of the sort that the latter professes to show. The methodological argument “does not suggest that the possibility of language or communication depends on a certain conception of how to live (i.e. freely and equally)”. Rather, it is based on “a hypothetical imperative of the sort: if you want beliefs which will withstand the force of experience, then do such-and-such”. To this imperative, Misak then adds the “empirical or sociological claim” that “virtually everybody claims to be after such beliefs” (2000, 107).

Phrased in this manner, Misak's argument no longer hinges on the claim that beliefs *are* by their nature sensitive to the experience and argument – that being open to criticism based on the experience of others is what it *means* to have beliefs. Rather, the argument is that *if* one wishes to have beliefs which withstand the force of experience, *then* one should proceed in a manner that takes the experience and arguments of others seriously. Here Misak seems to think that also her illiberal opponent will argue that *his* beliefs are ones that will withstand the test of experience.⁷ But as we have seen, this view rests on an equivocation of “right” belief or the “aim” of truth. Perhaps the illiberal opponent does want the right belief, or aims at true beliefs – but right and true by *his* lights, not the liberal democrat's.

A second line of argument that Misak herself criticizes is John Rawls's defence of liberal democratic principles. In his later work, especially in *Political Liberalism* (1996), Rawls argued that citizens, despite their differing comprehensive moral views, can reach what he calls an overlapping consensus about the central tenets of deliberative democracy to an extent due to the liberal democratic tradition. Misak contests Rawls's view by maintaining that it will be an insufficient response to exactly those who question the basic idea of a liberal democratic society itself:

Our society happens to be a cooperative venture for mutual advantage. [...] The problem is that, even if Rawls' social ontology were right, even if such ideas were so deeply entrenched that they were shared by everyone, nothing about that fact warrants the thought that that is what we ought to aim at. (Misak 2000, 26)

However, the same problem will be faced by the methodological argument, which attempts to defend a set of *normative* principles of what kind of beliefs we would be best off having. Even if it were the case as a sociological, empirical claim that *everyone* wishes to form

⁷ As Misak argues at another connection: “[H]aving a belief which is aimed at the truth is something that we can assume of our opponents. Once the acknowledgement is made (as it *is* made by the flat-earthier, the Nazi, etc.) that one aims at getting the right belief, then one is open to a certain sort of criticism” (46).

their beliefs taking into account the experience and argument of others, it does not follow that we *ought* to aim at such beliefs. Analogously to Rawls's defence of the democratic principles, Misak's defence of the methodological principle will lose its *normative* bite, if it solely relies on a sociological and empirical fact of this sort.

Misak's methodological argument cannot avoid the pitfalls of these two alternative arguments. On the one hand, the transcendental argument supplied by Apel and Habermas faces the problem of circularity: in order for the argument to go through, we must artificially limit the scope of the concept of communication in order to arrive at the desired conclusion. It will turn out that everyone involved in communicative interaction is bound by a set of norms simply because that is what it *means* to be a participant in a communicative interaction. But Misak's own methodological argument goes through only if we limit our notion of *belief* in a similar manner: it is to say that everyone, by way of having beliefs aimed at truth, is open to the experience and argument of others – for that is what it *means* to be someone with genuine beliefs.

On the other hand, the sort of an empirical generalization underlying Rawls's later notion of an overlapping consensus will not lead to a conclusion that would justify any democratic principles or a notion of public reason. Perhaps many or even all citizens of a liberal democratic society share a number of principles concerning good deliberation, public reasoning and the formation of moral opinion. But as a defence of the liberal democratic position, as Misak perceives, simply pointing this out will beg the question against any illiberal opponent. The problem is that Misak's own argument, when made to depend on an empirical, sociological claim about what sort of beliefs we (happen to) want to have is no better off in showing that we *ought* to aim at such beliefs. But when attempting to avoid the circularity of the transcendental argument, this seems to be the only alternative available.⁸

⁸ I have elsewhere (Rydenfelt 2013) argued that defences of related methodological principles are generally faced with a dilemma between either relying on stipulating normative concepts – or what I call “conceptual chauvinism” – and generalizing from our current normative point of view –

7. Conclusion

Misak's argument for liberal democracy is founded on a methodological principle of (moral) inquiry – the principle which maintains that beliefs, including moral opinions, are by their nature sensitive to the experience and argument of others. But the appeal of the methodological principle, I have argued, is due to considerations which will under closer inspection turn out not to support Misak's wide-reaching application of the methodological argument. A first source of the plausibility of the methodological principle is the pragmatist perspective on truth as as the aim of inquiry, or "aim of belief" in the sense of the sort of a belief we *should* have, or *ought to* pursue. In Misak's hands, this approach leads quite directly to the conclusion that everyone is committed to acquiring such beliefs that are responsive to evidence of a certain sort – sensitive to experience, including the experience and argument of others. But as we saw, this is to confound the overall pragmatist approach to truth as the aim of inquiry with a particular account of that aim. Moreover, counterexamples – such as those provided by Peirce in his discussion of the fixation of belief – show that this view of truth is questionable from the point of view of other such accounts.

A second consideration that Misak employs in arguing for the principle are the claims on which the deflationary (or "disquotationalist") account of truth is based, such as the platitudinous claim that to assert or believe that *p* is to assert or believe that *p* is true. However, as I have argued, such platitudes allow for no substantial conclusions of the sort that Misak envisions. Indeed, on the contrary, the deflationary account is founded on the very idea that the locution "is true" has no conceptual content such that would be of aid in formulating something like the methodological principle. And finally, a third node for the methodological principle is the connection between belief and

leading to "historicist relativism" of the sort advanced by Richard Rorty (e.g. "Introduction" to 1982).

experience. As we saw, even if – as the pragmatist maxim may be seen to maintain – our beliefs are *individuated* by their practical consequences, including the expectations concerning future experiences they entail, it does not follow that the fulfilment of such expectations as if automatically constitutes evidence for that belief. Rather, our picture of the connection between belief and experience should be holistic not only in the “Quinean” but also in the “Sellarsian” fashion, including in its purview different (normative) accounts of what counts as evidence.

As I have argued, although Misak explicitly draws from the Peirce in setting up her methodological argument, the different methods of fixing belief that Peirce discusses in his “Fixation” rather provide counterexamples to the methodological principle: examples of ways of settling opinion which are not sensitive to the experience and argument of others. As a response, Misak may insist that the opinions settled in these “other” ways fail to be full-fledged, genuine beliefs. But this is exactly the sort of argumentative strategy she herself criticizes – when considering Apel’s and Habermas’s “transcendental” argument – of relying on a mere conceptual device to arrive at the desired conclusion. Alternatively, she may (and at one point does) argue that, as a sociological fact we *do* desire to have beliefs which are tested against experience, including that of others. But this alternative amounts to the sort of generalization from which, as she perceives – in considering Rawls’s defence of deliberative democracy – we cannot derive any substantial normative conclusions. Relying on either alternative will be insufficient for Misak’s methodological argument to have any bite against her illiberal opponent, someone who simply does not share the norms embedded in the methodological principle. Accordingly, we cannot find an attempt of this sort in Peirce’s writings. In “Fixation”, Peirce championed the notion of truth entailed by what he called the scientific method of fixing belief – the method which attempts to fix belief in accordance with a reality independent of our opinions. He did not however argue for this notion based on a mere empirical generalization. In Peirce’s view, there is no non-circular *argument* available for the method of science. The choice of the method – the choice of what counts as the relevant

kind of evidence or argument – is itself a substantial normative issue, which allows for no such simple resolution.

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EIGHT

Constructivist Problems, Realist Solutions

Henrik Rydenfelt

What to do with entrenched moral and political disagreement? How to resolve conflict between different individuals and groups in a society? This problem is central in philosophical discussion over the legacy of John Rawls's—both earlier and later—defence of a liberal democratic society. The question, in those discussions, inevitably becomes: how to persuade—rather than compel by force—citizens with widely different background beliefs, values, and ideals to adopt a liberal democratic framework. In *A Theory of Justice* (1971) Rawls argued that the central principles of such a society will be endorsed by all at least in certain, ideal conditions; in his later work, especially *Political Liberalism* (1996), he wanted to show that citizens, despite their different comprehensive moral views, can reach what he calls an overlapping consensus about the central tenets of a liberal democracy.

Many have found Rawls's suggestion problematic, and for good reason. Instead of listing possible problems, however, my aim is to present a more general perspective on the problems of his position. The first novelty of the discussion here is its wide-reaching formulation of the problem, which is generalizable to all versions of a position in meta-ethics and ethical theory, here to be referred to as *constructivism*. According to this position, in distinction to standard factual claims, normative claims are *valid* if they are or can be agreed upon by individuals and groups under conditions of freedom. Some important differences aside, this view is common to a number of thinkers aside from Rawls, such as Jürgen Habermas and Christine Korsgaard, here referred to as *the* constructivists.

I will argue that the constructivist view ultimately faces a dilemma. The first horn is a form of chauvinism: it makes the possibility of intersubjective agreement dependent on a conceptually narrowed scope of individuals or groups that are taken into consideration. The second horn is a form of historicist relativism à la Richard Rorty: it renders intersubjective agreement a mere coincidence, a contingent fact of history. Put in classical Kantian terms, the constructivist is looking for a *synthetic a priori* foundation for our agreement on some set of normative principles, but such agreement is ultimately dependent on either *analytic a priori* or *synthetic a posteriori* claims.

The second novelty of this discussion is its attempt to resolve the problem plaguing constructivism—a problem which was anticipated by Charles S. Peirce's remarkable discussion on different methods of fixing belief. As I will go on to argue, Peirce's criticism of the *a priori* method is applicable to contemporary constructivism, and the solution to its problems, the scientific method, entails abandoning constructivism in favor of realism.¹

THE CONSTRUCTION OF CONSTRUCTIVISM

The constructivist position, as I will here understand it, is not a singular philosophical stance. Rather, it is a family of slightly different views which share important common points of departure. These commonalities can be formulated in three propositions, the details of which are however subject to substantial differences between different constructivists.

The first common proposition is that the claims or judgments made in a particular domain, while not factual by nature, or attempting to represent things as they are, can however be *valid* in another fashion (to be specified).

A substantial difference among the constructivists concerns the domain of the claims in question itself. The label constructivism is from Rawls, who limits his view to what he calls *political constructivism*, in distinction to Kant's *moral* constructivism: he argues for the validity of certain basic principles of the political arrangement of a democratic society. Similarly, Habermas's constructivism pertains to what he calls *discourse ethics*, or the domain of social decision-making, which he claims inevitably entails certain democratic principles. Korsgaard's views are more aligned with (Kantian) moral constructivism: she argues that certain moral principles are valid due to the constitution of our agency itself.

Another difference concerns the logical relationship of the constructivist view with (meta-ethical) cognitivism. Cognitivism maintains that the judgments of a particular domain are cognitive, or truth-apt, while non-cognitivism is standardly conceived of as the denial of this view, at least

when truth is understood in a robust, non-minimal sense. Rawls contrasts his constructivist view with what he calls moral intuitionism, which amounts to the traditional cognitivist position; Korsgaard similarly argues that constructivism amounts to a view distinct from standard cognitivism (and non-cognitivism). Habermas, in turn, has sometimes rather presented his position as a version of cognitivism. This difference, however, is more verbal than substantial in nature: it is based on a differing understanding of "cognitivism." The issue is whether cognitivism is conceptually tied to the view that claims or judgments represent mind-independent facts (Rawls and Korsgaard), or whether it suffices for a cognitivist position that the claims or judgments can be valid (Habermas).²

The second proposition is that the validity of the claims of the domain under consideration amounts to an intersubjective *agreement* among (human) agents. Again, the claims in question are not valid by faithfully "representing" facts; instead, their validity is due to the fact that we all, in a manner to be specified, agree or are bound to agree on them.

A key difference between the constructivists is over whether such agreement is to be understood as actual or as occurring in a set of idealized circumstances (to be specified). In *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls argued that his two principles of justice concerning the arrangement of a liberal democratic society would be agreed upon by idealized representatives of citizens counterfactually situated in an "original position" behind a veil of ignorance which hides much of the agent's particular features and thus diminishes the influence of particular interests and desires. Habermas and the later Rawls have maintained that the relevant type of agreement is rather *actual* by nature. For Habermas, all participants in a social and political discourse are actually bound by a certain set of democratic principles. In *Political Liberalism*, Rawls hopes for a concrete "overlapping consensus" of different substantial normative views (or "comprehensive doctrines") to lay ground to a democratic society.

The third proposition concerns the source of the intersubjective agreement. Constructivists agree that the valid moral or political principles are such that we would arrive at under conditions of freedom. In Rawls's earlier view, the original position is occupied by the representatives of individuals *as* free and equal citizens; later, he has emphasized the overlap of *reasonable* comprehensive views, which are the products of a "framework of liberal institutions" (Rorty 1996, 37). In turn, the principles of Habermas's discourse ethics are designed to ascertain basic liberties, such as the freedom of opinion.

There is, however, much room for substantial differences between constructivist views, especially concerning the individual versus social nature of the locus of the agreement sought for. For the Rawls of *A Theory of Justice*, the principles of justice are such that they would be agreed upon by each *individual* (or his idealized representative) in the original

position. Similarly, in Korsgaard's view, valid moral views are due to the individual's (self-)constitution as an agent. In turn, for Habermas, the discourse between individuals and groups itself already entails principles that ground a democratic society. The later Rawls again comes closer to Habermas's view, as the "overlapping consensus" is to be derived from an actual discussion between citizens promoting different comprehensive doctrines.

Accordingly, we may distinguish two different strands of the concept of freedom that are involved in the constructivist account of validity. The first is freedom from coercion or oppression of opinion by an external authority, which, as the societal type of freedom, we may call *liberty*. The second type of freedom is freedom from an internal coercion of forces within individual agents themselves, which may entail internal compulsion of, say, obsession and mental illness, or even more generally the individuals' particular interests, urges, and desires. This type of freedom, we could—recalling Kant's distinctions—call *autonomy*.

A final, crucial difference between the constructivists concerns what we may call the *focus* of their account. Rawls aims to defend a set of democratic principles *as valid* in the (political) constructivist fashion, and Korsgaard argues for a set of moral principles (of action) in a similar vein. By contrast, Habermas attempts to show that the project of validating norms or moral views itself *assumes*, or implies the adoption of, a set of democratic principles, which we—engaged in such a project—are inevitably bound by. This difference however conceals a central commonality: the constructivist notion of validity must itself be made plausible for either course of argument to be successful.

There is thus a number of substantial differences between different constructivists as to the domain and scope of their accounts, as well as their relation to other philosophical positions. Still, in the following criticism I will remain at a level abstract enough to accommodate the whole family of constructivist views and take up these differences only when relevant to the argument. In the following sections, I will consider each of the constructivist propositions in turn. While the outcome of this consideration will be the constructivist position considerably weakened as to its scope and scale, it is a final criticism—offered in subsequent sections—that I think will show the barrenness of the constructivist project. This, in turn, will finally force us to consider a realist solution, pragmatically conceived.

TRUTH AND VALIDITY

The first constructivist proposition conceives the validity of claims in some domain in a fashion that differs from factual truth. When this domain is taken to be that of normative claims, the proposition faces a

formidable objection from the moral realist and moral sceptic alike. The realist and sceptic disagree on whether moral truth indeed is discoverable, but will maintain, against the constructivist, that the real debate is between *them*. Both will point out that validity is at best a secondary affair: we should look for factual truth also in normative matters.³ If the constructivist maintains that validity is the same as factual truth, the realist will be claiming a new ally; and if the constructivist admits that there is no factual truth about normative affairs, the sceptic will argue that constructivists are closet moral sceptics.

In dealing with this objection, the classical pragmatist view of truth—with some modifications—can come to the aid of the constructivist. The main contenders in contemporary discussions are the correspondence theory and a variety of deflationary or minimalist accounts. The former maintains that truth is a sort of a fit between a truth-bearer (idea, proposition, belief) and a truth-making reality. This account is often presented as an intuitively plausible *analysis* of our predicate “true.” Instead of setting about to uncover the meaning of truth, the latter, deflationary view attempts to give an account of the *use* of the truth predicate in our assertoric practices, an account that the deflationist usually argues is exhaustive of the predicate itself. In contrast, as I have argued at more length elsewhere, rather than focusing on the conceptual content or the use of the truth predicate, the classical pragmatists conceived of truth in terms of the sort of *beliefs* that we should, or would be better off to have (cf. “Pragmatism and the Aims of Inquiry”). In William James’s famous dictum, truth is just the “good by way of belief.” This notion of truth is indistinguishable from their notion of inquiry: truth is the *aim* of inquiry.

This pragmatist perspective will offer some conceptual leeway needful to the constructivist. The constructivist, reserving the label “truth” for *factual* truth, will disagree with the pragmatist about always equating the aim of inquiry with truth. Still, reformulating the pragmatist stance somewhat, he may argue that validity (as understood in his account), while not factual truth, is the aim of inquiry in the domain under consideration. From this point of view, the moral realist and sceptic, simply assimilating normative validity with factual truth, are mistaken as to the *point* of inquiry and debate about moral (or political) norms as opposed to inquiry into facts. Especially Habermas has argued for his constructivist position from this point of view, maintaining that the aim of a particular discourse, namely the social-political one, is the achievement of a consensus in accordance with a set of democratic principles. This is among the reasons why he has explicitly aligned his view with the pragmatist tradition.

While pragmatism is thus at least an amicable approach for the constructivist, it also offers a perspective critical of his project, and will ultimately bring into question the assumption that there would be a major divide between “factual” truth and validity in some other domain, such

as that of the moral or the political. The central text in this respect is Charles S. Peirce's classical piece, "The Fixation of Belief" (1877), which discusses four different ways of settling opinion—four different aims of inquiry, amounting to four different notions of truth from the classical pragmatist perspective. Despite its being one of Peirce's most read and commented writings, I don't think we have yet exhausted its riches; and in what follows, the different arguments for the constructivist position will be juxtaposed against its insight.

VALIDITY AS INTERSUBJECTIVE AGREEMENT

Assuming, for the sake of the argument, that the response just given on behalf of the constructivist will alleviate the greatest concerns with the first constructivist proposition, let us turn to a consideration of the second. This proposition maintains that the validity of a claim is to be identified with intersubjective agreement on that claim. Many of the constructivists, most prominently Rawls, have not argued at length for this view: it appears to be their basic position that if "factual" truth is unachievable, intersubjective approval is the closest we can get. By contrast, Habermas—following Karl-Otto Apel's lead—has attempted to formulate an argument to the effect that validity *must* be construed in this intersubjective fashion, and it is from this argument that the details of his whole position are supposed to flow.

Habermas's notion of the validity of norms is a notion of (idealized) justification: "Only those judgments and norms are valid that could be accepted for good reasons by everyone affected from the inclusive perspective of equally taking into consideration the evident claims of all persons" (2003, 261). His argument for this notion can be briefly outlined in four claims: firstly, that we discover the validity of moral norms through argumentation; secondly, that any participant in an argumentative discourse is bound by certain principles of argumentation; thirdly, that these principles include a principle of universalizability (or [U]); and fourthly, from [U] a principle of discourse ethics (or [D]) is derivable. [U] maintains that the consequences of a general observance of a valid norm must be acceptable to all, while [D] holds that norms are valid only if they "meet (or could meet) with the approval of all affected in their capacity as participants in a practical discourse" (Habermas 1990, 66). This latter principle amounts to the notion of validity of norms intended.

Habermas thus derives his notion of validity from the principles which, he argues, underlie all argumentative discourse. He wants to make it clear that the principles he promotes are not normative principles on par with any others, but principles that must be followed by anyone who partakes in an argumentative discourse. Otherwise, the risk here—as Habermas clearly perceives—is that substantial moral views are im-

ported into the discourse. Here he employs Karl-Otto Apel's "transcendental argument" to show that the principle [U] itself is a presupposition of argumentative discourse, and hence its observance is unavoidable to anyone attempting to justify norms of action: "Every person who accepts the universal and necessary communicative presuppositions of argumentative speech and who knows what it means to justify a norm of action implicitly presupposes as valid the principle of universalization" (Habermas 1990, 86). By this line of argument, Habermas (and Apel) want to show that even those who appear to scorn the opinions of others—say, the proponents of neo-Nazi views—are actually bound by the (democratic) principles of argumentative discourse in attempting to validate their normative views.

We need not consider the detailed analyses of communication and argumentation that Habermas (and Apel) supply to note that the strength of the transcendental argument is crucially dependent on our notion of discourse and argumentation. If argumentation is *defined* as the attempt to derive a shared opinion among a group of individuals, it immediately follows that anyone engaged in argumentation *is* concerned with finding such a common view, however the discourse is otherwise expected to proceed. But obviously, the hard case for the discourse ethicist is exactly individuals or groups who do *not* wish to engage in such a project. Merely holding an opinion—entertaining some belief or another—does not imply that one is open to debate and argumentation with others. Habermas's account reflects this fact in his admission that, while his principles may be requirements of participating in an argumentative discourse, their observance is not prerequisite to acting itself. Outside of the discourse people may act on opinions which have not been tested against those of others.

This fact is brought clearly to the fore by Peirce's classic piece. The first of the four methods of fixing belief Peirce discusses is that of tenacity, the steadfast clinging to one's own opinion. Oblivious to the intersubjective appeal of his views, the tenacious is the paradigmatic "hard case." And from the pragmatist point of view, the possibility of tenacity implies serious problems for (Habermas's) constructivism. In the pragmatist sense, this method amounts to its own (albeit crude) notion of truth: it is the aim of the tenacious inquiry to stick to the beliefs one already has. Translating this into the constructivist's terms of the constructivist, it becomes evident that the tenacious employs a notion of *validity* which is *not* the same as the constructivist's own, intersubjective view. The example of the tenacious thus shows that in fact, aiming at validity construed as intersubjective agreement is not a condition—let alone a transcendental one—for maintaining a moral norm.

Peirce does point out that we are *de facto* dissatisfied with fixing belief just for oneself; a "social impulse" will count against tenacity (1992, 116). We wish others to share our views: to settle opinion so that it is fixed for

all in an intersubjective fashion. On this conclusion, the pragmatist and the constructivist agree. But instead of attempting a transcendental (or “nazi-proof”) argument to this effect, Peirce does not intend to show that inquiry inevitably *must* have such validity as its aim. Instead, tenacity remains a live option, and the implication is that the constructivist’s most straightforward defence of his view is not sustainable as such.

AGREEMENT AND FREEDOM

If the foregoing is along the right tracks, the constructivist has no alternative but to scale back ambition. His arguments will not convince those who simply are not concerned with convincing others, but who nevertheless maintain moral or political opinions. The constructivist is forced to give up the initial high hopes of persuading such individuals solely by argumentative means. But perhaps this is not fatal to the whole of his project. After all—the constructivist can maintain—as social creatures embedded in social contexts and political arrangements, we are almost inevitably concerned with gaining others on our side. Along Peircean lines, the constructivist may hope that everyone will ultimately become disillusioned by mere tenacity. The constructivist may still point out that he supplies a feasible account of how intersubjective agreement is to be achieved among those concerned with it.

This latter account is encapsulated by the third proposition, which maintains that valid claims are those that can be intersubjectively agreed upon under conditions of freedom. Habermas’s formulation nicely captures the joint constructivist stance: in his view, argumentative speech as a process of communication presupposes universal and equal rights of participation in the absence of “all external or internal coercion other than the force of the better argument” (1990, 89). The sort of agreement that counts is one that is brought about under conditions of (external) liberty and (internal) autonomy.

This demand is, however, again more substantial than it might initially seem. Intersubjective agreement can be achieved by other means. Consider an option discussed in Peirce’s “Fixation.” By the second of Peirce’s methods, the method of authority, agreement across individuals is brought about by external compulsion: the state itself imposes the correct opinion on its subjects, and puts down heresy by all means necessary. The followers of this method, then, achieve agreement by relying on the testimony of an infallible authority in settling their opinion. What is there to show that intersubjective agreement should not be derived in this way?

Again, Habermas attempts to “go transcendental”: he argues that a number of principles, including the freedom to voice one’s own opinion as well as to question any view, are required by an argumentative dis-

course, or communicative action, as its “inescapable presuppositions” (1990, 89). But again, this is simply to define argumentation (or other relevant concepts) in a way that assumes these principles. Such a transcendental argument will not convince those to whom the project of drawing intersubjective agreement is *de facto* based on an authoritative source. If argumentative discourse, as conceived of by the Habermasian democrat, shrugs the opinion of the authority, the follower of the authority will simply shrug argumentative discourse.

Rawls, in turn, attempts to argue that there will be an overlapping consensus about a set of liberal democratic principles, among people maintaining different comprehensive doctrines. Importantly, however, Rawls demands that the members of the society maintaining those doctrines are *reasonable*, or “desire for its own sake a social world in which they, as free and equal, can cooperate with others on terms all can accept” (1996, 50). Similarly, in the original position, our idealized representatives setting the principles of the democratic society are our representatives *as free and equal citizens* under constraints that express “the reasonable and so the formal conditions implicit in the moral powers of the members of a well-ordered society whom the parties represent” (Rawls 1996, 106). The problem with such a view is its circularity: Rawls’s liberal democratic principles are supported by all parties (at least in idealized conditions) simply because the relevant parties *are* those who agree on those principles. Again, Peirce’s contrary example shows the problems of such an attempt. The follower of the authority will simply fall out of the picture simply by not being willing to accept the principles of a liberal democracy at the outset.

CONCEPTUAL CHAUVINISM

If the foregoing criticism hits its mark, the constructivist is again forced to reconsider the scope of his view. It cannot be that we are all inevitably wedded to the notion of validity as agreement under certain kinds of conditions, such as those of liberty and autonomy, as Peirce’s example of the method of authority shows. But perhaps the constructivist position can again recast itself by admitting that it addresses only people relevantly similar to the constructivist himself—those who are reasonable in Rawls’s fashion. Surely there are many enough such people around, and constructivism, it may be argued, will at least supply a conception of what it means for (moral or political) norms or principles to be valid for us *as* such people.

Obviously, the basic structure of the constructivist view will then guarantee that norms enabling the liberal moral or political discourse will themselves be agreed upon by everyone involved: again, this is because we are engaged in a discussion only with those who already do agree on

these norms. This can easily be shown either in the Habermasian transcendental fashion, or by employing a Rawlsian notion of reasonableness. Habermas would not be satisfied with such a line of argument, but for the later Rawls and other less transcendentially inclined constructivists, this could be quite enough. After all, what the constructivists wanted to show (in their different ways) was always the validity of the democratic principles themselves.

Still, what of any other substantial moral norms concerning correct conduct, or political norms—such as those governing social institutions and policy, criminal justice and distribution of wealth—when their implementation is *not* prerequisite to the participation of all other liberal democrats? What makes us think that there will be any (lasting) agreement over this or that moral or political view—any claim that could be valid in the constructivist fashion—even among the liberal? The constructivists have not made any efforts to answer such questions. Quite the contrary, Rawls himself maintains that under conditions of liberty, different mutually irreconcilable comprehensive doctrines will develop (1996, 36). Then, however, it follows that no agreement will be reached over any policies *other* than those immediately derivable from the democratic principles themselves.

The issue at hand shows the underlying dialectic we have faced in considering both the second and the third constructivist propositions. Once again, to show some substantial norm to be valid, we might of course simply argue that we are all bound to agree on it, for that is what it is to be a participant of a free argumentative discourse, or a citizen of a liberal democratic society—to be one of *us*. This option leads to a (conceptual) *chauvinism*: it is for us to take into account only those who are relevantly similar. Alternatively, we may argue for the validity of some substantial moral or political position by pointing out that a wide-reaching agreement over that position actually prevails. But this alternative leads to a form of (historicist) *relativism*. The constructivist's view, if I am correct, is stuck between the horns of a dilemma between chauvinism and relativism. Validity conceived of in its terms is achieved either by definition—or by coincidence.

The first horn of this dilemma is readily illustrated by one of Korsgaard's key examples. Korsgaard argues that the Kantian hypothetical and categorical imperatives are the *constitutive*, normative principles of agency, for they are the principles "that we must be at least trying to follow if we are to count as acting at all" (2009, 45). Korsgaard explicates the idea of constitutive principles by drawing from an analogy with a particular activity, namely swimming:

Constitutive principles, like constitutive standards more generally, are normative and descriptive at the same time. They are normative, because in performing the activity of which they are the principles, we

are guided by them, and yet can fail to conform to them. But they are also descriptive, because they describe the activities we perform when we are guided by them. . . . If I am not swimming . . . then my failure to make headway through the water is no failure at all. But if I'm trying to swim . . . and all I succeed in doing is splashing around in the water, then my failure to make headway is a failure indeed. (2008, 9)

Again, however, this notion of constitutive principles uncomfortably rests on the definitions we have given of the activities in question. If we have *defined* swimming as the attempt to make headway in water, then it does follow that someone who tries to swim but only manages to splash water around is making a bad job at swimming. By analogy, then, if we have defined *agents* as those who purport to follow certain principles of practical reason—those engaging in the Korsgaardian project of “self-constitution”—it immediately follows that someone who fails to abide by those principles is doing poorly *as* a self-constituting agent. But what of those who are *not* interested in self-constitution, or being an agent in Korsgaard's fashion—or those who are not trying to swim?

HISTORICIST RELATIVISM

Avoiding the chauvinistic alternative means that the constructivist cannot rely on definitions in his attempt to show that certain principles are agreed upon by everyone. But what if, without the aid of such “transcendental arguments,” there are no such principles to be uncovered? This is the upshot of Peirce's discussion of the third method of fixing belief, the method of *a priori*. By that method, we settle our opinion in a free discussion with others under conditions of liberty. However, as Peirce points out, in the absence of any further constraint to the opinion agreed upon, this method makes inquiry “something similar to the development of taste; but taste, unfortunately, is always more or less a matter of fashion” (1992, 119). The condition Peirce describes is the second horn of the constructivist's dilemma, which, I have claimed, amounts to lapsing into a variant of relativism.

As relativism is a broad notion, it is useful to distinguish at least three different variants. (I by no means intend to claim that these alternatives exhaust different philosophical positions that have been called by this name.) A first variant might be called *conceptual* relativism. It maintains that truth is conceptually or indexically tied up to the opinion of some individual or group of individuals: to call some claim true is to say that the claim is believed by the speaker, his group, or a whole culture that the speaker represents. As such, this brand of relativism has not gained much popularity. It does however have an analogue in the somewhat more popular meta-ethical position called speaker subjectivism, which maintains that usage of key normative terms is pegged to the speaker's own

attitudes: for example, to call an act “right” is simply to say that the act is approved by the speaker (or his group). Such a view is, of course, incompatible with the constructivist’s notion of validity.

A second variant we might call *factual* relativism. Instead of making conceptual claims about central semantic (or normative) notions, this variant attempts to argue that the world itself, or the “facts,” are different for different individuals (groups, cultures). Hence truth, too, is relative. This version faces a number of well-rehearsed problems. One is the self-referential problematic famously levied by Plato’s Socrates against Protagoras. Another is the Davidsonian challenge of making sense of how we could even intelligibly realize that we occupy different worlds (or “conceptual schemes”). As such, this version of relativism has not received much serious philosophical support, and in any case has no clear affinities with the constructivist view.

A third and far more interesting form of relativism is the ethnocentrist and historicist position prominently advanced by Richard Rorty. This view abandons the idea that there is something like “the world” which would constrain our opinion in a rational fashion. (All that remains, in his “Darwinian” story, are the *causal* connections that we, including our opinions, have with “facts.”) Following Donald Davidson, Rorty attempts to show that the idea of the world, and of truth as correspondence with the world, have fueled both realism and (factual) relativism alike. The upshot, Rorty argues, is that there is no hope for truth and objectivity in a sense that would exceed the approval of one’s peers. While we may hope to bring others under the same fold, our success is not due to the influence of anything but sheer historical occurrence. For Rorty’s unabashedly ethnocentrist “Western liberal intellectual,” there is “nothing to be said about either truth or rationality apart from descriptions of the familiar procedures of justification which a given society—*ours*—uses in one or another area of inquiry” (2010, 229), admitting as he does that “we must, in practice, privilege our own group, even though there can be no non-circular justification for doing so” (2010, 335). In Rorty’s slogan, intersubjective agreement is grounded on “solidarity” rather than (fact-based) “objectivity.”

While Rorty does not think that his view amounts to a form of relativism deserving of the name, there is reason to hold that the converse moral can be drawn.⁴ Neither of the two other variants of relativism just listed have received much serious support; if anything, it is Rorty’s view that can seriously be advanced as the philosophically interesting relativistic position. It is this *historicist* form of relativism that the constructivist position threatens to collapse into. (Of course, nothing crucial depends on labels: if one rather reserves “relativism” to the two other possible views, one may call this third variant simply historicism instead.) It entails the three constructivist propositions: it maintains that intersubjective agreement is the (only) sort of validity we may attain, and that the relevant

kind of agreement is forged among Rortian “wet liberals.” At the same time, it holds that there are no grounds for intersubjective agreement beyond mere historical fact. Indeed, it readily admits that there are no grounds for holding the agreement among our liberal peers itself on a place of prestige; that is simply what we do.

A REALIST SOLUTION

The problem faced by the constructivist can be put in distinctly Kantian terms. On the one hand, the constructivist may define key terms of his argument in a way that immediately leads to his conclusion. Perhaps all agents attempt to follow a set of principles because that is what it *means* to be an agent. It is then an *analytic a priori* truth that all agents agree on those principles. On the other hand, the constructivist may note that agents *do* follow some set of principles. This claim is then a *synthetic a posteriori* truth. But what the constructivist is seeking is neither analytic, a matter of how we have defined key terms merely, nor a *posteriori*, a matter of coincidental fact. What he *is* seeking all along is the Kantian *synthetic a priori*: that there would be a truth concerning the acceptance of a set of principles neither dependent on our definitions (but, rather, synthetic) nor captive of historical coincidence (but, rather, *a priori*). The agreement on such principles would somehow be *inevitable* without being a matter of conceptual analysis merely.

I have argued that, abandoning conceptual chauvinism, the ultimate outcome of the constructivist position is, if anything, a relativism of the historicist stripe. This latter view is not inherently problematic. Just as against the followers of Peirce’s methods of tenacity and authority, there is no method-neutral, independent argument by which to refute the *a priori* method.⁵ Neither is the following of that method self-refuting: there is no *a priori* proof that the *a priori* method itself will not lead to any substantial results. Rather, if anything, once the method is found unsatisfactory, we have already started to think in terms of *another* method. The realization that the *a priori* method leads to no substantial results can only be made from the point of view of a method that tracks the historical and factual development of human opinion.

This move anticipates the solution that Peirce offers to the problem of the *a priori* method, which is turning to the fourth and final method of fixing belief he discusses, the scientific method. By this method, our opinions are to be “determined by nothing human, but some external permanency” which “affects, or might affect, every man” (Peirce 1992, 120). Instead of relying on the opinions of one or the many, the scientific method renders our beliefs answerable to an independent reality. The hypothesis that underlies the scientific method is the assumption that there are things independent of whatever any number of us may think—the view

we could call *hypothetical realism*. As such, it avoids both of the pitfalls of the *a priori* alternative. It renders intelligible how the acceptance of a particular opinion may be inevitable as the opinion that reality itself (at least ultimately) would force upon us. Such an opinion is not coincidental, a mere product of taste, nor is it based on our deliberately limiting the group of those whose opinions count.

The abstract notion of the scientific method is readily open to two lines of criticism. The first is the standard objection that its notion of truth is that of the “mystical” correspondence with a reality as it is by itself, a notion which has been the subject of much well-rehearsed philosophical criticism. Another objection, more pertinent to the topic at hand, is that such a realist view is not suitable for dealing with normative issues. But the pragmatist is set apart from the traditional correspondence theorist and realist in several ways, on which I will be here limited to the following remarks.

Firstly, there is the pragmatist’s unique way of deriving the notion of an independent reality. The pragmatist does not attempt to argue that truth, on *conceptual* grounds, amounts to something like “correspondence.” Instead, notions of truth are as various as are the methods of fixing opinion. As we will ultimately find the scientific conception the most satisfactory, realism is rather the outcome of a normative story about the aim of inquiry.

Secondly, the pragmatist does not remain on a high level of abstraction but insists that what it means for our opinions to accord with an independent reality is to be worked out in a practical fashion. Making this notion a slight bit more concrete, Peirce suggests that truths are those opinions that would continue to withstand doubt were scientific inquiry pursued indefinitely. The particular methods of science—norms and desiderata for inquiry and theories—are themselves open to revision and up to scientific practice. Crucially, the inquiry in question is not just *any* investigation but such inquiry that attempts to find out how things are independently of our opinions and desires. This prevents the scientific method from collapsing back to the *a priori* method. Instead of pulling solidarity and objectivity apart in Rorty’s fashion, then, the scientific method glues these two together in its practice: it is by the truth-seeking activity of a community of inquirers that factual objectivity is to be achieved.

Thirdly, the pragmatist approach opens a novel way of understanding truth in normative matters. The problem of the standard cognitivist approaches has always been to find the sort of *facts* that our normative claims could “correspond” within a scientific and naturalistic framework. The constructivists attempt to avoid this problem by diverging factual truth from the validity of moral or political norms. The pragmatist alternative here explored brings factual and normative opinion back under the same fold by its insistence that the latter, too, could be settled by

scientific means. However, this does not amount to a return to the usual cognitivist problematic. Equipped with a traditional correspondence notion of truth, the traditional cognitivist has been looking for a sort of one-on-one match (or accurate “representation”) between, say, a truthbearer and a truthmaker. The pragmatist conceives of the answerability of opinion to reality far more broadly: it does not require of our opinions to “represent” reality to be *guided* by it. This loosens the grip of standard picture so that the reality in question can be reconceived.

Fourthly, the pragmatist also has at hand at least the beginnings of an account of the sort of reality that our normative opinion can be answerable to in Peirce’s later views, especially his naturalistically conceived of teleology. Peirce argued that certain ideas (or ideals) themselves have the tendency of becoming more powerful by gaining more ground. (Peirce’s statistical understanding of final causation and its connection to normativity has been discussed in great detail by T. L. Short in *Peirce’s Theory of Signs*.) Although I cannot defend this highly original position here, it opens up the possibility that our normative opinions are to be settled in accordance with such tendencies, which are independent of our particular inclinations and desires. This is the form that hypothetical realism may take on normative matters.

Fifthly, and finally, the scientific method thus conceived can be defended by its own means, in the light of the method itself. Someone—a Rorty perhaps—could argue that the scientific method and its account of objectivity is just another story we let pass by. While, as with any other method, the scientific one cannot show its own supremacy in a method-neutral fashion, it can still draw from its own notion of truth in its own defence. (For elaboration on this point, see my “Naturalism and Normative Science.”) The acceptance of the method, from its own point of view, is not a simple matter of having convinced our peers to assume a certain “objectifying” vocabulary. Instead, the scientist may argue that the scientific method—its normative principles concerning the fixation of opinion—are those imposed upon us by reality itself.

CONCLUSION

The constructivists have attempted to show that there are principles which we must unavoidably follow: for Rawls, these are the principles of a liberal democratic society, which would thus be shown valid; for Korsgaard, the inevitable principles constituting us as agents; and for Habermas, the constructivist principles concerning validity itself. As I have argued, at bottom this search has been for principles that we would agree on neither by definition nor by coincidence: our agreement on them would be a synthetic truth, but still necessary in the *a priori* fashion. However, the constructivist proposals for such principles face formid-

able, concrete counterexamples, such as those that Peirce invokes in his discussion on the different methods of fixing belief. In each case, the constructivist is forced either to limit the scope of his discussion by definitional means, leading to what I called conceptual chauvinism, or to draw from the fact of coincidental agreement, which amounts to a historicist variant of relativism. Crucially, as we have seen, the constructivist's own notion of validity—especially its second and third propositions as distinguished above—is itself among the principles that Peirce's examples render doubtful.

The solution to the constructivist's problems, here promoted under the banner of pragmatism, is the bold acceptance of wide-reaching realism. Peirce's scientific method, I have argued, makes our (inevitable) agreement as inquirers intelligible by relying on the hypothesis of an independent reality. Moreover, in explicating agreement in terms of the influence of such a reality—or drawing solidarity from objectivity—it is extendable to the domain of the normative as well. This goes against much contemporary philosophical acumen, which maintains that the whole idea of normative truth, unless conceptually reducible to some innocuous natural facts, has unacceptable non-naturalist implications. This assumption has led to the popularity of the simile of the first constructivist proposition, which drives a wedge between factual truth and normative validity. To many, contesting this dichotomy will appear outlandish, and any proposal of a robust realism about normativity dangerous. Much work is thus required to carve the conceptual space for a position which attempts to bridge the chasm. But to make good on the promise of the realistic solution to the constructivist problem—as well as to be consistent with its own, normative story about the development of the scientific method—this is the direction that the pragmatist enterprise must take.

NOTES

1. It is thus that Rawls's problem will here receive a Peircean "fix"; indeed, an early draft of this paper was originally presented under the title "Rawlsian Problems, Peircean Solutions" at the conference *Persuasion and Compulsion in Democracy*, in Opole, Poland, April 2012.

2. Especially on this point, Habermas's account has undergone substantial revision during the past decades. Earlier, he proposed an epistemic conception of truth in terms of agreement derived from an idealized argumentative discourse, which in effect assimilated the notion of truth for factual and normative claims. In his more recent work, Habermas has emphasized the differences between the two, maintaining that the notion of factual truth (unlike that of the validity of norms) cannot be exhausted by an epistemic conception.

3. Contemporary pragmatists have been critical of the constructivist's way of distinguishing between factual truth and normative validity, arguing that such a dichotomy will be difficult to maintain (cf. Misak 2000, 37–38; Bernstein 2010, 198–99). This criticism is well founded, but we have yet to see the pragmatists offering a plausible

alternative approach. The solution offered here attempts to overcome the dichotomy by showing that the pragmatist perspective enables us to assume a realist approach to factual and normative questions alike.

4. Rorty himself distinguishes three forms of relativism somewhat analogous to the ones discussed here, the third form being his own ethnocentrist view, which he wishes to distinguish from the first and the second.

5. Some contemporary Peircean pragmatists, most notably Cheryl Misak and Robert B. Talisse, have argued that a certain notion of truth or epistemic norms—that embedded in Peirce's scientific method—is inevitable due to the nature of *belief* itself. But this does not align well with Peirce's discussion of different methods of fixing belief, as it renders all of the other methods moot. If anything, in its reliance on a definition of belief as fixable only by certain means, this approach slips into the problematic argumentative strategy of the constructivist.

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Realism without Mirrors

Abstract

Contemporary pragmatists, especially those who follow Richard Rorty's lead, have contested the philosophical paradigm they have referred to as 'representationalism': the idea that our claims or beliefs describe or are 'about' the world. These 'new pragmatists' have often been seen to be in an antagonistic relationship with their antecedents, the pragmatists of the turn of the 20th century: these 'classical pragmatists' advanced at least moderate forms of realism, towards which the non-representationalist position is taken to be hostile. A case in point is Charles S. Peirce, who proposed that our beliefs are to be fixed by the scientific method which entails an assumption of an independent reality which those beliefs may accord with.

I argue that the views of the classical pragmatists are amenable to an expressivist and non-representationalist interpretation. The prevalent assumption that this cannot be the case is due to the received wisdom that realism entails representationalism. But for Peirce, the scientific method and its commitment to what I will refer to as *hypothetical realism* is not derived from a robust notion of representation. As such it is fully compatible with the non-representationalist view: it is a realism without representationalism. I will further show that this position enables us to reconceptualize different brands of realism, such as *normative* realism.

1. Introduction

Contemporary pragmatists, especially those who in one way or another follow Richard Rorty's lead, have contested the philosophical paradigm they have referred to as 'representationalism': the idea that our claims, thoughts, beliefs and the like describe, reflect or are

‘about’ the world or reality. These ‘new pragmatists’ have often been seen to be in an antagonistic relationship with their antecedents. The pragmatists of the turn of the 20th century, Charles S. Peirce, William James and John Dewey, all advanced at least moderate forms of realism, towards which the non-representationalist position is taken to be hostile. Contrary to this common assumption, it is my aim to show that, on the one hand, the early pragmatists could adopt the basic tenets of non-representationalism and that, on the other hand, the form of realism they developed could complement the views of their contemporary namesakes. The result of this novel combination is a realism which does without representationalism.

In what follows, I will first describe meta-ethical expressivism and its current non-representationalist offspring, the *global expressivist* view that Huw Price defends in the papers collected in *Naturalism without Mirrors* (2011b) and several other writings. I will then proceed to argue that the views of the pragmatists allow for an expressivist and non-representationalist interpretation. The assumption that this cannot be the case is based on the received wisdom that realism and non-representationalism are incompatible philosophical views—an assumption I will contest by arguing that realism, conceived of as an ontological (as opposed to a semantic) view, is fully compatible with non-representationalism. Moreover, I will propose that Charles S. Peirce’s account of the scientific method and its realist underpinnings—the view which I will call *hypothetical realism*—is not derived from representationalist considerations but, rather, can be sustained within a non-representationalist framework. Finally, as an example of how the novel view here developed can help us to reconceptualize realism in different domains, I will consider its extension to normative (or moral) realism.

2. Varieties of expressivism

A central debate in meta-ethics of the past decades was first conceived of as one between cognitivism and non-cognitivism. Traditional non-cognitivism, originally proposed by thinkers such as Stevenson (1944) and Ayer (1952), held that moral (or more broadly

normative) statements do not express beliefs but, rather, non-cognitive states such as emotions and desires. As such, normative statements—unlike non-normative ones—were argued to have no truth-values. Cognitivism, in turn, is the traditional view that normative statements—like non-normative statements—describe the world, express beliefs, and have truth-values like any other statement.

Non-cognitivism fell out of philosophical favor by the late 1960s due to criticism by Peter Geach and John Searle, who argued that the non-cognitivist has no plausible account of how statements expressing non-cognitive attitudes enter into logical relations such as those involved in deductive inferences. For a while this Frege-Geach-Searle objection was held to be a decisive refutation of non-cognitivism. Since the 1980s, however, philosophers working under the *expressivist* banner have attempted to tackle this problem in various ways. Simon Blackburn's (1988; 1998) expressivism set out to earn the right for a notion of truth for normative claims, non-cognitivistically understood, by combining non-cognitivism with a deflationary account of truth. This quasi-realist approach was to make sense of the realist-seeming nature of such claims while retaining a crucial contrast between normative and non-normative statements. At the same time, expressivist views became more encompassing. In Allan Gibbard's (1990; 2003) expressivist understanding of language, non-normative statements themselves are conceived of as *expressions* of belief-like states instead of *descriptions* of the world. This approach, Gibbard has argued, will ultimately enable the expressivist to cast the Fregean concerns of Geach and Searle behind.

While whether Gibbard is correct is a question far beyond the scope of this discussion, as a consequence of these developments, the original debate between non-cognitivism and cognitivism was now conceived of as one between two different approaches to *language*: expressivism and (what is now often called) descriptivism. This spreading of the expressivist stance beyond its initial domain of normative language has paved the way for Huw Price's (2011a; 2011b) *global expressivism*. Price, to an extent following Richard Rorty's lead, contests the traditional philosophical notion of representation—the idea that our thoughts, claims, statements and the like are 'about' or describe some 'facts'. In his view—which he has likened to Robert

Brandom's (1994; 2000) inferentialism—claims rather express our functional, behavioral and inferential stances or commitments. When making such commitments explicit in a discourse with others, our claims attain their typical assertoric shape and propositional form; Brandom's view of assertion as making inferential commitments explicit is one account of how this takes place.

People working under the expressivist banner are thus variously divided. Blackburn has retained a descriptivist view about non-normative statements, which his quasi-realism is not intended to cover. His expressivism is thus *local*. In turn, Gibbard and more recently Mark Schroeder (2008) have extended expressivism to non-normative language. In their view, however, non-normative judgments gain their truth-conditions, or propositional content, from the beliefs that they express: for example, the statement “a cat is on a mat” expresses the belief *that* a cat is on a mat, and it is the propositional content of this belief (i.e. that a cat is on a mat) which then forms the truth-conditions of that statement. While in a sense encompassing both normative and non-normative uses of language, this approach thus splits language into (at least two) distinct regions, one of which still involves a robust notion of representational content. Such expressivism is, we might put it, *regional*.

The *global* expressivism advanced by Price (and Brandom, in Price's reading) adopts a crucially different perspective. Eschewing any robust concept of representation, it does without any contrast with between normative and non-normative statements (thoughts, beliefs) in representationalist terms. The differences between these sort of thoughts or commitments are functional rather than representational by nature. Price's global expressivism is thus a (globally) *non-representationalist* position. It maintains that claims or statements express commitments of a practical sort. Such commitments do not involve a “representation” of reality but are functional or behavioral in nature.¹ While nothing prevents the non-

¹ To be precise, in order to avoid potentially paradoxical-seeming statements, Price's global expressivist nowhere *denies* that our claims do not “represent” the world. Rather, the global expressivist *avoids* making such claims in giving her account of language.

representationalist from employing standard philosophical notions such as “content” and “proposition” (or, indeed, “representation”), these notions are to be construed in a manner that does not involve a robust representational relation from claims, thoughts and mental states to reality. Accordingly, truth is not to be understood as “correspondence” of a thought or a claim with reality but as a linguistic or grammatical device as a variety of deflationary or minimalist accounts have maintained. This non-representationalist approach is currently gaining ground under the label of *pragmatism*.

3. Pragmatism and expressivism

In what follows, I will argue that pragmatism in its *classical* form can be interpreted as combining realism—in particular, a form of scientific realism as proposed by Charles S. Peirce—with a non-representationalist position closely akin to that advanced by their contemporary offspring. As the very thought that the pragmatists (as I will refer to its classics, especially Peirce) could have approved of anything like the non-representationalist view is rather contentious, I will offer three different considerations in defence of the first claim. Firstly, the pragmatists anticipated the local expressivist view pertaining to moral language. Secondly, the very starting point of pragmatism, the *pragmatist maxim*, implies that our claims are primarily to be taken to express our functional or practical dispositions and commitments—the shared starting point of regional and global expressivism. And thirdly, the form of realism that the pragmatists advanced is not only independent of representationalist assumptions but moreover gives grounds to a non-representationalist (or global expressivist) interpretation of pragmatism; indeed, in the following sections I will argue that if Peirce had been a proponent of a straightforward representationalist picture, his defence of scientific realism would *not* have taken the shape it did.

According to my first claim, the pragmatists advanced a view of moral language which bears resemblance to contemporary (non-cognitivist) expressivism. Obviously, such a claim is bound to be somewhat anachronistic. It would not do much injustice to say that

the contemporary meta-ethical debate largely begins with G. E. Moore's (1903) famous Open Question Argument, which challenges the cognitivists to make good sense of what sort of properties normative terms such as 'good' and 'right' predicate. Peirce, James and Dewey never took up Moore's argument, and their writings do not involve much by way of sustained discussions on meta-ethical topics.²

Considering James's usual lack of interest in the systematic development of themes in the philosophy of language, it may come as something of a surprise that their probably most sustained statement on normative thought and language appears in his relatively early address, "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life" (1891). There James maintains that moral ideals are dependent on the desires or demands of "sentient beings" such as ourselves:

Physical facts simply *are* or are *not*; and neither when present or absent, can they be supposed to make demands. If they do, they can only do so by having desires; and then they have ceased to be purely physical facts, and have become facts of conscious sensibility. Goodness, badness, and obligation must be realized somewhere in order really to exist; and the first step in ethical philosophy is to see that no merely inorganic 'nature of things' can realize them. (James 1897, p. 190.)

From this, James draws the following conclusion concerning moral language:

[T]he words 'good,' 'bad,' and 'obligation' [...] mean no absolute natures, independent of personal support. They are objects of feeling and desire,

² Common to the pragmatists is the view that our moral ideas are open to revision quite like our other ideas. At least initially, this could be taken to imply a cognitivist position according to which moral thoughts and claims are responsive to some (moral) facts. My ultimate proposal here also attempts to make sense of the idea that normative thought is open to revision in a manner analogous to non-normative thought. If successful, then, the position here developed will also account for the cognitivist-seeming views of the pragmatists.

which have no foothold or anchorage in Being, apart from the existence of actually living minds. (James 1897, p. 197.)

Put in contemporary terms, James here argues that moral terms—unlike claims concerning physical facts—do not refer to properties out there in the world (or “absolute natures”) but rather give expression to our conative states of mind (or the “objects of feeling and desire”). This picture obviously bears resemblance to Simon Blackburn’s *local* expressivism.

According to my second proposal, there is reason to think that the pragmatists could accept the extension of the expressivist approach beyond its traditional moral scope. The origin of pragmatism is in the pragmatist maxim formulated by Charles S. Peirce (1878) and later advanced in a somewhat different version by William James (1907, ch. 2), who was the first to use the term “pragmatism” in print, giving full credit to Peirce, in 1898. This maxim is sometimes glossed as the pragmatist account of meaning; however, this is a rather crude simplification. In Peirce’s original formulation, pragmatism enables us to grasp a *dimension* of meaning aside from acquaintance-based familiarity and definitional understanding of a concept. To attain a further, or ‘third’ grade of clarity of our claims (or the concepts they involve), we are to consider the imaginable practical consequences differences in the conduct of an agent who believes that claim (or a claim which entails that concept): to find out what is (in this sense) meant by ‘hard,’ we are to consider the conduct of someone who believes that something is hard.³ Moreover, any meaningful claim is one that would make a practical difference to the conduct of an acting agent. The pragmatist maxim relies on the contention that beliefs by their nature involve a preparedness to act under some conceivable circumstances: they are *habits* (although ones that never may bear fruit in actual conduct). As with regional and global

³ Pragmatists often connect these consequences to the conduct of an agent to the expectations of what will occur in experience, if the accepted idea or claim is true (cf. Rydenfelt 2009a). However, in my view even this connection assumes the perspective of the Peircean scientific method, to which I will presently return.

expressivism, pragmatism hinges on the idea that our claims—including our non-normative claims—express functional or dispositional states of a practical nature.

This starting point however leaves open the issue of the role of representation in the pragmatist account. Regional expressivism, as we saw, still retains a representationalist order of explanation: it views beliefs as attitudes towards propositions (or ‘representations’), the acceptance of which will then involve some practical consequences to the believing agent’s conduct. Global expressivism or non-representationalism implies a reverse order of explanation. It does not begin with a received account (propositional) *content*, and with beliefs as attitudes towards such content. Instead, it sets out with the notion of beliefs as functional or dispositional states. Propositional content, in turn, is considered in terms of functional and inferential commitments that are put forward in our assertoric practices. Semantic notions such as ‘proposition’, ‘content’ and ‘representation,’ are technical and philosophical devices for accounting for what is being believed, thought or said—for what, for example, is common to different verbal manifestations of the same claim or thought.

As we may well expect, Peirce offers no single account pertaining to the role of representation (understood in this contemporary fashion). At points, he holds on to the traditional notion of beliefs as attitudes towards propositions, lending to a representationalist interpretation (e.g. Peirce 1903, p. 139). But many of his discussions on the nature of beliefs do not at all invoke representationalist notions at all. Crucially, Peirce nowhere appears to maintain that the practical operation of beliefs as habits is due to a specific ‘representing’ function, or their being ‘about’ some realities, nor that believing requires awareness of a (representational) content or proposition. (Indeed, when we ascribe beliefs to animals, such as dogs, we cannot even expect them to be able to formulate the content of their belief in any such manner.) The basic ideas of the non-representationalist view could thus be accepted by Peirce; as I will proceed to argue in what follows, this view is better suited to Peirce’s discussion of truth and the scientific method than the representationalist alternative.

It is not my intention to claim that the pragmatist account of the nature of claims and the sort of functional states they express is in every detail the same as that advanced by their contemporary namesakes. Robert Brandom has noted that the classical pragmatists' notion of meaning centres on practical consequences in conduct. This is in distinction to his own account by which the meaning of a claim (or its conceptual content) is composed of both its consequences in action (or its 'exit rules') *and* the circumstances where one becomes entitled or committed to endorse that claim (or its 'entry rules'). Brandom turns this fact into a criticism of pragmatism, which in his view leads to a semantic theory which is "literally one-sided" as it identifies "propositional contents exclusively with the consequences of endorsing a claim, looking downstream to the claim's role as a premise in practical reasoning and ignoring its proper antecedents upstream" (2000, pp. 64, 66).

I'm mostly in agreement with Brandom's analysis: there is a difference of this sort—at least one of emphasis—between his view and that of the early pragmatists. However, I do not think this should be taken to imply that the latter account is crucially limited; instead, the pragmatist view comes with a distinct advantage.⁴ Consider, for example, an atheist and a religious fundamentalist, who not only sharply disagree about whether there is a God but have radically different notions of what counts as evidence for or against such a claim. It is a well-known consequence of Brandom's account that 'God' and "God exists" then mean different things for them: they have differing entry rules for the commitment expressed by that claim.

Brandom, of course, is not alone. Similar considerations have led many to think that the God-talk of the atheist and the fundamentalist belong to different language games altogether. But such a view renders hopeless any effort to find common ground for settling issues between such interlocutors. Pragmatism in its classical version

⁴ In addition, I do not intend to endorse the whole of Brandom's reading by which the classical pragmatists advanced an instrumentalist account of truth in terms of the success of practices. For a useful critical discussion, see Pihlström (2007, pp. 272–5).

makes things easier for us. It allows us to say that, despite having differing conceptions of what makes for good evidence for their beliefs, the atheist and the fundamentalist talk about the *same* thing insofar as the belief in God (or lack thereof) would similarly affect their conduct. By not making conceptions of evidence integral parts of the meanings of our claims, the pragmatist view leaves open the issue of how to settle such conflicts of opinion. As we will shortly see, this difference between the classical pragmatists and their contemporary followers is one that makes a difference.

4. A compatibility claim

So far I have argued that the classical pragmatists, especially Peirce, could accept the basic tenets of the global expressivist and non-representationalist interpretation. This however goes against the standard contemporary accounts of their views. Proponents of classical pragmatism, especially the Deweyans of today, have tended to criticize Rorty for reading the classics, especially Dewey, as non-representationalists (e.g. Rorty 1982). The most important reason for this criticism appears to be their conviction—I think correct—that Dewey was more inclined towards a realist position than Rorty has tended to admit. Where Rorty and the Deweyans *do* however agree is that even a moderately realist reading of Dewey would involve a number of representationalist assumptions. Consequently, Rorty's Dewey is not much of a realist, and the Deweyans' Dewey is a representationalist. Things get even more polarized when Peirce—the indubitable arch-realist—and Rorty are pitched against one another (e.g. Haack 1998). This has led to the common assumption that there are *two* pragmatisms, the one the realist strand beginning with Peirce, the other the non- or anti-representationalist brand promoted by Rorty and arguably anticipated by James and Dewey. But while there are various differences between the pragmatists, old and new—much too various to be accounted for here—perhaps this issue is not after all such a great divider. My suggestion is that this picture of two distinct traditions is rather dependent on the received wisdom that non-representationalism is incompatible with realism.

An important reason for this latter assumption is the fact that the debate over expressivism has been largely conducted in meta-ethics, where the expressivist position about normative claims has been contrasted with realism on the non-normative side of things. Up till this point it has been taken as a matter of course that expressivism about normative language, understood in the non-cognitivist manner, results in an ontological position which does without realism. More than that, the expressivist view has often been taken to imply at least some commitment to anti-realism. While Simon Blackburn explicitly denies that his expressivism should be understood as the claim that there are no moral facts or properties, contrary to his intentions, his ‘projectivism’ may easily be taken to imply a form of anti-realism about morality—the view that moral ‘facts’ are merely projected on a reality strictly speaking composed of non-moral facts such as those studied by natural science. Thus, for example, Mark van Roojen’s (2004) entry “Moral Cognitivism vs. Non-cognitivism” in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* begins with the statement “Non-cognitivism is a variety of irrealism about ethics with a number of influential variants”.

However, it should be noted that expressivism is a view about the nature of claims, thoughts, mental states and the like, not about *what there is* in general terms. As such, it is not an *ontological* position at all but a set of views itself open to a variety of ontological stances and interpretations. This becomes especially evident when expressivism is globalized to the non-representationalist stance. Expressivism appears as an anti-realist or ‘irrealist’ view only when set against some *real* ‘realism’. Losing any such contrast, the non-representationalist view has no particular ontological implications; indeed, we could hardly make sense of what *global* quasi-realism would mean. Global expressivism, or non-representationalism, should be considered an ontologically *neutral* position.

For another example from the direction of the discussions on realism, however, the entry “Realism” by Alexander Miller (2002) in the *Stanford Encyclopedia* lists expressivism as one of the ways in which to ‘resist’ the existence dimension of realism, or the claim that some things exist. The underlying reason for this is that an expressivist interpretation frees claims made in some domain of any commitment

to the existence of some facts to make those claims true. But even as the non-representationalist position as presented here rejects such a commitment in a global fashion, as well as involves a denial of a traditional correspondence account of truth, it is hardly evident that realism itself is wedded to any particular *semantic* picture. As Michael Devitt (1991) has for long emphasized, realism conceived of as an ontological position is distinct from any semantic views that we might hold, most centrally a correspondence theory of truth. There is no *prima facie* reason to think that any of the semantic views that non-representationalism sets out to contest are necessary for realism as an *ontological* position.

At the outset, then, non-representationalism and realism are not mutually exclusive, or jointly incoherent views. Obviously, the question of why *be* realist, if one is a non-representationalist, still remains open.⁵ Once the burdens of representationalism have been relieved, there may be little temptation to subscribe to an ontological view of any kind. In the hands of the global expressivist, ontology may receive a treatment similar to the minimalist purging of robustness that our central semantic terms already have. Perhaps “a cat is on the mat” commits one, minimally, to claims such as “it *is a fact* that a cat is on the mat”, or “it *is the case* that a cat is on the mat”. But by analogy to the deflationary truth-predicate, the non-representationalist may argue that the italicized phrases don’t really add anything ontologically robust to the nature of the commitment.

However, I think there is a story to be told in favour of a form of realism, derivable from the pragmatists—one that is not dependent on a representationalist picture of assertoric activities themselves, the picture prone to be deflated in the expressivist fashion. The source of this commitment to realism is the pragmatist perspective on truth as the aim of inquiry. If anywhere, it is here that the paths of the pragmatists, new and old, begin to diverge.

⁵ I’m indebted to Jonathan Knowles for discussions on this point.

5. Pragmatists on truth

In the contemporary philosophical debate over truth, there are two main contenders: the correspondence theory and a variety of deflationary or minimalist accounts. The former maintains that truth is a sort of a fit between a truth-bearer (idea, proposition, belief) and a truth-making reality. This account is often presented as an intuitively plausible *analysis* of our predicate ‘true.’ Instead of setting about to uncover the meaning of truth, the latter, deflationary view attempts to give an account of the *use* of the truth predicate in our assertoric practices, an account that the deflationist argues is exhaustive of the predicate itself. As a third alternative, there is a variety of epistemic accounts of truth which attempt to analyze the concept of truth in terms of epistemic notions, such as justification, warrant and belief.

Many have made the mistake of thinking of the pragmatists as attempting to participate in the analytic project. For example, James’s elucidations of truth in terms of what works or what would be useful to believe have been used to ridicule the pragmatist position, as if James had aspired to uncover the *conceptual content* of ‘true’. For someone playing the analytic game, it is childishly easy to find counterexamples to any such analysis.⁶ In turn, drawing from notions such as *use* and *practices* is what has led many to assimilate the deflationary position with the pragmatist one. However, the pragmatists offered an approach to truth which differs from both of the accounts currently in vogue. Rather than focusing on the conceptual content or the use of the truth predicate, they approached truth in terms of the sort of *beliefs* that we should, or would be better off to have. In James’s famous dictum, truth is just the “good in the way of belief”. This notion of truth is indistinguishable from their notion of inquiry: truth is the *aim* of inquiry or belief (cf. Rydenfelt 2009b). In one sense, the pragmatist approach is thus deeply epistemic: its notion of truth is that of the aim of inquiry. But in

⁶ To an extent, James himself is to be blamed for the confusion. For some reason, he decided to title his 1909 collection of articles on the topic *The Meaning of Truth*.

another sense, this is not the case: as we will presently see, the pragmatist does not maintain that truth is *analyzable* as any such aim.⁷

The central pragmatist text in this respect is Peirce's classic piece, "The Fixation of Belief" (1877). There, Peirce's starting point is the pragmatist notion of inquiry as the move from the unsettling state of doubt to the settlement of opinion, or belief.⁸ "Fixation" then discusses four different ways of settling opinion or aims of inquiry, in effect four different notions of truth from the pragmatist perspective. The first of the methods is tenacity, the steadfast clinging to one's opinion. However, under the influence of what Peirce calls the 'social impulse,' this method is bound to fail. The disagreement of others begins to matter, and the question becomes how to fix beliefs for *everyone* instead of merely for oneself. The three latter methods Peirce discusses are ones attempting to reach such a shared opinion across believers (or inquirers). Contemporary scholars of pragmatism have referred to this demand as underlying the (pragmatist) notion of *objectivity*, or of a standard of opinion beyond one's current views and inclinations (Misak 2000, pp. 3, 52; Short 2007, pp. 324–5).

Interestingly enough, this same phenomenon is reflected in the revised version of the deflationary account of truth propounded by Huw Price. The aspect of our concept of truth as used in our assertoric practices that Price (1998; 2003) has drawn attention to is its function as a 'convenient friction' pointing towards a disagreement to be resolved. The response "that's not true," invites disagreement at least in many of our discourses. For contrast, Price envisions a group of "merely-opinionated asserters," whose assertoric practices include a deflationary truth predicate but do not involve this phenomenon.

⁷ During the past decades, the pragmatist perspective has been sometimes assimilated to the epistemic conception of truth largely due to the influence of Hilary Putnam (1981).

⁸ Peirce points out that we might think this is not enough but insist that "we seek, not merely an opinion, but a true opinion". However, this "fancy" is immediately dispelled: "we think each one of our beliefs to be true, and, indeed, it is mere tautology to say so" (1877, p. 115). Here Peirce appears to anticipate contemporary deflationist accounts of truth (cf. Short 2007, pp. 332–3).

For these speakers, the concept of truth is merely used to register one's agreeing or conflicting opinion, but disagreement will not matter.⁹

The phenomenon Price points towards in practices of assertion is intimately related to the demand for a shared opinion which Peirce detects in our practices of fixing belief. Price's merely-opinionated asserters are akin to Peirce's tenacious believers: they do not aim to coordinate their opinions. Indeed, arguably they are much the same people: the lack of friction of the merely-opinionated speaks to their tenacity, and is derivative thereof. Why disagreement matters in many of our assertoric practices is because we, unlike the tenacious believers, aim to coordinate our underlying commitments.¹⁰

The question that Peirce addresses—and Price doesn't—is how to resolve such disagreement. The second method Peirce discusses is a straightforward way of doing so: by this method of authority, a power such as that of the state forces a single opinion upon everyone by brute force, even the elimination of dissidents. However, this method ultimately becomes questionable because of the arbitrariness of its results. A “wider sort of social feeling” will show that the opinions dictated by the authority are mostly accidental: different peoples at different ages have held differing views (Peirce 1877, p. 118). The third, *a priori* method attempts to rectify this problem by fixing

⁹ The fault of the usual deflationist view, Price argues, is that it does not take into account this aspect of the concept of truth present in our assertoric practices. I am not however sure if the traditional deflationist should be very concerned. At least according to deflationary views which maintain that the concept of truth is a device of disquotation or reassertion, the ‘friction’ phenomenon might only be expected, but not due to some special power invested in our concept of *truth* itself: if disagreement matters, it will matter even if we lacked that concept. The assertion “London is the capital of France,” being met with the response, “London is not the capital of France,” will invite disagreement just as much (or as little) as it would if the latter speaker had the conceptual capacity of simply pointing out: “that’s not true”.

¹⁰ The norm of sincerity present in many of our discourses could arguably be due to this fact: we do not merely want others to pay lip service, but need to detect disagreement that ought to be resolved.

opinion so that its content would not be arbitrary. Instead, opinion is to be settled, under conditions of liberty, by what is agreeable to reason. However, this method “makes of inquiry something similar to the development of taste; but taste, unfortunately, is always more or less a matter of fashion” (1877, p. 119). The actual development of human opinion will show that this method does not lead to any stable consensus—a result that we will ultimately find unsatisfactory (cf. Rydenfelt forthcoming).

To avoid the problems of the *a priori* method, it is required to develop a method which does not make our belief dependent of our subjective opinions and tastes altogether, “by which our beliefs may be determined by nothing human, but by some external permanency” (1877, p. 120). This method is the scientific one: it depends on the assumption that there is an independent reality, which “affects, or might affect, every man” (1877, p. 120). Truth, from its point of view, is the opinion which accords with a reality independent of our opinions of it. The hypothesis that underlies the scientific method is that there are things independent of whatever any number of us may think—*hypothetical realism*, as I will call it. This assumption finally makes intelligible the attainment of objectivity, or the possibility of reaching a single answer to any question across inquirers.

The pragmatist view is not an epistemic account of truth which attempts to analyze our concept of truth in terms of epistemic notions, and Peirce nowhere identifies truth as understood within the scientific method with epistemic notions: scientific inquiry is not just *any* investigation that would bring about a consensus among inquirers, but one that has finding out how things are independently of us as its goal. However, epistemic concepts play a central role in the Peircean picture of science. Making the scientific notion of truth more concrete, Peirce suggests that truths are those opinions that would continue to withstand doubt were scientific inquiry pursued indefinitely (1878, p. 139).¹¹ Drawing from scientific *practice* prevents

¹¹ A common objection to this picture maintains that the central notion of an end of inquiry – or what it would mean for an opinion to withstand all future inquiry – is impossible to grasp, and that this will render the pragmatist view hopelessly murky. This objection, however, rests on a

Peirce's notion of scientific method from settling on an inexplicable notion of 'correspondence.'

The pragmatist approach to truth just delineated implies two lessons crucial for the discussion at hand. Firstly, the pragmatist does not draw from conceptual resources in defending the scientific method and the ensuing hypothetical realism. The overall pragmatist approach on truth as the aim of inquiry rather implies that beliefs as such are not to be taken to stand, as if automatically, in any robust semantic relation with 'the world'. Peirce's discussion of the methods of fixing belief traces the development of the aim of inquiry—the development of the notion of truth, pragmatically conceived. It is not however intended as a method-neutral *argument* for the scientific method. Indeed, if Peirce relied on the idea that beliefs (or claims) 'represent' an independent reality and it is *hence* that the scientific method is successful, his discussion of the different methods of fixing belief would be moot: science would win as if by default. If anything, the converse is the case. The fact that the choice between the methods is a genuine one shows that, for Peirce, realism does not simply fall out of a representationalist picture. The scientific method as the product of a substantial development is independent of any representationalist assumptions.¹²

confusion between the abstract and the particular. It is not inherently difficult to abstractly conceive of what it would mean for an opinion to be sustained even at the end of inquiry pushed indefinitely. On the other hand, however, there is no way for us to tell that we have, on any particular question, reached the end. But this is only to be expected: the scientific method implies a thoroughlygoing fallibilist attitude towards any hypothesis.¹² This view differs from that of some contemporary Peircean pragmatists—most notably Cheryl Misak (2000) and Robert B. Talisse (2007; 2010)—who have maintained that the notion of truth embedded in Peirce's scientific method is inevitable due to the nature of belief itself: belief can be genuinely fixed by scientific means only. While not relying in their on an analysis of the concept of truth (which they rightly note the pragmatists did not intend to supply), these defences of the scientific method rely on an analysis of the concept of *belief*. But Peirce nowhere suggests that the opinions fixed by methods other than the scientific one are less than genuine beliefs (cf. Rydenfelt 2011b).

The second lesson is due to the particular pragmatist account of truth that is entailed by the scientific method. This view is not a naïve correspondence account by which we should somehow be able to compare our beliefs (or their contents) with ‘reality.’ Neither is this account a mere explication of how, in practical terms, an in-built fit between our beliefs and the world can be achieved or recognized. Rather, what it practically speaking *means* for our opinions to accord with an independent reality is itself to be worked out in a concrete fashion. Even Peirce’s suggestion that truths are those beliefs that would withstand doubt were science to be pursued indefinitely implies nothing by way of the methods that are to be deployed to attain this goal. The particular methods and of science – norms and desiderata for inquiry and theories – are themselves open to revision.

6. Non-representationalist realism

Finally we have reached the point where the pragmatist conception of truth, including the hypothetical realism just developed, can be woven together with the non-representationalist point of view with which we started out. In its global form, expressivism maintains that claims made in any discourse or domain do not represent or describe in a straightforward fashion. It loosens the grip of the representationalist picture by which our thoughts and claims are automatically ‘about’ something, or intended to ‘fit’ truthmakers that are there in the world. As I have argued, the pragmatist, too, does not maintain that our claims—or thoughts, beliefs and the like—are automatically ‘about’ some independent or external reality.

The pragmatist *does* however hold that our practical stances—expressible by way of making claims—*may* be made to accord with such a reality. Again, this does not revert the pragmatist back to the representationalist picture. The scientific method does not imply that we can as if compare our stances with what they are about, or represent. Rather, science is conceived of as the project of attempting to uncover ways to make our opinion accord with reality. The features that suggest that a particular hypothesis accords with an independent reality is up to scientific *practice*. In a sense, as science

progresses, we *learn* what our beliefs, thoughts and claims are ‘about.’ Pragmatism thus offers us a version of realism which goes along with non-representationalism. As we have seen, the pragmatist notion of realism does not contradict any of the basic tenets of the contemporary non-representationalist; it merely *complements* them.

In fact, the non-representationalist position as developed by Price already includes a conceptual space for the kind of realism advanced by the classical pragmatist. Price has pushed a distinction between two notions (or nodes) of representation, which he suggests should replace the standard picture. Price’s *i-representation* (where ‘i’ stands for ‘internal’ or ‘inferential’) covers the sort or answerability that comes with the expression of a commitment or stance inside a discourse. It is due to this sort of representation that for those involved in that discourse, it appears as if they were talking about the way things *are*. I-representation contrasts with another node of representation, *e-representation* (where ‘e’ stands for ‘external’ or ‘environment’). This type of representation is involved when something—say, a device for measurement of some sort—is intended to react to environmental conditions.

In Price’s view, running these notions together, or thinking of one as the primary node of representation, has resulted in the problems we face when trying to discover the facts ‘out there’ that our claims and thoughts are supposed to match in the usual representationalist picture. While any discourse where notions such as ‘truth’ or ‘facts’ are invoked is i-representational, it is only in genuinely e-representational discourses that the purpose of claims made is to react to, or covary, with things in our environment.

Following Price’s terminology, the scientific method could now be understood as turning a discourse into an e-representational one: it attempts to make the claims made in that discourse answerable to an independent (or ‘external’) reality. Importantly, there is no principled barrier to what kind of stances, claims, or discourses can be brought under the scientific fold. Price, on his own part, appears to maintain that e-representation covers much of claims made in contemporary natural science, while other domains, such as those of moral and modal claims, are i-representational only. However, this perspective still shows the remnants of old-fashioned representationalism. It

threatens to make e-representation the direct conceptual offspring, a sort of a residue, of the ‘representationalist’ view that Price rejects, so that the lines between what is i-representational and what is (also) e-representational will inevitably fall in the place where the borders between local expressivism and descriptivism already used to lie. This picture relies on a conception of the sort of facts that we may encounter derived from our contemporary understanding of natural science and the objects of its investigations, taking for granted that scientific realism must be realism of science as we now conceive it and delimiting the scientific enterprise to its current image.

Instead, my suggestion here is that the moral to be drawn from global non-representationalism is even more radical. Peircean *hypothetical* realism does not entail a commitment to any particular ontological picture: it is not a realism about the results of science, past, contemporary or future, but about an independent reality which our claims may accord with. Assuming such realism, the scientific enterprise can be extended to domains that contemporary scientific practice leaves untouched. In a discourse turned e-representational—as opposed to i-representational “only”—the opinions expressed are not merely open to criticism from a point of view with transcends the speaker’s subjective opinion, but more specifically answerable to the standard of an independent reality. (This *norm* of answerability to such a standard external to the discourse is itself unavoidably internal to the discourse, but this does not make the *standard* any less external.) Obviously, the specific nature of the *reality* in question depends on the discourse at hand, and giving a plausible account of it will require scientific discovery and (philosophical) conceptual work.

7. Normative realism and normative science

It is this insight that finally brings us to the idea of *normative realism*, which will serve as a case in point. Forms of normative realism (such as *moral* realism) have standardly been conceived of as the combination of two theses. The first is the *cognitivist* semantic thesis: it maintains that normative (or moral) judgments are fact-stating, or describe ways things are. The second thesis is ontological: it holds

that there are things such as described by (some) normative judgments. As a third component, many moral realists have insisted that these (moral) facts must be independent of what we think, believe, desire and so on.

The cognitivist thesis faces two major difficulties. The first is the problem of accounting for the facts our normative claims are supposedly 'about.' After Moore, the cognitivists have either retreated to forms of non-naturalism about normative 'facts' (Shafer-Landau 2003), or attempted to give viable (naturalist) accounts of the conceptual content or the reference of normative predicates (e.g. Smith 1995; Boyd 1988). But the former alternative implies the existence of strange non-natural facts, which fit uneasily into the scientific and philosophically naturalist world-view; and the latter accounts have not arrived at any commonly accepted results. The second difficulty is that normative claims and thoughts appear to play a different role in our agency than that of non-normative claims and thoughts. By contrast to 'descriptive' claims, normative claims tell of the outcomes we aim at and the sort of actions we are prepared to promote or avert, praise or reprimand—the *ends* or *goals* of our actions.¹³ The cognitivist position as commonly conceived has, if anything, fuelled scepticism about the normative: it appears we have no plausible account of what sort of facts normative claims are 'about' in the first place, or at the very least much reason to doubt the existence of such facts.

The non-cognitivist alternative sets out to deal with both these problems with a simple and elegant response. It maintains that the cognitivist project is futile as normative claims do not describe the world; instead, such claims express such functional states that play the relevant practical role of setting the ends or purposes of action. Perhaps the most central difficulty of this view is its unsettling

¹³ This idea is often cast in terms of moral motivation: normative claims are thought to have a distinct, conceptual connection to what we are motivated to do. This fact has caused problems for the cognitivist view when coupled with the so-called Humean theory of motivation, which maintains that beliefs as such are not sufficient for motivation, but require the presence of other mental states or dispositions, commonly called desires.

implication that there is nothing to back our normative views beyond the preferences we merely happen to have—a form of *relativism* that this position results in. To be sure, the non-cognitivist position is not a form of what we could call *conceptual* relativism (cf. Horgan and Timmons 2006). Quite the contrary, it contests the view that normative claims or terms refer to the conative states of those who make such claims.¹⁴ Neither does the non-cognitivist maintain that any normative or moral view is as good as any other: this would amount to a normative (or moral) stance of its own right, and arguably a very strange one at that (cf. Blackburn 1998, p. 296). But as we already saw, proponents of expressivism have drawn attention to the demand of intersubjective agreement in many of our discourses (Price 1998; 2003; cf. Gibbard 2003, ch. 4); and debates over normative issues count among them: differences in moral opinion certainly invite disagreement. If our normative and moral preferences are simply the products of our personal development as well as that of our societies, and there is nothing beyond them to settle our common opinion, what are our hopes of attaining a lasting consensus over normative affairs?

Non-representationalist realism—the pragmatist view here developed—can avoid both the sceptical and relativist concerns of the customary alternatives. Equipped with the representationalist picture, the traditional cognitivist has been looking for a match between normative claims (or their conceptual contents) and ‘facts,’ leading to sceptical results. Abandoning the representationalist view, non-cognitivism has been taken to eschew all grounds for a lasting consensus, raising the worry of relativism. The pragmatist, however, conceives of the answerability of opinion to reality more broadly: it does not require of our opinions to *represent* reality in order to be *answerable* to it. It is by abandoning the representationalist

¹⁴ Indeed, expressivists have long argued that their view does not attempt to give conceptual content for normative vocabulary in terms of the attitudes of the speaker, his group, or the like. Expressivist non-cognitivism is thus crucially different from views such as (moral) speaker subjectivism, which maintains (for example) that to call an act wrong is to say that one disapproves of that act.

assumptions while reconceptualizing realism that the pragmatist view developed here can bring normative and non-normative claims under the same fold. In the global non-representationalist view, neither are at bottom any more (or less) ‘cognitive’: the difference between these claims pertains to their different functions in discourse and action rather than in their ‘representational’ capacities. By adopting the scientific method, *both* kinds of opinions may be settled in a manner that is sensitive to (an independent) reality.

Even when relieved of the burden of giving an account of what our normative claims and thoughts ‘represent,’ the pragmatist will still need to supply a view of the sort of *reality* that our normative opinions can be made to accord with, and how that reality may affect us as inquirers—that is, an account of the form that hypothetical realism could take in normative matters. Fortunately the pragmatist has at hand at least the beginnings of such an account Peirce’s later views, which have been further developed and elaborated by T. L. Short (2007). Peirce recognized that teleology had been reintroduced to modern science in that some forms of statistical explanation are not reducible to mechanistic causation. As an extension of this naturalistic view of final causation, he suggested that certain ideas (or ideals) themselves may have the tendency of becoming more powerful by gaining more ground. Our normative opinions are to be settled in accordance with such tendencies, independent of but affecting our particular inclinations and desires. As Short construes Peirce’s later semiotic view, these ideals can affect us through experience by eliciting feelings of approval and disapproval, satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Experience may correct our feelings, and eventually force convergence among inquirers. These notions form the basis of Peircean normative science.¹⁵

This picture is admittedly sketchy, and will doubtless seem outlandish to many. But at bottom it only requires openness to the hypothesis that normative and moral ideals can, analogously to our non-normative opinion, be guided by an independent reality. The

¹⁵ Similarly, the Peircean pragmatist may argue that the scientific method itself as well as the particular norms of science are due to the compelling force of experience (cf. Rydenfelt 2011a).

historical development and spreading of certain ideals—say, those concerning basic human rights and liberties, freedom of opinion, and the way we are to settle disagreements over matters of (non-normative) opinion—may be taken as evidence for the possibility of reaching a consensus, slowly and over time, about such issues. Not much more can be said about the nature of the reality that normative science pertains to, as otherwise too much in particular will be said about how ideals are to be settled and what kind of ideals would prevail—too much will be said about the *results* of such a science, rather than its foundations merely.

8. Conclusion

Contemporary expressivism contests the traditional idea that our thoughts and claims attempt to ‘fit’ something in the world. This approach, when extended in Huw Price’s fashion, results in a global non-representationalism. I have argued that the views of the classical pragmatists, especially Charles S. Peirce’s account of inquiry and truth, are amenable to an expressivist and non-representationalist interpretation. The prevalent assumption that this cannot be the case is due to the received wisdom that realism—which the pragmatists advanced in different forms—entails representationalism. But for Peirce, the scientific method and its commitment to a hypothetical realism is not derived from conceptual considerations, or a robust notion of representation; instead, it is the outcome of a substantial development of ways of fixing opinion. As such it is fully compatible with the non-representationalist view: it is a realism without representationalism. One of the advantages of this novel, combined pragmatist perspective is that it enables us to radically reconceptualize other brands of realism, such as *normative* realism. Once we have adopted the global expressivist perspective, there is no principled, ‘representational’ difference between normative and non-normative (or ‘descriptive’) claims or opinions, and the pragmatist may argue

that both kinds of opinion are to be fixed by the same—scientific—means.¹⁶

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¹⁶ I’m grateful to Jonathan Knowles, Sami Pihlström, Huw Price and T. L. Short for comments on earlier versions of this paper.

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Naturalism and Normative Science

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Abstract: Naturalist views in philosophy often combine a Quinean denial of a first philosophy – the idea that science cannot be based on a foundation more secure than itself – with the (metaphysical) position that science is our best or privileged means of finding out what there is. My task here is to inquire what the status of the latter *normative* claim is in light of the former. Based on a reading of different contemporary “pragmatist” philosophers – most notably Quine, Putnam, Rorty and Price – I will argue that philosophical naturalism lapses either back into foundationalism or to a heavily qualified internal realism. As a remedy, building on Charles S. Peirce’s conception of normative science, I will suggest that the problem is circumvented by opening the possibility of a scientific inquiry into normative issues.

Introduction: The “natural” in naturalism

In its simplest form, *metaphysical* naturalism amounts to pretty much the same as the denial of the supernatural. If this were all there were to naturalism, one way of making sense of the view would be simply to list what there *is* in our “natural” world: to say that there are just physical particles and their properties, or that there are also chairs, tables, people, cats and mats and the like, taking these common sense objects to be in some manner based on the more profound scientific realities. In any case there are no such things as fairies, demons, angels, spirits, souls or Platonic ideas.

However, such an *inventory* conception of metaphysical naturalism would surely be judged strange, and for obvious reasons. It is not a particular list of basic “things” as postulated by contemporary science that naturalism concerns. Instead, metaphysical naturalism, as usually understood, is the *deferral* of ontological questions to science: it is the view that science should decide upon what there is and is not, usually with the additional clause that science already gives a pretty good idea of this. The “supernatural” amounts to exactly those things whose existence cannot be countenanced by (natural) science.

A distinction has often been drawn between metaphysical naturalism and a closely allied but separate philosophical position, *methodological* naturalism. Metaphysical naturalism, it is usually held, concerns the ontological question of what there is, while methodological naturalism maintains that philosophy should (to an extent specified) follow scientific methods (cf. Papineau, 2007). Depending on the reach of scientific method, there are methodological naturalisms of varying strengths. Weaker versions only claim that philosophy should follow or

mimic science, especially the scientific method, in solving its own set of problems; while stronger versions look for answers to philosophical questions from within science, or even suggest abandoning philosophical issues when no scientific answer is forthcoming.

Methodological naturalism might be delimited to a certain area or aspect of philosophy and is thus relatively independent of metaphysical naturalism. Naturalist approaches to philosophical questions can be advanced in any field, but metaphysical naturalism is not a necessary condition for the success of this move. Metaphysical naturalism, however, is dependent on at least one particular and strong standpoint of the methodological variety: metaphysical questions are to be answered by science. In any case, and this is the simple but crucial point, it is, according to metaphysical naturalism, *up to science* and not to philosophy to find out what there really is.

Different combinations of metaphysical and/or methodological naturalism have yielded the different sorts of philosophical naturalisms discussed today. However, it is perhaps not the various positive claims that naturalists have made about the position of science and the dependence of philosophy on science that have attracted most attention. Instead, it is the *negative* naturalist claims concerning philosophy – about what philosophy *cannot* do – that are the source of much of the interesting debate concerning naturalism. The most prominent claim of this sort is, of course, Quine's famous denial of a *first philosophy*: the repudiation of "a foundation for scientific certainty firmer than scientific method itself" (Quine, 1992, p. 19).

Quine's view combines different elements of methodological and metaphysical naturalism. The essential metaphysical claim is that science provides the best available account of what there is. Methodologically speaking, scientific issues are to replace traditional philosophical problems. Science should decide what central epistemological concepts amount to, or what (if anything) they correspond to in the natural realm. In particular, instead of the traditional normative notions of knowledge and justification, and concepts in philosophical psychology such as thought and belief, we should be talking in terms of empirical psychology and neuroscience about such matters. "Epistemology," in Quine's famous phrase, "is contained in natural science, as a chapter of psychology" (Quine, 1969, 89).

Methodologically speaking, then, Quinean naturalism involves a commitment to a strong form of naturalism: philosophical questions are to be solved by scientific means, if there are such questions – if philosophical concepts have a place in the naturalist world-view – in the first place. Some philosophical notions are to be studied in light of advances in (natural) science while still leaving some room for distinctly philosophical inquiries – defined by their broad compass rather than a specifically philosophical standpoint – whilst others are to be

replaced by scientific notions studied by different (special) sciences, and others again to be rejected, since they are not worthy of scientific study at all.

Combined with the negative thesis of first philosophy, metaphysical naturalism is inevitably faced with two questions. The first concerns the nature of science itself. Perhaps we can defer questions about what there is to science, but then what is science? The second concerns the position of the naturalist thesis itself. Perhaps science should act as an arbiter of what there is, but what sort of status does this claim itself have? Both of these questions turn out to be difficult to answer without a theory in philosophy proper. For the time being, I will set the first question aside, understanding science as simply the actual project of inquiry we usually call by that name, and concentrate on the latter problem: the status of the naturalist thesis.

Where does the naturalist's negative thesis stem from? Obviously, such a view is easily refuted if it is put forth as a distinctly philosophical claim – as a doctrine in methodological naturalism. For then it would be the *philosophical* position *that* philosophy has no place in deciding what there is. Such a denial of first philosophy would be self-undermining – indeed itself a thesis *in* first philosophy. The remaining option – the one taken by Quine – is to say that the denial of first philosophy is itself a scientific view. What needs to be examined, then, is what sort of a scientific claim that could be.

The point so far is plain and simple. Metaphysical naturalism as such is not problematic: it leaves room for philosophy to develop views on why exactly it is up to science to decide what there is. However, when combined with a denial of first philosophy – in effect the methodological naturalist claim that philosophy is in no position to decide *about* the position of science – we are left with two choices: either the claim is philosophical, and thus self-undermining, or it is scientific. The first choice is untenable, but what of the second?

Science and justification

It is clear that Quine thought that his naturalism is not guilty of self-referential problems; instead it is a scientific claim itself. But such a view is immediately faced with a number of interrelated problems, three of which I will elaborate on here.

Firstly and most importantly, there are the limitations of Quine's view of science and, hence, philosophy turned science. Quine however emphasizes that his view retains a place for the normativity of epistemology:

To emphasize my dissociation from the Cartesian dream [of a foundation for scientific certainty firmer than scientific method itself], I have written of neural receptors and their stimulation rather than of sense or sensibilia. I call the pursuit naturalized epistemology, but I have no quarrel with traditionalists who protest my retention of the latter

word. I agree with them that repudiation of the Cartesian dream is no minor deviation. But they are wrong in protesting that the normative element, so characteristic of epistemology, goes by the board. Insofar as theoretical epistemology gets naturalized into a chapter of theoretical science, so normative epistemology gets naturalized into a chapter of engineering: the technology of anticipating sensory stimulation. (Quine, 1992, p. 19)

Although prediction (or anticipation) is perhaps not the most central business of science, in Quine's view good science is still defined by its successes in predicting sensory stimuli. We can perhaps agree with Quine (with some qualifications) that science is concerned with the explanation and understanding of sensory stimuli. But if this is all science does, his critics are certainly correct that normativity goes by the board. The rejection of philosophical foundationalism itself does not imply that we cannot have a *non*-foundationalist yet normative epistemology. But as Quinean epistemology *is* the "technology of anticipating sensory stimulation," it simply has no answers to questions concerning justification – the sort of questions that are of interest here.

Secondly, and more practically speaking, it seems actual scientists are hardly occupied with an inquiry into whether and why their project enjoys the privileged position naturalism claims for it. Either they take this as a matter of course, or simply refrain from considering the issue at all. It often seems as though science refers such questions back to *philosophy*, either as something of very limited interest from the scientific perspective, or as something that is better left to those who wish to engage in such sophistry. Scientists, as Quine would surely have to admit, usually have no interest in such normative issues.

Thirdly and finally, what makes matters even more complicated, is Quine's consistent commitment to a strong form of ontological physicalism throughout his writings. His ontology consists of physical objects and sets. Physicalism effectively excludes normativity, which is especially evident in Quine's replacement of traditional epistemological notions such as thought and belief with 'scientifically respectable' talk of neural states and receptors. Such a view leaves no room for normative notions of truth and knowledge. To be clear, there is nothing paradoxical in theories of physics or a physicalist world-view as such. But the claim that the physicalist world-view has a status that is privileged, or is better than its alternatives, cannot be a part of these theories or world-view.

The crucial lesson of these three claims is perhaps best put in reverse order. Within a physicalistic world-view, normativity has no role – matters of correctness and justification do not figure in the explanations of the physical sciences from which epistemological "engineering" draws. Scientists, then, have usually had no *explicit* concern with such issues. And thus by extension is epistemology naturalized only concerned with explaining the way the stimulus of neural receptors gives rise to theories about the world, or the procession from stimulus to science, rather than the justification of that process. There is no scientific theory

that would justify science – the sort of theory that would be required as a *scientific* equivalent or replacement of the project of first philosophy.

An evident remedy to this condition is to say that science itself could be such that it explicitly takes up normative issues – the possibility I will below discuss under the label of *normative science*. Almost needless to say, what has made the possibility of such a remedy seem eminently implausible to philosophers, it seems, is the basic assumption that normative questions do not appear in science, for there are no normative “facts” to be discovered – an assumption that looms behind Quinean naturalized epistemology. While making sense of such normative facts is beyond the scope of this paper, this is actually my preferred version of naturalism. But before proceeding to the normative question itself, a different way of looking at naturalism should be considered.

Naturalism as science

In the foregoing, the problems with Quinean denial of first philosophy and the privileged position of science were largely due to the fact that while those claims concern the position of science itself, it is difficult to find a place for them inside science. But perhaps there is another way of thinking about Quinean naturalized epistemology. Instead of making any normative claims, Quine’s suggestion can be read as offering a *scientific theory* about those concepts and their place in the natural order. Stripped of any normative claims, epistemology naturalized might amount to nothing more than a first-order, scientific view about central epistemological concepts and ideas. Such a view would not face the problems inherent in a “*philosophical*” view of naturalism, as it would not purport to say anything philosophical in the first place.

Obviously, this is a somewhat artificial approach to Quine’s position. Naturalized epistemology is not a *particular* scientific theory – e.g. a psychological and neuroscientific theory about perception – but rather a view about what sort of theories are to solve questions that philosophers have previously been occupied with. On the other hand, sometimes Quine’s views, in spite of their forming part of professional philosophical discourse, seem to amount to just such first-order theories. Far from advancing traditional epistemological notions, Quine’s task is to present a scientific theory of how we understand, learn and use language. The naturalist project could be viewed as the attempt simply to replace philosophical notions by talk in scientifically respectable terms.

In Quine’s behavioural theory of meaning, understanding is a matter of linguistic behaviour, and learning language the assuming of behavioural dispositions. Meanings are not items in a “mental museum,” Quine held: “There is nothing in linguistic meaning beyond what is to be gleaned from overt behavior in observable circumstances” (Quine, 1992, p. 37; cf. Quine, 1992, p. 110).

What people mean by terms and sentences are, then, to be discovered by observing their behaviour, especially the acts of assent and dissent. The behavioural theory of meaning results in Quinean indeterminacy of reference: translations are indeterminate when we cannot, by the speaker's behaviour, tell exactly what is meant – in Quine's famous example, when we can translate a speaker's asserting "gavagai," when rabbits are present, as "rabbit" or "undetached rabbit parts."

Meanings being just behaviours, Quine's project of naturalized epistemology largely turns out to be the explanation of language, or a child's learning a language, ultimately arriving at scientific theories and the whole of science itself. In his view, a child learns a language by coming to master appropriate responses, or dispositions to such responses, to sensory stimulation. Such responses Quine calls observation sentences. To master an observation sentence is to be prepared to assent to it when the appropriate stimulus is present. But when is a response appropriate to a stimulus? In brief, Quine's answer: when the speaker is prepared to assent to the observation sentence (cf. Quine 1992, pp. 62-65)! As there is no notion of "appropriateness" other than the actual stimulus-responses of language-users, Quine must draw from the actual behaviour of the agents. This takes his view beyond the mere idea that behaviour is all there is to "meaning" by adding that such behaviour is constituted by dispositions to react to stimuli.¹

This Quinean image of science effectively eschews normative notions. Indeterminacy of reference as presented above is pretty much the same as the under-determination of our *theory* of what the terms of a language refer to: the linguistic and other behaviour of language-users allows several empirically adequate theories of what they mean. Talk about the "correct" theory has no place in this picture. Indeed, set alongside the view that language is explained by showing how we come to be disposed to certain responses to certain "surface irritations," it is not because of under-determination that there is "nothing to scrute"; it is because there are no ("cognitive") meanings in the first place. As a consequence, there is no more question of making mistakes and errors in using language and proceeding from stimulus to science than in receding ice's eroding a canyon or a massive star's exploding into a supernova. In such a view words are not *signs* of objects; they are reactions or responses to stimuli.

Internal successes

Quine's naturalized epistemology gives a rudimentary image of how we arrive at language and the assertion of the whole of science – an image that is then hoped to turn into a full-fledged explanation after considerable advances in neu-

1 To be precise, in Quine's view, the *explanation* of meaning – the behavioural responses to stimuli – is supposed to be given on a more fundamental neuro-scientific level.

rosience. Such a view involves no genuinely normative notions. To repeat what was already said in connection with physicalism, such views are by no means contradictory. Indeed, what Quine did with meaning and reference could be done, and has been attempted, with other philosophical and epistemological concepts, such as belief, truth, intention, value, etc. But from a slightly more philosophical standpoint, there still remains a problem which is perhaps best put forth by considering the conclusions drawn from a similar background view due to Hilary Putnam.

In the early 1970s, Kuhn (1970) (at least as he is commonly read) questioned the idea that science progresses, in any simple terms, towards ever 'truer' theories. Instead, when a background theory (or paradigm) changes, Kuhn argued, the meanings of central terms in that theory undergo similar changes, and hence two competing theorists would be talking of different things instead of disagreeing over the same thing. This criticism was reinforced by the likes of Feyerabend (1975), who questioned the idea of any kind of progress in science. In response, the so-called causal theories of reference of Kripke (1980) and Putnam (e.g. Putnam, 1988) were used to make sense of how we fix the reference of scientific terms so that the meaning of such terms is not merely up to the theories that involve these terms. According to these theories, meanings are not just "in the head"; instead, things in the world have caused us to have certain words for them, and using these words, we manage to refer back to those things in the world, despite differences in our theories of what those things are. The causal theory of reference is, then, essentially a scientific theory about the causal relationship between language and reality.

However, as Putnam (1978, pp. 123-125; 1983, pp. 17-18) noted, the fact that our words are causally linked to our expressions is itself a postulation of scientific theory. The situation at hand is exactly analogous to scientific theories explaining the success of science – science explaining itself. As theories of perception may explain the reliability of a certain type of perception by relying on their lawful connections to the world, theories of reference make sense of how our concepts denote independent realities by referring to the causal connections between such realities and concepts.² But the success of those theories is dependent on those perceptions and concepts themselves. From this, Putnam drew the conclusion that such realism is "merely" *internal*. The causal theory of reference relies on itself: *by* that theory, the terms of that theory refer by their causal connections to the world. It was in this manner that Putnam, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, combined his "semantic externalism" with ontological internalism.

2 This idea of reliable processes has had its famous applications in the theory of knowledge such as Alvin Goldman's (1967) reliabilism about justification. But Putnam opposes, I think rightly, the idea that such views could give a non-circular account of justification.

Putnam's internal realism seems to be largely due to two considerations. The first has to do with issues of reference more generally. Nothing precludes that there could be other scientific accounts or sets of theories of reference that can successfully explain themselves. Perhaps such self-explaining theories only describe the world as it is "for us." What is missing from the picture are meaningful ideas of how scientific terms can refer to an reality independent of ourselves, and how scientific theories can discuss that which is as of yet unknown to us. A more basic philosophical theory of reference to what is independent of and unknown to us would be required to make this connection intelligible. This is no easy feat in its own right, and cannot occupy us here.³

Of more importance in this discussion is a second (less "metaphysical") consideration, which in the broadest of terms concerns the connection between the success and "privilege" (or *truth*) of science. The fact that scientific theories have turned out to mutually support and converge with one another was by no means inevitable. In addition, the success of science is not a wholly internal issue. Science explains more than just its own theories: its predictions can successfully be applied outside of its investigative core in, e.g., engineering and technology. Such success, it could be argued, cannot be coincidental. And thus it has been suggested that the success of science is explained by the fact that its theories are true (Boyd, 1983). By Putnam's own, earlier "miracle argument", realism is the only philosophical view that does not render the success of science a miracle (Putnam, 1975, p. 73). By analogy, then, it would be a miracle if our best scientific theories were not at least approximately true. However, such an argument is contingent upon the acceptance of the theory that what *explains* the success of science is truth, or more precisely, that truth is that which (perhaps among other things) explains convergence and success. In Putnam's terms, this is "just more theory".⁴

In more general terms, the success of science and the question of its privilege are separate issues – and this is just to return to the original problem of justification. The fact *that* science has been successful in this way does not as such have bearings on the more pertinent question of the status of science as the

3 Putnam (1978, pp. 123-125) distinguishes three ideas – or three denials – that go together in the mixed and difficult doctrine of internal realism: (1) we cannot conceive of a reality completely unknown to us; (2) we cannot conceive of how the whole of our "representation" or scientific body of theory can refer to an independent reality; and (3) truth cannot exceed our best theory. My discussion here is mainly related to (2) and (3). For Putnam of the internal realist period, these notions seem to go hand in hand, but it seems feasible to accept only one or two of them while renouncing one or two (cf. Short 2007, pp. 199-200).

4 The phrase "just adding more *theory*" appears in connection of the causal theory of reference in Putnam's so-called model-theoretical argument (Putnam, 1980). Instead of drawing from its specific use in that still hotly debated argument, here the phrase is employed more broadly.

(cognitively) privileged human project, in particular as our best way of finding out what there is. Quine himself seemed to understand this predicament, which he however seems to have found rather trivial and relatively benign:

[W]hen I cite predictions as the checkpoints of science, I do not see that as normative. I see it as defining a particular language game, in Wittgenstein's phrase: the game of science, in contrast to other good language games such as fiction and poetry. A sentence's claim to scientific status rests on what it contributes to a theory whose checkpoints are in prediction. (Quine, 1992, p. 20)

Practically speaking, science "works". But without the premise that what works indeed is privileged, we cannot infer that its game is to be preferred. A moment's philosophical reflection spoils the nice scientific picture. What is to be said in favour of the scientific view in comparison to "other good language games"?

A loud quietism

Replacing the traditional epistemological project with a naturalized one of Quine will, at its best, admit and explain the success of science but will not completely satisfy our philosophical questioning of the justification of the privilege of the scientific project. To this recurrence of the normative problem, however, there is an obvious alternative: one that simply will not allow that moment of philosophical reflection. One influential position in recent philosophy comes close to just such view – Richard Rorty's "neo-pragmatism".

Rorty's background motivation derives from problems that have their origins in philosophy of language – questions of reference, meaning and representation of "reality" (cf. Gustafsson, this volume). However, his view can arguably be seen as turning on the normative question of how some particular human project, like science, could have the sort of privileged position already discussed (Rorty, 1979, pp. 176-179). In a nutshell, as no answer to this question seems forthcoming, Rorty suggested abandoning the whole idea of a privileged perspective, or faithful representation of reality. This is Rorty's doctrine of anti-representationalism, which is essentially the suggestion that there is no privileged language game or, in Rorty's terms, "final vocabulary" – there is only the game that prevails.

To some, like Putnam (1990, pp. 22-23), Rorty's suggestion seemed to amount to a variant of relativism. Rorty however protested, positioning his view resolutely beyond a realism vs. relativism debate: such debates, from his perspective, can only arise within a representationalist framework (Rorty, 1991, pp. 50-54). It would be tempting to call Rorty's view about such matters 'quietism',

were it not for his anti-representationalism not being exactly silent about how our language games are related to reality: *not* as faithful representations. Neither is Rorty silent about traditional epistemological notions; instead, he proposes several different accounts of what truth (and related normative concepts) will amount to in an anti-representationalist framework. Both of these two “non-quietist” facts about Rorty, beginning with the latter, will be central to my discussion here.

There is an ongoing discussion about what Frank Jackson and Huw Price among others have called *placement problems*. By these they mean the contemporary naturalist’s problem of fitting all of our different vocabularies or language games – such as those of morality, modality, causality etc. – in with the “truthmakers” that scientific language, our privileged language game according to many metaphysical naturalists, supposedly represents. I will soon return to these problems in my discussion of Price’s subject naturalism. But here there is another sort of problem, which I would like to call the *replacement problem*: if *none* of our vocabularies “represent,” what are we to say about notions such as truth and reference in the anti-representationalist framework?

Rorty obviously has plenty of say on truth, and his position on the issue developed over the years. There’s Rorty’s *pragmatist* view about truth as a matter of coping from the early 80s (e.g. Rorty, 1982, pp. xv-xvii, 162-166). Then there is the *ethnocentrist* view of the late 80s and early 90s (e.g. Rorty, 1989, pp. 50-53, 196-198). In his later writings of the 1990s, Rorty attempted to advance more consistently an explicitly “minimalist” account of truth largely derived from Donald Davidson, despite his admission that he (as a Jamesian pragmatist) “swings back and forth between trying to reduce truth to justification and propounding some sort of minimalism about truth” (Rorty, 1998, p. 21; cf. Ramberg 2007). Because of this, Rorty argues that truth offers no goal to which we may strive over and above warrant (or *justification*, which is something like truth of the ethnocentrist view), and thus that the whole notion of truth is redundant, and better left out of our vocabulary. Again, Rorty’s motive for this move lies in his commitment to liberalism: the redundant goal of truth is to be *replaced* by the more important goal of liberalism and solidarity.

However, if Rorty were right and dropping the notion of truth would make no difference in practice, the implication seems to be that nothing really changes if we stop talking about it.⁵ It becomes unclear what anti-representationalism amounts to in addition to this suggestion. Perhaps we can drop the *word* truth, but this, by Rorty’s own admission, makes no difference in practice. It seems

5 Of course, a more plausible view would maintain that the notion of truth *does* play an important role in our practices. But if this is so, the implication seems to be that the notion of truth must, after all, be a meaningful one, not something completely redundant, and not quite as easily replaced by another notion as Rorty would like to maintain. (Cf. also Price 1998; 2003.)

justification does all the normative work needed to account for our (conversational) practices. Is the whole anti-representationalist position redundant? What does replacing truth with solidarity amount to? The Rortian anti-representationalist's response to this questioning would probably be that there is something important that the whole position is meant to deny. According to anti-representationalism, there is no such thing as privileged representation: our vocabularies, while they may have justificatory connections with *one another*, cannot be privileged in the sense that they would represent "reality". The anti-representationalist may add that this sort of representationalist weight that is usually attached to the notion of "truth", and that it is in this sense that he suggests we stop talking about truth.

But then another problem arises: how is this view supposed to be *true*? Even if we drop out the notions of truth and representation altogether and do not ask how anti-representationalism is true or represents reality, the question still remains in a simpler form, namely: why prefer anti-representationalism to its alternatives, such as representationalism? What sort of a privilege does the view itself have?

One way of responding to this question is simply to write it off as misguided. Rorty's purpose is to make a vocabulary shift in favour of liberalism, for which, by his own admission, there is no philosophical justification. Instead, the issue is one in philosophy turned cultural politics. However, this is not quite the whole story: often Rorty attempts to make a distinctly "philosophical" point in favour of anti-representationalism. As we already saw, unlike Quine, Rorty thought that from the fact that the language game of science is a language game or vocabulary among others, it follows that the scientific game enjoys no sort of privilege among the games we may play. But quite like Quine, Rorty retains the key *naturalist* idea that we are connected to the world only causally. There is no bridge from the domain of language games or vocabularies – the realm of conversation, justification and "rationality" – to the world of cause and effect. Naturalism underwrites Rorty's *historicism*: there is nothing supra-historical to be said, or non-historically "rational," about the change from one vocabulary to another. As Rorty at one point put his conclusion on Quine: epistemology and ontology never meet (Rorty, 1979, p. 202). Normative connections are internal to vocabularies or between vocabularies; but none of these connections are with the world, so to speak. Rorty often labels his naturalist position "Darwinism", by which he means

[...] a story about humans as animals with special organs and abilities, [...]. According to this story, these organs and abilities have a lot to do with who we are and what we want, but have no more of a *representational* relation

to an intrinsic nature of things than does the anteater's snout or the bower-bird's skill at weaving. (Rorty, 1991, pp. 47-48)⁶

This is the view that underlies anti-representationalism. But paradoxically this threatens to turn the anti-representationalist position, as developed by Rorty, into just another sort of “first philosophy” or foundationalism.⁷

In effect, Rorty's naturalism is a reversal of Putnam's internal realist view. The latter took the fact that we are causally related to the world as internal to the successful language game of science. The former understands the world as simply that of causal relations, and normativity, in its turn, as a matter of the relations between items in vocabularies. This difference could be roughly put as follows: starting with epistemology, Putnam never arrives at ontology (a view of what is there independent of our theories and descriptions); starting with ontology, Rorty never arrives at epistemology (a view of how theories and descriptions can be justified by reference to what there is). Denying that there is a privileged language game but retaining a naturalist ontology will lead to anti-representationalism; starting with a privileged naturalist position but denying that this position represents the true structure of the world will lead to internal realism.

Subject naturalism

So far, my discussion has centred on the question of how science might justify naturalism – its own position as a privileged perspective on the world. Quine's view that (“normative”) epistemology becomes a chapter of science led to Putnam's internal realism about the language game of science. On the other hand, Rorty's anti-representationalism, which held that science is just one language game among many, started out with a scientific or physicalist ontology. This interplay of epistemological, semantic and ontological issues leads to wonder whether it would be possible to drop the idea that science would need to be judged against its possibility of referring to an “independent” reality at all by assuming an anti-representationalist position, but without the plain assumption of an ontological naturalism of the sort that Rorty's view is ultimately based upon. Such an attempt can, I think, be detected in one of the most important contributions to recent discussions on naturalism, the *global expressivism* Huw Price has advanced in a number of recent writings (2004; 2010; this volume).

6 Typically, Rorty continues by the remark that he has adopted this position because of its practical benefits: “[...] I am suggesting, in the spirit of Deweyan experimentalism, that it behoves us to give the self-image Darwin suggested to us a whirl, in the hope of having fewer philosophical problems on our hands” (Rorty 1991, p. 48).

7 I will presently return to this view and why it threatens paradox or incoherence.

Price's starting point is pretty much the converse of our problem so far: it is the contemporary naturalist's attempts at fitting all of our different vocabularies or language games – such as those of morality, modality, etc. – with the “truth-makers” of the scientifically conceived world. For our purposes here, it is important to note that these *placement problems* already mentioned above are not due to the fact that we somehow know what reality is like independently of these different language games. Instead, they are due to the fact that one type of statement, or one language game, is taken as privileged – the language game of science. The picture we start with is, then, what Price calls the *object naturalist* picture: the world is what science tells us what it is, and the rest, Quine's “other good language games”, have to somehow be dealt with.⁸

Price's preferred means of dealing with the remainder is to advance an expressivist view according to which the statements of some particular domain (e.g. evaluative judgments) do not “represent” but are truth-apt in a minimalist vein. This effectively reduces the number of statements that are supposed to “refer,” or “represent” reality. However, in a radical move, Price “globalizes” expressivism to cover all of our statements, and not just statements of some particular domain. Expressivism, Price maintains, has somewhat artificially been maintained locally, resulting in a bifurcation problem of drawing a line between the cognitive and non-cognitive (or expressive) uses of language. This problem has usually been taken to benefit the cognitivist side of the debate. But Price reads the logic of this situation differently. For him, the failure of non-cognitivists to contain their view in one linguistic practice and prevent it from

8 Price (2010) lists the three evident alternatives. The first is to say that the different language games actually all refer, for example in the reductionist manner of equating the apparently “excess” statements with, ultimately, shorthand for talk about scientifically admissible objects and properties. The other two options concern the amount of things on either side of the statement-world divide. The second is to expand on the ontological side of what there is to include more “truthmakers” than initially thought. As Price rightly remarks, it is a question of labels whether this would amount to allowing “non-natural” truthmakers or to widening our conception of science. The third is to reduce the number of statements that require “truthmakers” on the linguistic or semantic side of things; Price lists eliminativism, fictionalism and expressivism as variants of this last project. It perhaps deserves to be noted that the way Price understands eliminativism as a form of reducing the left-hand side is not an obvious reading. If eliminativism works analogously to the error theory of moral judgments (cf. Mackie, 1977), which pretty much equals anti-realism about morality, it does not “eliminate” anything. Instead, both sides stay just like they are, but we note that some of the things on the left cannot be fitted with things on the right – it is for this reason that we can be said to have erred. Error theory in morality does not mean dropping moral language altogether. Like anti-realist views in general, it only points out that a piece of language, which we may merrily keep using in all practical contexts, is in error because it fails to refer.

“spilling” over to other regions of language points towards the possibility of turning expressivism into a global – we might say *default* – position.⁹

As expressivism generally holds, our language – especially our usage of standard semantic notions such as reference and truth – may have misled us into thinking that there is a representing relation between statements and the world. But in an expressivist framework, such representationalist and realist intuitions can be explained in the minimalist manner of Blackburn’s quasi-realism – in Price’s case, a global variety of quasi-realism. Instead of beginning with the view that reality is as science describes it (object naturalism), his view offers a scientific – anthropological or “genealogical” – account of human language and its function, a *subject naturalism*.¹⁰

Like Jonathan Knowles (2010; this volume) I find that the obviously difficult question for the subject naturalist is that concerning the position of his own claim (or the *replacement* problem as it already appeared in connection with Rorty above): in what sense is the global expressivist view itself *true*?¹¹ Compare this predicament to that of the local expressivist tenets. As Price points out, the local expressivist’s position does not depend on a distinction between statements that refer and statements that “express.” However, perhaps Price still understates the importance of at least *something* like representation for the local expressivists. While that domain of language that the local expressivist’s view concerns is not “representing”, the expressivist theory *itself* is: it represents the way things are, or so it would seem natural to take it. This is exactly where the local nature of expressivism becomes important. To borrow the Wittgensteinian image, Price has used the ladder of local expressivisms to climb up to a global expressivism – but then wishes to throw that ladder away.

However, *pace* Knowles, I don’t think the global expressivist has much trouble saying that his view is, scientifically speaking, true. Indeed, he has an easy enough response. Of course, the global expressivist is not required to give

9 Indeed, it seems expressivism about evaluative language or judgments has a tendency to spill over. If questions about how evaluative judgments “represent” are misguided, we cannot assume normative privilege to a certain group of statements (e.g. those yielding object naturalism). One diagnosis of Price’s view is to say that it works out the full implications of this view: expressivism must be extended to cover all of science.

10 How we should understand the relationship between Price’s view and expressivism depends on which aspect of the former we emphasize. In a sense, Price is, like local expressivists, reducing the cardinality of statements that are intended to “represent” (in his case, to zero) by explaining these away by a scientific theory. But another way of looking at the matter is that Price simply abandons the whole picture of language representing reality for an anti-representationalist and quietist view. This difference is one that makes a difference, as I’ll presently try to show.

11 To be precise, Knowles asks the more particular question of how subject naturalism can be true by its own lights. My question here is wider: in what sense is the subject naturalist account true?

an account of how things are expressivist in a *non*-expressivist (or representing) sense. Staying on an expressivist level, he will simply state that his theory is true in the same way that anything is true (by his view), in a minimalist, non-representationalist way. In effect, to talk about how the theory is true is just to talk about the theory itself.

This easy response, however, hides what I think is the crucial issue here. It remains to be understood how Price's global expressivist view of language is the *preferred* "subject naturalist" theory about language. This is, after all, a question that is supposed to be decided by empirical, naturalist means, and not *a priori*. The global expressivist will presumably just go ahead and argue that the view proposed will be found successful on an anthropological understanding of language. Moreover, he can explain the genesis of his own position in the same way he explains the genesis of all others: as an instance of his account of human language-use. As Knowles (this volume) points out, Price's account as such pretty much remains on a rudimentary and philosophical – as opposed to the "scientific" – level. As with Quine, this condition can be read as indicative of the need of further advances in science – in Price's case, anthropology and "genealogy." It is the choice of the explaining special science, so to speak, that differentiates Price's naturalism from that of Quine. Again, none of this forces the global expressivist to talk about how the theory is "true" in some sense other than the minimalist sense of the theory itself. His responses are simply more *use* of that theory.

The analogy to Quine brings to the fore a central complication. Namely, perhaps there are other, competing "subject naturalist" theories – theories that are intended as accounts of human *language* but do not equal Price's global expressivism. For example the causal theory of reference, or Quine's view of language as responses to stimuli, might amount to exactly such accounts, at least suitably adjusted and developed.¹² How are we to choose among these differing theories of language? The crucial problem here is that all of them will similarly be able to explain themselves and the sense in which they are "true": such an explanation is just more "use" of that theory – just more theory. It is in a sense *too* easy for the theories to account for themselves, or be "true" by their own lights.

Of course, this point of view requires that we take a step back from different possible subject naturalist theories of language and ask why any of these would

12 In addition, competing subject naturalist accounts might have clear "representationalist" implications. As we will shortly see, Price has advanced an interesting argument against empirical theories of reference or representation. However, this argument is directed against such views as positions in *object* naturalism, and (it seems to me) has no direct bearing on whether representationalist views could be viable theories in *subject* naturalism. As I will presently argue, however, similar problems will arise with subject naturalist theories of language – including Price's own global expressivism.

be preferred. As Price (2004) has argued, such a move is a real change of subject-matter, or a *genuine* move from “use” to “mention”. However, it seems such a move is unavoidable if only to make sense of how Price’s theory has an advantage over other possible *subject* naturalist accounts.¹³ Obviously, on this level, Price cannot say that his global expressivist theory *represents* the way things are. Indeed, Price takes seriously Paul Boghossian’s (1990) argument that we cannot coherently formulate an irrealist view of semantic terms: such a position would, it seems, amount to arguing that reference doesn’t refer to anything. It is for this reason that the global expressivist remains *quietist* about reference – the question simply does not come up, not to mention being answered in the negative. Price takes care not to overstep his subject naturalist position and court incoherence: instead of saying that our statements do not represent and terms do not refer, he emphasizes that the whole question does not appear in the subject naturalist framework as he conceives of it.

But if this is how we are to understand Price’s subject naturalist account, his global expressivist theory clearly approaches a version of internal realism as discussed above. Again, science explains itself: the global expressivist position explains the sense in which it is “true”. But this is “just more theory”. Stepping back from that theory – or from the level of “use” to the level of “mention” – we can note that there is potentially a large variety of such equally self-supporting theories of language. Moreover, on this level, quietism must prevail when it comes to “representation”: whether the theory represents the “world” as it is independently of our vocabularies is not a question to be considered. This is analogous to Putnam’s insistence that the theories themselves only give an “internal” realism. The question of how they are preferable to competing, equally self-supporting accounts cannot be answered – although both Putnam and Price do mention this question *on* the level of “mention”.¹⁴

There are two important reasons why Price would and should, I think, insist that his view is not an internal realist one. Firstly, perhaps the most central of Price’s own arguments against representationalism is that there are multiple *compatible* theories of reference: using Price’s notation, by theory R^* , “Refer-

13 This also points towards a more general issue with all minimalist accounts of truth, which I will only mention here. Minimalist accounts have often been defended as successfully explaining our use of the truth concept or predicate (and sometimes related semantic notions). However, when we ask how a particular account of our use of the truth predicate is preferable to another, or moreover why a minimalist account is preferable to a more robust theory of truth (in which the concept does explanatory work), we seem to be asking how these minimalist accounts are preferable (or true) in a sense *not* (necessarily) entailed by these accounts themselves. The implication is that ultimately the question is one of justification and not just explanation.

14 Of course, “representing” is perhaps not the only way in which a theory might be so privileged; however, internal realism as conceived of above should not be considered as wedded to a representationalist picture.

ence” stands in the relation R^* to the relation R^* ; by theory R^{**} , “Reference” stands in the relation R^{**} to the relation R^{**} , etc. (Price, 2004). This shows that the object naturalist’s project of devising a singular theory of reference (or representation) is somewhat misguided, as formulating that theory presupposes the notion itself. In subject naturalism, it may turn out that there is no such relation to be scrutinized or explained (which is the case in Price’s global expressivism). However, as we already saw, something analogous still happens to different subject naturalist accounts of *language* (including the concept of truth): a variety of such accounts may be similarly compatible as all of them can be “true” by their own lights. What this seems to show is that the object naturalist’s problem will return to haunt the *subject* naturalist. Our choice between different subject naturalist views of language should presumably be an empirical matter, but it appears that there are several compatible subject naturalisms (at least as long as the choice of subject naturalist theory is supposed to be naturalist and not *a priori*¹⁵). If this is right, subject naturalism will lose a key point of advantage against object naturalism.

Secondly, as Price’s subject naturalism resorts to quietism about representation, it is in danger of losing much of its *anti*-representationalist bite. Global expressivism was never supposed to show the representationalist view *mistaken*. However, this places anti-representationalist tendencies of global expressivism “inside” a second-order quietism. As internal realism is not realism “all the way down”, Price’s global expressivism is not anti-representationalist “all the way down”. While internal realism *is* realist, and global expressivism *is* anti-representationalist, they both come with a limitation of domain (or instructions of application) that will leave us wondering whether something could actually be said for realism or anti-representationalism deep down.

Price might resist such likening of internal realism and subject naturalism by pointing out that in his view, the world underlying our language-use is that of science. This notion gives us a way of pointing out what our statements do *not* represent. The problem with this gesture is that it begins to look as if Price’s expressivism – like Rorty’s anti-representationalism – would then be based on the point of view of that independent reality, the underlying scientific picture of the world. Expressivism, then, would itself be based on the underlying scientific position (like local expressivism was above described as a view that *itself* “represents”): it would be an *object* rather than subject naturalist view. But such an account would threaten exactly the sort of incoherence which Price’s quietism was designed to avoid.

The issues at hand are obviously intricate and difficult. But if what I have said here is along the right lines, there is, I think, an underlying reason why

15 To put this point differently, subject naturalism cannot simply *equal* global expressivism or minimalism. This would be an *a priori* account. Again, the choice between different subject naturalist theories must be an empirical matter.

Price's choice turns out to be the one of Putnam vs. Rorty, indicating a kind of dialectical tension in the global expressivist position. The question posed above was about the sense in which global expressivism is the preferable subject naturalist account of language. My suggestion here is that in answering this question the global expressivist either turns towards quietism (where nothing can be said in favour of the global expressivist view against competing *subject* naturalist views) or lapses back to object naturalism. This problem, however, is not peculiar to Price's views – indeed, it seems to be shared by all naturalist accounts. If we do not draw from either a naturalist epistemology or a naturalist ontology, we have no idea of how a distinctly *naturalist* view can get off the ground. But by either alternative we end up in trouble making sense of the privilege of these “naturalist” positions. What is required is an account of how the scientific project or naturalist ontology might *genuinely* be privileged. For this purpose, I will finally turn to normative science.

Normative science

As Quine held, philosophy has been for a long time occupied with the foundationalist project of laying groundwork for the certainty and objectivity of science. There are of course a number of historical examples of exactly such attempts: Descartes's argument that a particular kind of idea – those that are clear and distinct – have epistemological privilege, which would in turn lead to their functioning as the indubitable foundation for further (scientific) study; similarly, Kant's project of “deducing” the categories of experience is an attempt to justify basic claims in metaphysical philosophy, which would in turn lay the ground for the objectivity of science. The naturalist's key move is to deny the feasibility of such “first philosophy.” But as we have seen, such attempts threaten to lapse into either more “first philosophy” or a “mere” internal realism.

To navigate between these two alternatives, I will here (albeit briefly) return to the idea left open above, that of science itself studying normative questions, as well as the question left open above, that of what science is. Although many other things have been called pragmatism in more recent discussions, taking the possibility of a scientific study of normative issues seriously is perfectly pragmatist at least in the classical sense of the word (cf. Pihlström, 2005, p. 95). William James positioned pragmatism as standing between two tempers in philosophy, namely, the “tough-minded,” turning towards hard science for answers, and the “tender-minded,” whose wish to take moral issues seriously leads to metaphysical and religious speculation. Here James not only managed to point at a major dilemma in his contemporary thought but anticipated central developments in subsequent philosophy. While advancing an essentially scien-

tific world-view, then, classical pragmatist philosophers attempted to allow room for genuinely normative and ethical questions, although differently. James's pluralism sometimes took a more explicitly epistemological and normative form, suggesting that there is an irredeemable plurality of epistemic goals (cf. Rydenfelt, 2009). John Dewey, in turn, emphasized that philosophical as well as (other) scientific theories were meant to solve practical, tangible problems that arise from our situations, including our "ends in view," but in his view, there is no overarching end to these ends, or a quest for certainty for its own sake. It is no coincidence that Quine derived his naturalism originally from Dewey (cf. Sinclair, this volume) – and that Dewey was also Rorty's anti-representationalist champion.

It is in Charles S. Peirce's writings that I think we can find the most interesting and fruitful perspective on the possibilities of such pragmatist views. In his early and probably most read paper, "The Fixation of Belief" (1877), Peirce gives an account of inquiry and his notion of the scientific method. Beginning with the idea that inquiry is the passage from the restless condition of doubt to that of belief, Peirce then considers four different ways in which such an inquiry might proceed, different methods of fixing belief – in effect different accounts of truth. The first is the method of tenacity, the clinging to one's opinion despite the criticism of others and the disappointments of experience. However, under what Peirce calls the "social impulse," this method is bound to fail. The disagreement of others begins to matter, and the question becomes how to fix beliefs so that they are fixed in a community and not only for oneself. The next two methods are those of authority, which draws from an authoritarian source, and its refinement, the *a priori* method, which fixes belief in accordance with what human beings can agree upon by way of free deliberation. But ultimately both methods are deemed unsatisfactory, as they make the opinion of all depend on the arbitrary views of the authority, or accidental matters of taste. Instead, our beliefs must be fixed in a way that would make them independent of our subjective opinions and tastes altogether – by a reality "independent of what anybody may think them to be" (Peirce, 1878, p. 137). This is the scientific method. It assumes that there is an independent reality, of which we moreover already have some true beliefs and with which we are in touch in experience, widely conceived. The success of science gives this hypothesis credence, although not infallible authority.¹⁶

16 An interesting comparison could be made between Peirce's view and Price's (1998) argument that the concept of truth plays a normative role in our discourse (or practice of assertion) in that disagreement implies that one of the conversation partners must be wrong. Peirce concentrates on the fixation of belief rather than the norms of assertion. But for him, too, the importance of truth begins with the move from tenacity to the more general conceptions of truth. From Peirce's perspective, however, this still leaves open the more interesting question of what way of fixing "mutual" belief can be found satisfactory, or

From this Peircean perspective, contemporary naturalism has resorted to too narrow accounts of science itself in terms of e.g. physicalism, or to relying on our common understanding of the scientific project, and then attempting to give an account of how this project is a privileged one, or “represents” reality. As we have seen, such an attempt leads nowhere. Instead, the Peircean approach begins with the idea that belief-fixation is ultimately satisfactory only when it is responsive to what is independent of us. On an abstract level, this *defines* the scientific method, which is the attempt to fix belief in accordance with such a reality. This conception builds neither on specific scientific results nor on a particular method that is considered the scientific one. In principle, any particular method inside science is open to revision and “scientific revolutions,” although we have much reason to believe that at least our most fundamental ways of reasoning are not completely out of accordance with the way things are. Obviously, this basic conception is to be fleshed out in terms of what specific methods are better and worse in attaining this task. Peirce later conceived of a part of philosophy he called *normative science* as the study of what sort of rules and aims are satisfactory, or possible to adopt (Peirce, 1903). Of the triad of such sciences – aesthetics, ethics and logic – logic is the inquiry into the feasibility of more particular methods of inquiry, or inference. Thus normative science concerns both of the two levels here discussed: the more abstract choice of overall method (such as the scientific one) and the choice of particular methods or modes of inference inside science, giving the overall content of the method.

As Peirce positions his normative science inside the confines of philosophy, it might easily seem that it amounts to pretty much the same as “first philosophy,” just differently formulated. If normative science has the important task of discussing the *justification* of scientific claims – then it might seem like philosophy also retains its traditional status. But in contrast to “first philosophy,” normative science reconceives of philosophy as that part of science which (among other things) is concerned with the justification of the scientific method itself. This leads to two important differences between such a normative science and a first philosophy. Firstly, while the latter places philosophy beyond and above science and imposes no limitations to the content and methods of such inquiry, the former sets boundaries for what would amount to philosophical study in a scientific framework. Normative science, *qua* science, must also follow the general methods of science, including the testing of its theories. Unlike a first philosophy completely detached from a scientific framework, normative science is then methodologically bound to a scientific perspective. Secondly, and consequently, unlike traditional first philosophy, normative science does not attempt at any *a priori* certainty, or laying a foundation for science that is, in Quine’s phrase, “firmer than the scientific method itself.” Instead, normative

how we are to resolve disagreements. As we will see, the Peircean account also attempts to account for *why* it is that we have such norms (of fixing belief or assertoric practice).

science is quite as experimental and fallible as all of science. It successfully resists regress to a dubious, “philosophical” level of certainty.

This brings us directly to the second point, the question of internal realism. As we saw, the problem with theories of reference, language, etc., which might be highly successful in explaining themselves, was that this does not imply that these theories cut the world at its joints. That is “just more theory”. The implication of this is internal realism. If normative science does not resort to foundationalism, how can it avoid being *circular* in this manner? The main problem of first-order scientific theories as justifying naturalism was that success of scientific theories in explaining other bits of science, or their own genesis, does not equal a philosophical justification for privilege for these theories. (In addition, several such theories might turn out to be equally successful.) However, normative science differs from theories of reference and language in this respect. Instead of an explanatory task, it has a *justificatory* position: its conclusions are explicitly normative. Hence the problem of explanation not being justification evaporates.

Admittedly, however, also the normative science’s picture of the scientific enterprise is ultimately circular. Even although it will not face the problem of explanation vs. justification, if normative science is to be a *science*, it must, as was already noted, work within the scientific method. Instead of an *explanatory* circle, normative science moves in a *justificatory* circle: as a science, it too follows the very method it is in a sense designed to investigate and justify. An idea that underlies Peircean normative science is that we can indeed give an explanation of why some goals (or methods) will prevail: there is an irreversible tendency toward affirming certain aims instead of some others. The implication of a normative science is, after all, a normative realism: there must be an independent reality which this science is answerable to. (It is here especially that the Peircean view contests much of contemporary orthodoxy.¹⁷) But obviously, such an explanation is only available for those who already have adopted the framework in question. Peirce’s “Fixation” story of proceeding from one method to another is intended neither as a historical account nor as a “method-neutral” argument in favour of the scientific method. There is no such argument available: for any argument to hold sway, one has already had to adopt the method in ques-

17 In a sense, then, there are “normative facts” that such science considers. Initially, this might be taken to be an attempt to respond to the placement problems discussed above by the simple addition of new “truthmakers.” However, two considerations should make clear how this position is not as *ad hoc*. Firstly, it depends on the account of science already developed rather than *vice versa*: the conception of science is not simply expanded to “naturalize” a number of “non-natural” facts. Secondly, there is a Peircean way of accounting for such facts that makes them non-mysterious as well. T. L. Short (2007, ch. 5) has argued that instances of such irreversible developments can be found in phenomena studied by the special sciences, e.g. in thermodynamics and biological evolution.

tion. This circular view is hardly vicious, however. Rather, it is perfectly in line with the scientific method itself: what hasn't been taught by experience cannot be shown with words.

Conclusion

The Quinean denial of a “first philosophy” – the attempt to give (distinctly) philosophical foundations for science – is an important, anti-foundationalist point of departure for naturalist views. However, it results in the problem of accounting for the related naturalist position that science is our best way of finding out what there is. Obviously, this should be done without resorting to more first philosophy. Moreover, as I have argued, even the denial of this whole project, like Rorty's anti-representationalism, itself courts foundationalism. To avoid any form of foundationalism – representationalist or anti-representationalist – naturalism can be recast as a first-order scientific theory (or anticipation of such a theory), as with Quine's account of how stimulus leads to science. But this move has the drawback of issuing a “mere” internal realism, as we saw in Putnam's case. This problem, I have argued, also haunts Price's subject naturalist position. The remedy suggested here is to take normative questions seriously and maintain openness to a scientific (even if philosophical) inquiry into such questions – even a “normative realism” to make sense of such inquiry. This will result in science having the means for justifying itself, which avoids both a recoil to foundationalism as well as the qualifications of internal realism. Science itself will account for what is good science. The picture is obviously circular, but not viciously so.

What has been said here goes only a very short way towards showing what I think is the plausibility of a scientific inquiry of normativity and the possible bankruptcy of the alternatives presented. But it is a beginning of an account of the pragmatist perspective which enables the development of a sophisticated naturalism of the sort required. For us to *be* naturalists, we must be able to account for the normative issue of the “privilege” of science. By means of normative science we can do so while *remaining* naturalist.¹⁸

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