

# TRUTH IN PRAGMATISM. DEWEY AND BRANDOM FACE TO FACE<sup>1</sup>

*LA VERDAD EN EL PRAGMATISMO.  
DEWEY Y BRANDOM CARA A CARA*

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## ABSTRACT

In this paper, I compare the approach to truth characteristic of pragmatism, often identified with warranted assertability, with the prosentential proposal put forward by Robert Brandom. I argue that Brandom's is a genuine step forward from pragmatism and analytic philosophy, even though his philosophical take includes classical pragmatist features. Furthermore, I show that Dewey and Brandom coincide in their social kind of naturalism, also supported by evolutionary psychology. I conclude that the essential distinction between truth and warranted assertability cannot be exposed without involving an external perspective, the third-person perspective, which is absent in standard pragmatist approaches to truth.

**KEYWORDS:** cultural naturalism, facticity, warranted assertability, prosentential theory of truth.

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<sup>1</sup> This text is written on the occasion of the exquisite translation into Spanish of Dewey's monumental work, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, by Ángel M. Faerna, published by Prensas de la Universidad de Zaragoza. I want to express my gratitude to Ángel Faerna and Juan Vicente Mayoral for the invitation to participate in this volume. Ángel Faerna also read a previous draft and made accurate comments on Dewey's position. Answering many of them would have meant to extend this paper considerably. Thus, my discussion will have to wait until a future occasion. I am also grateful to Eduardo Pérez-Navarro for his insightful comments on an earlier version of this paper.

## RESUMEN

En este artículo, comparo la perspectiva sobre la verdad característica del pragmatismo, a menudo identificada con la asertabilidad garantizada, con la propuesta pro-oracional presentada por Robert Brandom. Defiendo que la propuesta de Brandom supone un avance genuino sobre el pragmatismo y la filosofía analítica, aunque su perspectiva filosófica incluya rasgos del pragmatismo clásico. Además, muestro que Dewey y Brandom coinciden en la clase de naturalismo social que defienden, también apoyado por la psicología evolutiva. Concluyo que la distinción esencial entre verdad y asertabilidad garantizada no se puede incorporar sin implicar una perspectiva externa, la perspectiva de tercera persona, que está ausente de las habituales concepciones pragmatistas sobre la verdad.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** asertabilidad garantizada, facticidad, naturalismo cultural, teoría pro-oracional de la verdad.

Mastery of language implies the grasp of concepts. This slogan not only holds for inferentialists like Sellars and Brandom but also for empiricists like Carnap and Quine, although the specific wording and the interpretation they give to it differ from school to school. The skills mentioned in the slogan are two sides of a single competence, which includes proficiency in the use of ground-level concepts and of concepts that are higher level. Truth is one of those higher-level concepts whose mastery comes with linguistic competence.

Understanding meaning by the use that subjects make of words is the pragmatist strategy, followed by Dewey and Wittgenstein, by Sellars and Brandom. In pursuing this strategy, we get to know that the meaning of truth emerges in the practice of assertion (Austin 1950/2013, p. 14, Dewey 1938, p. 6, Strawson 1950/2013, p. 14), marks the necessary “friction” between language and the world (Price 2003), and expresses the aim of “getting things right” (Misak, 2015, p. 263). These latter remarks stress the role of truth in any kind of discourse that aims at objectivity.

As pragmatists, we must lend credibility to speakers’ insights. And indeed, truth is a sign of assertion, of friction with the world, and an expression of how things really are. Unfortunately, these are too vague and unspecific intuitions to pin down the complex function of a higher-level concept, linguistically represented by terms with expressive meaning, such as truth. The difficulties that truth presents are no news and, concerning them, (almost) all philosophical approaches are on a par. No matter how much the criteria are weakened, whether

by defining truth or merely giving a “pragmatic elucidation” (Misak, 2007, p. 68, mentioned in Capps, 2018, p. 43), either by focusing on the substantive concept or to be contented with some weaker surrogate, truth eludes a satisfactory account that responds to even the more obvious objections.

And there is a reason for this. Truth is an apparently transparent notion that encompasses complex aspects at the syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic levels (see Frápolli 2013). The complexity of truth calls for a sophisticated theory of meaning with tools to distinguish between various semantic and pragmatic roles concerning different kinds of concepts/words. Neither the standard empiricist reductionist views nor the standard pragmatist narratives are up to the task. In particular, the essential distinction between proper truth, on the one hand, and warranted assertability, on the other—a distinction around which the debates of truth in pragmatism revolve—is beyond the reach of pragmatist approaches to truth, which do not have the semantic resources to address it. In this respect, Brandom’s view outperforms Dewey’s.

Brandom offers a complete and worked-out analysis of how truth works placed in a technically developed semantic proposal as the prosentential theory. This theory shows the semantic and pragmatic depth of the concept of truth and the syntactic role of the truth predicate. It also avoids the difficulties that truth has standardly faced, paradoxes included. And yet, understanding the proposal requires more than the trivial narratives to which we are so accustomed without needing the empty formal technicalities offered by logicians, standardly severed from actual practices.

That truth, knowledge, and other normative higher-level concepts call for sophisticated theories of meaning is a(n) (indirect) reason for Brandom’s exceptionalism about the conceptual, which also receives support from developmental psychology. Practices involving concepts—higher-level and ground-level alike—represent, in Brandom’s view, a breach with non-linguistic practices and non-linguistic creatures, a breach that advises for a discontinuous treatment, at least for methodological reasons.

In this paper, I will discuss the kind of theory of meaning able to offer a satisfactory approach to truth. Hereby, I will highlight some aspects of Brandom’s view and argue how they are essential for this task. I will also compare them with Dewey’s position and show that Brandom’s is genuinely a step forward from classical pragmatism and classic analytical philosophy (cfr Alexander 2014, Faerna 2014, p. 361 and p. 369). I start with Brandom’s expressivism to elaborate an analysis of truth that includes ingredients from other views, both classical and

contemporary. The analysis will be unequivocally pragmatist in the double sense of the term, i.e., in the sense that refers to classical pragmatism, of which Dewey is a distinguished representative, and in the sense that derives from pragmatics as a discipline that accounts for the role of agents, understood as a part of the contexts of utterance, in the identification of the contents of their linguistic actions.

The resources to be included in a theory of truth able to deal with higher-level concepts and the expressive terms that correspond to them in language are the following. First, it must distinguish between linguistic meaning (semantic value) and semantic or assertoric content, i.e., it needs to be a two-factor view. Besides, it must discriminate between ground-level concepts, i.e., concepts that apply to objects, and higher-level concepts, i.e., concepts that apply to other concepts and combinations of them. In traditional terms, we would say that these are semantic requirements. The next requirements would be pragmatic, although I do not grant too much weight to the distinction. The first one is the priority of sentences and propositions over terms and concepts as the centre of the semantic analysis. Finally, a way of bringing the third-person perspective must be included. I will deal with these requirements in turn. But before going into the more technical aspects, I will review the kind of naturalism that Dewey and Brandom embody. Substantial differences between their views will not be found. Brandom's position could also be called "cultural naturalism", as Dewey called his own view, without betraying either Dewey's or Brandom's general approaches.

## 1. CULTURAL NATURALISM

Brandom has eloquently defended his exceptionalist take on the conceptual. By "exceptionalism" he understands the thesis that there is a(n) (explanatory) gap between the psychological and social life of non-human animals and the cognitive life of sapient. The emphasis on the gap has given rise to doubts about the kind of naturalism that Brandom professes. His pragmatism has also been questioned (Faerna 2014). In this section, I argue that Brandom's naturalism does not differ from Dewey's version in any essential aspect, being both non-reductionist and social. I also defend that, even if some variations are identifiable between Brandom's and former pragmatists' approach to language, as we will see in the next sections, their differences are not so radical as to take Brandom out of the pragmatist tradition. There are undoubtedly differences in emphasis, but Dewey and Brandom alike recognise continuities and discontinuities between the communication life of sentient and sapient.

There is no doubt, nevertheless, that Brandom's general picture encompasses rationalist assumptions which are completely absent from classical pragmatism. Brandom openly acknowledges that his approach to meaning, which makes semantics answer to pragmatics (1994, p. 83, 2000, p. 184), and his inferential approach to content, which individuates it by inferential relations, stand in tension (Frápolti and Wischin 2018, p. 5). The first aspect rests on the standard pragmatist and pragmatic insight that meaning is use, present in Dewey and in Wittgenstein. The meaning as use approach promotes a view that proceeds without gaps from the communicative actions of animals and prelinguistic children to the mature human linguistic exchanges, all of them using articulated languages with their full expressive power. It also allows the explanation of linguistic actions by analogy with the non-linguistic activity of humans and non-humans. The second aspect, by contrast, makes use of the defining property of concepts, i.e., their capability to stand in inferential relations, which rests on social and cognitive structures not to be found in the natural world except for human communities. Inferential semantics requires complex communities, which evolve side by side with the conceptual life of their members. As concepts and words are two sides of a single reality, communities with complex social rules, which involve high cognitive skills, possess highly developed languages. The distinction between language in the social sense and language in the scientific sense (Dewey, op. cit., p. 50), the thick and thin senses in Faerna's terminology (op. cit., p. 365), does not make a difference concerning the social ground of human mind. Only societies with a high degree of sophistication, based on complex communication systems that involve complex minds, include, as part of their functioning, monuments, rituals, and arts (Dewey, op. cit., p. 46, Faerna, op. cit., p. 366).

The exceptionalism of human societies is hardly disputable. To avert the temptation of non-naturalist explanations, naturalism adds the methodological assumption that there must be some natural processes to explain how human beings evolve from non-human creatures, even if we do not know exactly yet how.

Dewey notices the uniqueness of human communities. In *Logic*, he says:

For man is social in another sense than the bee and ant, since his activities are encompassed in an environment that is culturally transmitted, so that what man does and how he acts, is determined not by organic structure and physical heredity alone but by the influence of cultural heredity, embedded in traditions, institutions, customs and the purposes and beliefs they both carry and inspire. Even the neuromuscular structures of individuals are modified through the influence of the cultural environment upon the activities performed. (Dewey, op. cit. p. 43)

Brandom could have written this text. And Tomasello as well. He too defends the exceptionality of the social trait that grounds human cognition: shared intentionality (Tomasello et al. 2005, Tomasello 2008, p. 154, Tomasello 2018). “Human communication” is, according to Tomasello, “a fundamentally cooperative enterprise,” which is “unique in the animal kingdom in many ways, both structurally and motivational” (Tomasello, 2008, p. 6). Chimps and children are alike in many features but, from the age of nine months onwards, humans experience a cognitive revolution that opens a radical breakthrough (Tomasello 2020). The outcome for our topic is that although all sentient beings communicate, only sapients talk. This is what evolutionary psychology teaches us.

Since the sensible and minimal claim that philosophy must not be incompatible with science is a core tenet of pragmatic naturalism, Dewey, Brandom, and pragmatists of all kinds reject the intervention of supernatural powers and abilities in the explanation of human behaviour. This is how Dewey puts it:

If one denies the supernatural, then one has the intellectual responsibility of indicating how the logical may be connected with the biological in a process of continuous development. (Dewey, op. cit., p. 25)

The “intellectual responsibility” is the methodological assumption that science will eventually explain the connection, something that Brandom cannot reject. In fact, he acknowledges the relevance of developmental psychology and Tomasello’s experiments for his view (Frápolli and Wischin, op. cit. p. 6). Nevertheless, when it comes to naturalism, he tries an alternative path that involves modelling meaning relations using the resources of automaton theory and computational linguistics instead of those of biology and psychology. His *Between Saying and Doing* (2008), where he offers a naturalistic explanation of meaning and normativity in computational terms, develops the argument at length.

Biology-based naturalism and computational naturalism do not differ in their general, scientifically informed, understanding of the kind of animals we are. Brandom explicitly endorses Price’s subject naturalism and takes a lot of trouble to explain normative expressions within the boundaries of what is scientifically acceptable:

[Huw Price] argues [...] that although normative vocabulary is not *reducible to* naturalistic vocabulary, it might still be possible to say in wholly naturalistic vocabulary what one must do in order to be using normative vocabulary. If such a claim about the existence of an expressively bootstrapping naturalistic pragmatic metavocabulary for normative vocabulary could be made out, it would evidently

be an important chapter in the development of the naturalist core program of the classical project of philosophical analysis. (Brandom 2008, p. 12)

Besides respect for science, pragmatism and developmental psychology acknowledge that humans are fundamentally animals in societies. Dewey and Brandom, in the philosophical field, and Tomasello, in the scientific field, agree in the essentially social nature of human cognition. Leaving aside variations in aims and emphasis, they build up their conceptions of the human based on mature social structures.

We are the ones who say “we”, Brandom famously says (Brandom 1994, p. 275). And Tomasello expresses himself in similar terms:

[S]hared intentionality is what is necessary for engaging in unique human forms of collaborative activity in which a plural subject ‘we’ is involved: joint goals, joint intentions, mutual knowledge, shared beliefs—all in the context of various cooperative motives. (Tomasello 2008, p. 6-7)

Nothing too far from Dewey’s cultural naturalism. Faerna rightly points out some misinterpretation of Dewey found in Brandom’s characterisation (Faerna, p. 364). In Faerna’s view,

[e]specially after Dewey, pragmatists conceive nature as encompassing the practices and activities that form the social life no less than those directly connected to the organic condition of human beings. (loc. cit., p. 364)

And he continues:

Dewey explicitly denies that physical or organic occurrences could have any explanatory function in relation to those norms unless they are subsumed within a social context. (loc. cit.)

The origin of normativity is thus collective for Dewey as much as for Brandom, both understanding intentionality as essentially social. This remark holds for the thick and thin versions of language alike.

Brandom offers some technical explanations of how representational and normative expressions (*de re* locutions, knowledge, and truth) trace their roots in complex social structures whose specific details, as for instance normative scores, they help track down. These explanations would belong to language in the thin sense of the term. But Brandom’s expressivism shows how the social nature of intentionality applies to language in the thick sense too, i.e., to communicative exchanges that are unsystematic, incomplete, and even inconsistent. In no case

is Brandom's language the precise formal structure of the analytic tradition. His explanation of the role of logical constants and other higher-level concepts evidences that he is dealing with language as used by ordinary speakers in ordinary situations. Following Sellars, Brandom insists that grasping a concept is mastering the use of a word. Concepts and words are inseparable; words and concepts are essentially involved in the social and cultural life that defines language in the social, thick sense. Concepts evolve, and sometimes present incompatible ingredients that must be re-assessed and modified. Expressive higher-level concepts, logical constants among them, allow making tensions and discrepancies in our underlying conceptual life explicit.

The content of all concepts, except logical ones, exceeds their application conditions (Brandom, 2000, p. 69ff.). This is Brandom's main criticism to the empiricist approach to concepts. In hybrid concepts, i.e., those which are half descriptive and half evaluative—"boche" is an example—the surplus of content that goes beyond the circumstances in which a concept can be applied becomes particularly patent. We may or may not accept the inference drawn from the application of some ethnic slurs to the correspondent descriptive terms, or from some (apparently) descriptive terms to some openly evaluative ones, as in the inferences from *being French* to *being a good cook*, or from *being a woman* to *being particularly prone to emotional breakdowns*. But likewise, we might be interested in discussing explicitly the inferential content of purely descriptive concepts like "life" or "planet". For these analytic purposes, we need specific higher-level concepts. Logical constants and epistemic concepts, among others, are tools to bring these tensions into the open and eventually resolve them.

So far, I have emphasised Dewey's and Brandom's common ground, a common ground that gives reasons not to expel Brandom too lightly from the pragmatist tradition. In the next sections, I will display the extra mile that Brandom advances over pragmatism and that makes it possible for him to offer a semantic account of truth, pragmatically accurate, which, unlike the pragmatist treatment, does not have the effect of weakening truth to become an epistemic concept.

## 2. THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A traditional source of trouble for the analysis of higher-level concepts has been the practice of focusing on isolated terms and the obsession with defining them in terms of sufficient and necessary conditions. Pragmatism refocuses the spotlight from isolated terms and concepts to complete sentences and

propositions. Sentences, propositions, and judgements—the chosen item depends on authors and schools—are the minimal units to which pragmatic force can be attached. Alternative formulations of the same intuition are common. Some of them, which focus on propositions, are the following: only propositions can be asserted, only they represent a move in a linguistic game, only propositions can be produced as reasons, and play the role of premises and conclusions in arguments. In explicitly normative terms, they are the minimal units for which the subject can take responsibility. The move from terms/concepts to sentences/propositions is found in Kant and Hegel (Brandom 2019, p. 9), but also in Frege (1879, p. 11, 1884, p. xxii) and Wittgenstein (1922/2012, [T1] and T3.3), all of them authors with pragmatist sensitivity (for the case of Frege, see Frápolli 2022, in press, chapter 2).

Once the pragmatist shift has materialised, the need for explicit definitions vanishes. In the new emerging setting, what the pragmatic analysis must explain is why and with which purposes subjects produce sentences that include the terms to be analysed. Moreover, the semantic analysis, dependent on the former, must identify the systematic contribution of terms and sentences to the content of actions performed by their use.

So far, I have made general remarks on meaning. From this point on, I will focus on truth, analyse how the pragmatist shift looks applied to it, and discuss in which directions the analysis must be extended to obtain a conceptual framework in which truth, in all its complexity, can be spelled out.

The pragmatist shift thrusts sentences (and propositions) into the limelight. Truth terms standardly occur in truth ascriptions, i.e., in sentences used to ascribe truth to a content, typically to the content of somebody's utterance. (1) represents the form that truth ascriptions typically take,

(1) What A said is true.

A variation of (1) is (2),

(2) A said that p and it is true.

Examples (1) and (2), where a subject saying something is explicitly included in the ascription, reflect the pragmatist concern with agents performing actions. The alternative semanticist structure for truth terms, proper of analytic philosophy (see, for instance, Tarski 1935), is (3),

(3) S is a true sentence.

The different structures in which truth terms are inserted have had an effect on the promotion of some theories of truth and the neglect of others (see Frápolli 2013, pp. 55ff.), but I will not pursue this issue at this point. Since this paper deals with truth in pragmatism, structures like (1) and (2) will be our primary concern.

(1) represents a blind truth ascription (Frápolli 2013, pp. 57ff). Blind truth ascriptions make it clear that a distinction between sentence meaning and the content of the assertion made by the uttered sentence is essential to a complete account of the meaning of truth. This distinction can be cast in a wide variety of semantic theories but, without it, the meaning of truth cannot be explained. Tarskian-like, on the one hand, and standard pragmatist approaches, on the other, do not have the required resources. By contrast, the prosentential theory defended by Brandom (1994, pp. 299ff., 2009, pp. 156ff) encompasses the semantic ingredients to give truth its well-deserved comprehensive consideration. For the widely assumed triviality of truth—something that Frege, Ramsey, and Austin, among others claimed—is deceitful: truth is simple in its functioning but extraordinarily complex concerning its syntactic role and its semantic and pragmatic traits. To explain how the tip that we see works so smoothly on the surface, the rest of the iceberg must be brought into the open.

The complexity of truth derives from its status as a higher-level concept. As the rest of higher-level concepts, the terms that represent truth in language possess expressive meaning. Expressive meaning opposes descriptive or representational meaning: those terms with expressive meaning are not paired with any specific concepts in propositions, a feature that has made some scholars on truth assume that truth is redundant or idle. Truth is none of these things, as we will see. Its alleged redundancy only follows in a representational framework, where meanings are seen as the representation of features of state-of-affairs. Unfortunately, in this framework not only truth becomes intractable. All higher-level concepts appear to be mysterious, undefinable, or inconsistent. The difficulties to define knowledge, in meta-epistemology (see, for instance, Williamson 2000), and goodness, in meta-ethics (see, for instance, Blackburn 1993), to mention only two cases in point, derive from the same semantic flaw. And something similar can be said of the analysis of theoretical terms, which are usually first-order, in the philosophy of science (see, for instance, Benacerraf 1973, Carnap 1996).

Let us now apply the abstract remarks made so far to the analysis of (1) and (2). (1), “What A said is true”, is a well-formed English sentence. As such, it has linguistic meaning, i.e., it belongs to the set of sentences generated by the grammatical rules of English. But concerning the topic of (1), i.e., the information conveyed by its utterances, we can only acknowledge that we do not know. At most, we can mention some purely formal treats: it is about truth, it refers to something that somebody has said, etc.

Placed in a context, nevertheless, the situation changes. Consider now the following situation:

- (4) A: Conspiracy theories are fuelled by ignorance and fear,  
 B: What A said is true.

In (4), the content of B's act is *that conspiracy theories are fuelled by ignorance and fear*. B has performed an indirect assertion of this content by means of a truth ascription. Evidence of this is that B cannot add (5) to her utterance,

- (5) (What A said is true but) I'm not saying that conspiracy theories are fuelled by ignorance and fear.

If she did, she would incur a pragmatic contradiction.

In other words, there is no difference in A's and B's degree of commitment to the content first expressed by A. The difference lies in the means A and B have used to express it. Example (4) shows that truth ascriptions inherit their content from ground-level assertions in which some content is put forward. Consider now example (6),

- (6) A: No political system is immune to corruption  
 B: What A said is true.

In (4) and (6), B utters tokens of the same type-sentence. Therefore, the linguistic meaning of what she utters does not change. "What A said is true" is not an ambiguous sentence and its meaning is preserved from an occasion of use to a different one. Nevertheless, B in (4) asserts *that conspiracy theories are fuelled by ignorance and fear* and in (6) she asserts that *no political system is immune to corruption*. This brings about a further trait of truth ascriptions: the content expressed by them is not the result of enriching their linguistic meaning, as it happens with ordinary sentences. There is nothing in (1) that makes it express something about conspiracy theories, corruption, angels or Olympic Games, although in appropriate contexts it can be used to make assertions about all these topics and eventually about any topic. In sum, without the distinction between the meaning of truth ascriptions as sentences and the content of truth ascriptions as acts of ascribing truth, the semantic power of truth cannot be displayed.

(3) also condenses two acts together. The contrary impression depends on a wrong identification of sentences as truth-bearers. As this is a mistake that pragmatism does not make, there is no need to discuss it here. (3), nevertheless, helps see what the expressive meaning of truth terms amounts to. (7) is an instance of (3),

- (7) "Academic life is hard on women" is a true sentence.

The first step in a correct analysis of (7) is disclosing the two levels, meaning and content, mentioned above. (8) accomplishes this function.

(8) By the utterance of an instance of “Academic life is hard on women”, speakers typically say *that academic life is hard on women*.

The qualification “typically” intends to account for contextual information, implicatures, and the like. The addition of the predicate “is true” does not change the content of “academic life is hard on women”. This is a well-known phenomenon, of which Frege, Ramsey, Tarski, and Strawson, to mention only classic figures, were aware. When the only function of grammatical predicates is to add a concept to the content expressed, the truth predicate becomes an anomaly. Hence the alleged philosophical problems that truth poses.

The pragmatist shift has tools to remedy the situation. Meaning relates to the function an expression accomplishes. The role of truth in (3) and (7) is expressive, which means that it boils down to the display of the kind of speech act that is being performed, i.e., an assertion. Or any one of an array of other functions: drawing attention to the content of a sentence, anticipating a possible objection (Ramsey 1927, p. 341), and possibly others. In (1), (2), (4b) and (6b), it works as a prosentence former. Its function is to convert singular terms whose content is a complete proposition, like “what A said”, into sentences with the same content, “what A said is true”. In (3) and (7), the truth predicate is also a prosentence former, although this function is more difficult to spot in these structures. In no case its function is representational. Being a higher-level predicate, “is true” does not pick up any feature of the world. This, nevertheless, does not mean that languages could do without it.

In the analysis of (4) and (5), I have argued that the contents of (4b) and (5b) do not bear any connection with the linguistic meaning of the sentences in (4a) and (5a). Understanding (4b) and (5b) this way is treating these expressions as proforms. An alternative way of making the point is saying that truth ascriptions work like pronouns but in the grammatical category of sentences. This is what the prosentential theory of truth defends.

Hints of the prosentential theory of truth are detectable in (Ramsey 1927). Completely worked-out proposals had to wait until Grover, Camp and Belnap (1975) and C.J.F. Williams (1976). Grover developed her position further in (1992). Brandom adopts a prosentential theory in (1994, pp. 299ff.) as part of his expressive account of normative notions, and I have developed a pragmatist version of the prosentential theory in (2013).

### 3. TRUTH AND WARRANTED ASSERTABILITY

As I claimed at the beginning of this paper, Brandom's view on truth represents a manifest improvement over the reductionist approaches to truth proper of pragmatism and positivism. In this section, I will give evidence to back my claim.

Positivism reduces meaning to a representational view that usually encompasses an empiricist ontology (see Ayer, 1936, pp. 84ff.). Classical pragmatism, in turn, substitutes truth with a weaker notion, which is paradigmatically epistemic. This is Dewey's case, who analyses truth in terms of warranted or justified assertability (see, for instance, Dewey *op. cit.*, p. 7 and p. 9). Because it renounces truth in favour of some other notions, classical pragmatism falls short of a suitable treatment able to explain its role in ordinary and scientific uses.

When philosophers undertake the analyses of higher-level concepts, they commonly make converge two realms that must be kept apart. The first one concerns the meaning of the notions involved. By "meaning" one does not need to understand a list of necessary and sufficient conditions for the concept's application; on the contrary, meaning as use is perfectly acceptable. The second one concerns the activity these notions help explain and the theoretical domains they help systematise. In the cases of truth and knowledge, the convergence is particularly damaging because it leads to the assumption that the meaning of these notions is linked to the activity of justification, which is the central concept in epistemology. However, justification, in the traditional sense, is not a component of the meanings of truth and knowledge. Truth and knowledge involve justification through the act of assertion. Assertions in which truth is attributed to a content and knowledge to a subject presuppose the attributor's capability to back the asserted content with reasons. On the one hand, speakers must have reasons, i.e., justification, for their assertions. On the other, assertion is the kind of speech act in which truth and knowledge make sense. This is the minimal connection between justification and the meaning of truth and knowledge. And yet, the reasons that a subject offers in support of her assertions are independent of the semantic and pragmatic import that characterise the role of these two notions. Dewey seems to be aware of these subtleties, which, in Faerna's words, take the following shape:

This gives rise to the Deweyan concept of "warranted assertability", which unites two dimensions: the epistemological one in the most conventional sense of the term, where truth is given a meaning as epistemic value [...], and the other

one, which we could call “judiciary” or properly practical, which takes up the existential or material import of the activity and its results; an import that, as Dewey always argued, conventional epistemology has systematically ignored to the point of making us represent knowledge as the only activity, among all those that human beings (or, for that matter, living beings) deploy, that does not produce the slightest change in reality nor enjoys the least effective efficacy (loc. Faerna, 2021, p. 24, *my translation*)

The two realms mentioned above are here explicitly distinguished although without a clear acknowledgement of their independence. In fact, just before this passage, Faerna explains:

Dewey superimposes [on the scheme doubt/belief that represents Peirce’s interpretation of inquiry] the notion of “situation” that he had, at the same time, developed as a framework for his theoretical and practical research in psychology and pedagogy. Its fundamental aim was to overcome the model of a “subject” (of behaviour, of learning) who reacts mechanically to an “object” and replace it by a coordination of interactions or transactions in the ingredients of an “integrated whole” (or, rather, of a whole subject to continuous disruptions and partial reintegrations), a model that is truly suitable for incorporating the habits as described above. (loc.cit., pp. 23-24)

This tension between the distinction of the two realms and their confluence in an integrated explanation is no surprise. Even if pragmatism shuns sharp distinctions, sometimes they are unavoidable. A position like Brandom’s, in which the analytic tradition and the pragmatist tradition converge, is thus better qualified to produce more accurate explanations of complex phenomena like those involved in the discussions of truth and knowledge.

The two dimensions that Faerna indicates can be labelled as the “epistemological dimension” and the “semantic dimension”. While being essential, as I have pointed out, the distinction might not suffice. To set apart truth from its epistemic surrogates, the semantic dimension must include the instruments not only to identify the speaker’s perspective but also to represent the perspective of the attributor of truth and knowledge. In other words, the semantics of truth must detect the role of the first and the third persons. Otherwise, truth and warranted assertability merge into one single notion, opening a breach for the sceptic to slip in. Let us call this general remark the “Gettier insight”, which can adopt two versions, the original, epistemic version (Gettier 1966), and what I have called the “pragmatic Gettier” (Frápolli 2019).

The epistemic Gettier establishes that (i) an agent can be justified in asserting a false proposition, and (ii) that not all cases of true justified belief are cases of knowledge. Point (ii) shows that agents are not able to distinguish between what they believe, even if justified and true, and what they know. In other words, the discrimination between belief and knowledge is not available to the subject; it requires an external perspective.

The pragmatic Gettier focuses on the act of assertion. The following is a suitable formulation of it:

[PG] No information a subject has access to suffices for him to distinguish the conditions that entitle him to assert that he knows from the conditions that entitle him to assert that he believes. (Frápolti op. cit., p. 4)

From the subject's point of view, it is impossible to discriminate between the conditions that enable her to assert each one of the following contents, (9) – (12),

- (9) p,
- (10) I believe that p,
- (11) I know that p,
- (12) p is true.

This is what follows from Grice's quality maxim and from Brandom's approach to knowledge and truth (see Frápolti 2019). No matter how much information the subject collects, the possibility of being wrong is always present. Peirce's strategy of identifying truth with what we would believe at the end of the research is a clumsy way of stating a correct intuition, i.e., the intuition that truth can only be attributed from the outside. A classical alternative is placing truth in God's eye. The non-theological and truly pragmatist explanation is that truth, like knowledge, depends on the different perspectives of the different participants in a conversation.

An example will clarify the point. I might be entitled to assert, in a particular circumstance, that

- (13) the swatch is red,
- even if it is false. (14), (15) and (16) are, nevertheless, pragmatic contradictions,
- (14) the swatch is red. What I have just said is false,
  - (15) I believe that the swatch is red but that the swatch is red is false
  - (16) I know that the swatch is red but that the swatch is red is false.

From the third-person perspective, the situation changes. An agent can attribute to a subject the belief that the swatch is red, acknowledge that the subject is justified in her belief that the swatch is red, and be entitled to assert that the subject does not know. In other words, warranted assertability can be rightly

attributed without thereby attributing truth to the asserted content or knowledge to the believer.

This analysis derives from Brandom's account of knowledge and belief. Knowledge, Brandom argues, possesses a deontic hybrid status, which encompasses commitments and entitlements of the agents who attribute knowledge and the person to whom knowledge is attributed (Brandom 2009, pp. 157-8). By contrast with what happens with belief attributions, such as (17),

(17) Joan believes that the swatch is red,

the attributor of knowledge indirectly asserts himself the content that she attributes and, therefore, shows her entitlement to the assertion and her commitment to its content. After uttering (17), a subject can add "but the swatch is not red". Nevertheless, the utterer of (18),

(18) Joan knows that the swatch is red,

cannot negate the known content on pain of contradiction. The utterer of (17) attributes a content without endorsing it whereas the utterer of (18) necessarily assumes the content attributed. The difference in behaviour between knowledge and belief responds to the fact that knowledge, unlike belief, is a factive concept. Being factive, the content in the that-clause can be detached and asserted independently. In other words, for the notion of knowledge the following rule holds,

[K-elimination]  $K(p) \vdash p$ .

Truth is the factive notion par excellence. In those classic logical systems that include a truth operator, it can be eliminated from an assertion without loss of semantic content,

[T-Elimination]  $T(p) \vdash p$ .

All other factive notions are factive because, in one way or another, involve truth in their definitions.

Factivity, in this context, means *being able to escape from the subjective realm*. Factive concepts contribute to making objective claims. For this reason, factivity can be seen as the semantic shadow of objectivity. It does not require much argumentation to establish that objectivity is one of the desiderata that an analysis of truth should comply. The connection between truth and objectivity explains the prevalence of the theory of truth as correspondence, the Peircean version that places it at the end of the inquiry, and the judiciary aspect identified by Faerna in Dewey's approach.

Now, let us apply these hardly controversial remarks to the debate of truth in pragmatism. I will use factivity as a minimal adequacy criterion for the correction of any proposal on the meaning of truth:

[*Factivity*] Factivity must follow from any correct analysis of truth.

No epistemic approach to truth, not even Dewey's nuanced version, scores well at this point. This should be enough to discard them and look for alternative proposals. Warranted assertability, no matter how qualified, rests within the subject's domain. Truth transcends subjects and can only be detected from an external viewpoint.

The prosentential theory that Brandom adopts offers everything that is needed for a complete account of the semantic and pragmatic behaviour of the concept of truth. It takes care, for instance, of the distance between the linguistic meaning and propositional content of truth ascriptions. Focusing on truth *ascriptions*, it directly places the basic uses of truth in the third-person perspective. Moreover, the prosentential theory is coherent with an expressive treatment of truth terms, whose function consists in making explicit the endorsement of a content. In the case of knowledge attributions, the expressive meaning of knowledge also indicates the attribution to the attributee of the required entitlements to assert the content, i.e., the part of justification of the classic definition of knowledge, and the appropriate commitments to the content, i.e., the part of belief of the classic definition of knowledge.

We should not blame the prosentential theory for not saying anything about certainty or justification. Nor for being silent about reliable methods of knowledge acquisition or the "methodology of inquiry" [...] "in order to reach valid conclusions" (Dewey, op. cit., p. 5). These issues are central to epistemology and the methodology of research, but they do not belong to an account of the *meaning* of truth. The prosentential theory offers a complete explanation of the concept of truth. It describes the expressive meaning of truth terms, the syntactic role of the truth predicate, and the pragmatic functions of truth ascriptions. No other approach to truth offers that much. Not even the judicious reflections on the nature of logical theory that Dewey offers in his monumental book.

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