

# 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.<sup>1</sup> While nothing prevents the non-

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<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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,

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<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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

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<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> 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

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<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> 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.

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<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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

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<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup>

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.<sup>8</sup> "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.

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<sup>7</sup> 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).

<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup>

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.<sup>10</sup>

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

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<sup>9</sup> 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”.

<sup>10</sup> 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).<sup>11</sup> Drawing from scientific *practice* prevents

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<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup>

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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 thoroughlygoingly fallibilist attitude towards any hypothesis.

<sup>12</sup> 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 which 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.<sup>13</sup> 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

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<sup>13</sup> 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.<sup>14</sup> 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

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<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup>

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

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<sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup>

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