DEFLATING TRUTH:
PRAGMATISM *vs.* MINIMALISM[1]

1. Pragmatism

It seems that no philosopher these days wants a theory of truth which can be accused of being metaphysical. But even if we agree that grandiose metaphysics is to be spurned, even if we agree that our theory of truth should be a deflated one, the controversy does not die down. A variety of deflationist options present themselves. Some, with Richard Rorty, take the notion of truth to be so wedded to metaphysics that we are advised to drop it altogether. Others, with Paul Horwich, take the disquotational or equivalence schema—'*p*' is *T* if and only if *p*—to completely capture the content of the predicate 'is true'. And others argue that there is a conception of truth to be had which is non-metaphysical but which goes beyond the triviality expressed by the disquotational schema (hereafter the DS).

I shall be concerned with a suggestion of the last kind. I want to show how a kind of pragmatism best captures what is important about truth. This Peircean view has it, in the spirit of the DS, that there is an unseverable connection between asserting a statement and claiming that it is true. But it also urges us to look to the practice of assertion and to the commitments incurred in it, so that we can say something further—something about what truth *is*.

My task will be to show, against most expectations, that a pragmatist position can come up to the anti-metaphysical standards of the disquotationalist and can better characterise perfectly good debates about whether a discourse such as moral discourse aims at truth or whether it is a radically subjective matter, not at all suited for truth-value.

C. S. Peirce, the founder of pragmatism, held that a true belief is one which would never lead to disappointment.[2] It would be 'indefeasible' (CP 6.485) or not defeated, were inquiry pursued as far as it could fruitfully go. I have argued elsewhere that the pragmatist must refrain from putting this thought in terms of the end of inquiry, must refrain from sug-

gesting that a true belief is one which would be believed in some cogni-
tively ideal state or a state of perfect evidence, whatever that might be.[3]
Rather, a true belief is one upon which inquiry could not improve, a belief
which would fit with experience and argument and which would satisfy all
of the aims of inquiry, no matter how much the issue was subject to ex-
periment, evaluation, and debate.

Peirce was a resolute fallibilist and insisted that an inquirer could
never know when inquiry had been pushed far enough for a genuinely
stable opinion to have been reached. Far from suggesting that a true belief
is one which we find good to believe at the moment, he argued that since
we cannot know when we have a belief which would never lead to disap-
pointment, we cannot know when we have a true belief. Nonetheless,
when we offer a justification for 'p is true', we offer a justification for the
claim that p itself. For what we do when we try to establish the truth of a
claim is to show that, thus far, it fits with all the evidence and argument
and that we have reason to think that it will continue to do so. So truth is
connected to human inquiry (it is the best that inquiry could do), but it goes
beyond any particular inquiry (it is not simply the upshot of our best
attempts).

Peirce did not intend to give an analytic definition of truth. He
argued, generally, that a debate about a definition is likely to be a 'profit-
less discussion', unless the predicate to be defined is completely
unfamiliar. (CP 8.100) He was content to let something like the corre-
spondence theory stand as a "nominal" definition of truth. A more
important task, he argued, is to articulate the consequences which can be
derived from 'p is true'.[4] We ignore this project at the risk of getting
theories which are empty, theories are metaphysical in that they make a
futile attempt to transcend practice and experience. A philosophical theory
must be such that something turns on it—there must be some set of ex-
pectations we can draw from it.

Peirce argues that what we can expect of 'p is true' is the following:
if we were to diligently inquire into the claim that p,[5] we would find that
it survived our inquiries—we would find nothing which would cause us to
doubt it.[6] He spends much time elaborating this thought. At the heart of
pragmatism is the idea that a true belief is the best that inquiry could do,
but this is just the beginning of a long discussion, not a definition of truth.

I have suggested elsewhere (1991:127f) that regarding the task of definition Peirce would, and should, be even happier with the DS than with correspondence. For one thing, he expressed qualms about the idea of correspondence to an unknowable 'thing-in-itself':

> You only puzzle yourself by talking of this metaphysical 'truth' and metaphysical 'falsity' that you know nothing about. All you have any dealings with are your doubts and beliefs. . . . Your problems would be greatly simplified, if, instead of saying that you want to know the 'Truth', you were simply to say that you want to attain a state of belief unassailable by doubt. (CP 5.416, see also 5.572)

Here we have an early statement of the now-popular thought that we must deflate the notion of truth. The metaphysician has lost sight of the connection between truth and the less glamorous notions of belief, assertion, doubt, and experience. He has lost sight of the point that arguing that p is true is just arguing for p itself. This is the point which lies behind the DS.

2. Disquotationalism and Purity

Disquotationalists, who would be loath to be lumped together with the pragmatists, nonetheless agree with Peirce about the metaphysics of the correspondence theory. Quine puts the point thus:

> What on the part of true sentences is meant to correspond to what on the part of reality? If we seek a correspondence word by word, we find ourselves eking reality out with a complement of abstract objects fabricated for the sake of the correspondence. Or perhaps we settle for a correspondence of whole sentences with *facts*: a sentence is true if it reports a fact. But there again we have fabricated substance for an empty doctrine. The world is full of things, variously related, but what, in addition to that, are facts? (1987:213)

One major difference, however, between what I shall call the pure disquotationalist and the pragmatist is that the disquotationalist will be principled about not adding anything further to the DS. He will not want to add the 'realist' thought that the '*iff p*' in the DS is meant to indicate that there is a mind-independent fact onto which p hooks and he will not want to add the pragmatist thought that truth is what would forever be assertible. The disquotationalist theory of truth has an infinite number of

axioms—we have an endless supply of sentences or propositions to sub-
stitute for p in 'p' is T iff p. (Horwich 1990:31) And those substitutions
must stand alone as entirely capturing the content of 'is true'. All we can
and need say about truth is 'Snow is white' is true if and only if snow is
white, 'Toronto is north of Buffalo' is true if and only if Toronto is north
of Buffalo, and so on.

So Horwich says that there is no 'essence' of truth; no 'special
quality which all truths supposedly have in common'. (1990:6) So we
should not inquire into its causal behavior or its 'typical manifestations'.
(1990:39) Believing that a theory is true is nothing but 'a trivial step
beyond believing the theory'. (1990:60)

Horwich does, however, think that there is a role for the predicate 'is
true'—he does not claim that truth is not a property at all. It has one (and
only one) use: a generalizing function in logic.[7] It is a device for infinite
conjunction and disjunction and for expressing propositions which we
cannot identity, such as 'everything the Pope says is true' and 'whatever
Icabod said about her is not true'. That is the '*raison d'être* of the concept
of truth'; it 'exists solely for the sake of a certain logical need'. (Horwich
1990:4, 2)

But the pragmatist thinks that something more comes on the heels of
the thought that truth is bound up with assertion. What we know about a
concept, our only access to it, is the role that it plays in our cognitive lives.
And what we know about truth is that we take truth to be our aim when
we assert, inquire, and deliberate. So, the pragmatist argues, were we to
forever achieve all of our local aims in inquiry, were we to get a belief
which would be as good as it could be, that would be a true belief.

We must pause here to ensure that the thought that 'inquiry aims at
truth' is not mischaracterised. We have in our various inquiries and delib-
erations a multiplicity of aims—empirical adequacy, coherence with other
beliefs, simplicity, explanatory power, and the like. What the pragmatist
argues is that when we say that we aim at the truth, what we mean is that,
were a belief to satisfy all of our aims in inquiry, then that belief would be
true. There is nothing over and above the fulfillment of those aims,
nothing metaphysical, to which we aspire. So when we say 'truth is our
aim in inquiry', this is a way of expressing the thought that a belief which
is, and which would continue to be, everything we want it to be, is true.

Horwich says that his view differs from pragmatism because he is not offering an eliminative analysis or an analytic definition of the term 'true', but rather, an account of what a person understands when he understands claims about truth. He takes the pragmatist to define truth in terms of utility, presumably 'p is true if and only if it is useful to believe p'. (1990:34, 47) He might have James in mind here, but we have seen that giving analytic equivalences is not in the spirit of Peircean pragmatism and, anyway, the pragmatic elucidation given by Peirce does not have usefulness at its centre.

Perhaps Horwich might then argue that the pragmatic elucidation which is offered, once the DS is accepted as a definition, is in some way spurious or metaphysical. But we must be careful not to slide with him from a perfectly good thought about the mysteriousness of essences to the thought that there can be no general characteristic of true sentences or no quality which all truths have in common, or even typically. A theory of x which identifies features of x's can be perfectly respectable for someone wary of metaphysics. Everything, of course, depends on what characteristics are identified and whether they are metaphysical. And the offenders are states of affairs, facts, and the like, not anything the pragmatist puts out.

What Horwich really must find objectionable in a view which goes beyond the DS is that the extra step offends against his sense that 'truth has a certain purity'. Our understanding of truth, he thinks, must be kept independent of other ideas—such as the ideas of assertion, verification, reference, meaning, success, or logical entailment. (1990:12)

But it turns out that Horwich thinks there might be much that is right in other theories of truth, it is just that we are not to think of them as part of our *basic* theory of truth. (1990:115) We are to get ourselves the most simple, pure, elegant theory of truth and then we can 'conjoin that theory with assumptions from elsewhere'. (1990:26) In 'combination with theories of other phenomena', minimalism will 'explain all the facts about truth'. (1990:26) A competing theory of truth might be a 'legitimate extension' of the minimalist theory, but it should not be seen as a 'tempting alternative' to it. (1990:115)

Here we encounter a fundamental difference in philosophical temperament between the pragmatist and the disquotationalist. The pragmatist

thinks that the disquotationalist's quest for purity will result in something rather empty and useless, for the important work is in spelling out the relations between truth on the one hand and assertion, verification, success, etc. on the other. The way to deflate truth, the pragmatist argues, the way to make truth less metaphysical, is to link it with these other, more down-to-earth notions, not to claim an independence from them. Linkages with notions that we have workaday dealings with are the one and only way to get a grasp on the idea of truth.

Of course, the disquotationalist does argue that the truth predicate is connected to our practices in that it has a generalizing function. But once the truth predicate is retained in order to hold on to that use, the door is flung open to other uses. The pragmatist wants to jam a foot in that door and keep it open. How could we possibly think that the generalizing function is the only function of 'is true' that we need to account for? If we stop with the disquotationalist here, we fail to give a full account of how truth is linked to our practices of deliberation and experimentation; we fail to live up to the demand of making sense of inquiry.[8]

Horwich's sense of purity, one presumes, is prompted by both the logician's concern about simplicity and by the fact that the DS seems to be the only uncontroversial thing that we can say about truth. (1990:126) Here we ought to straightaway agree that claims about what arises from the DS—claims about the commitments involved in assertion and belief—are more controversial than the DS itself. The suggestions I shall offer below about these commitments are very much up for debate. But the fact that something is controversial says nothing at all about whether it is correct or important.

3. Minimalism and Pluralism About Truth

Crispin Wright is not such a purist. His 'minimalist' position aims to reinflate truth while retaining the disquotationalist's aversion to thinking of truth as identifying 'some especially profound form of engagement between language, or thought, and reality'. (Wright 1992:72, 37) He agrees with the disquotationalist (and pragmatist) thought that '*p* is true' amounts to the assertion that *p*. But Wright finds much more 'lurking behind the Disquotational Schema' than does Horwich. (1992:72)

The DS has it that to say that a sentence is true is to assert it and to assert a sentence is to say that it is true. Wright says that the point here is that the biconditional relation between assertion and truth is such that the norms governing assertion will also be the norms which govern the use of the predicate 'is true'. Reason to regard a sentence as warrantedly assertible is reason to regard it as true and *vice versa*. (1992:16–18)

One of the minimal conditions on a truth predicate, however, is that truth must come apart from warranted assertion—truth does not amount to mere warranted assertibility here and now.[9] Wright thus turns his attention to the truth predicate which he calls 'superassertibility', a special kind of warranted assertion:

> A statement is superassertible ... if and only if it is, or can be, warranted and some warrant for it would survive arbitrarily close scrutiny of its pedigree and arbitrarily extensive increments to or other forms of improvement of our information. (1992:48)

Here truth is a non-metaphysical property, 'a projection, merely, of the standards, whatever they are, which actually inform assertion within the discourse'. (1992:61)

This looks very much like the pragmatism I articulated above, but Wright thinks of pragmatists[10] as holding the implausible view that there is an ideal limit to our efforts at getting warranted beliefs—a point when all relevant empirical information would be in. Moreover, he thinks that the Peircean view of truth requires that, were a person in such ideal conditions, she would know that she was; she would be in a position to acknowledge the fact. (1992:46) Since an inquirer could never have an intimation that she had somehow managed to get to a state of comprehensive empirical information, the antecedent of the following conditional is 'conceptually impossible': were a subject to be in epistemically ideal conditions and were she able to acknowledge that fact, she would believe *p*. Wright thinks this is very 'bad news for Peircean views of truth'. (1992:46)

But we have seen that the pragmatist can and should stay away from the ideas of total evidence and epistemically ideal conditions. Inquiry, in the slogan 'truth is what would be believed were we to inquire as far as we could', is not to be thought of as global, complete inquiry, where every question is decided, including the question of whether inquiry is complete.

The pragmatist is a fallibilist and will simply agree that a person could never know that inquiry into a given question (never mind inquiry *tout court*) had been pursued as far as it could fruitfully go.

It might now seem that there is no difference at all between Wright and the pragmatist. It might seem that they both think that what it is for a belief to be true is that it would not be improved upon, that it would forever be assertible.

But Wright argues that superassertibility is the truth-predicate of choice only for certain discourses—discourses in which we think that if p is true, then p is knowable. (1992:58, 75) Other discourses have more robust truth-predicates. His proposal is a pluralist one: we are to take any predicate which satisfies the DS and which takes truth to be distinct from warranted assertibility here and now to be a truth predicate. There may be more than one perfectly good conception of truth, and on some, truth is higher and better than superassertibility.[11]

But such pluralism comes at the price of superassertibility looking not like truth, but like truth's poor relation—sustained warranted assertibility. Indeed, we can multiply such impoverished predicates in the following way: 'warranted assertibility today and tomorrow', 'warranted assertibility today, tomorrow, and the day after tomorrow', and so on until we reach some suitably durable warranted assertibility. None of these look like real truth, *if we have as a contrast something more robust*, something more like the truth predicate the correspondence theorist has always sought.

Wright himself verges on admitting this when he distinguishes between truth *simpliciter* (minimal truth) and substantial truth (what one gets when a discourse has some other features, for instance, cognitive command, where it is *a priori* that intractable disagreements are due to one kind or another of cognitive shortcoming[12]). He makes this distinction, he says, 'merely for the ease of discussion'. (1992:89–90) Similarly, he thinks that it is just a terminological matter if we talk of the assertions in a discourse which meet the minimal requirements but not more substantial requirements as aspiring to 'correctness', while those which display the additional features can aspire to 'truth'. (1992:232)

The problem is that it looks very much like the minimal requirements are *not enough for truth*. Just about every statement makes the minimalist grade and so that grade is of little interest. It is not what we normally think of as truth—as what we aim at. Wright thinks, for instance, that the case

for the more substantial requirements cannot be made for moral judgments—they admit of truth, but only of minimal truth. But the temptation presses to just say that moral judgements fail to aspire to truth, since they cannot aspire to robust truth. We should, I submit, stick with the pragmatist's aim of saying something about truth *simpliciter*.

So far, the pragmatist has fared well against his minimalist colleagues. But the stickiest issue is yet to come.

4. Bivalence

The most pressing difficulty for those who take truth to be linked to evidence, or to reasons we might have for a belief, concerns the status of the principle of bivalence and the corresponding law of excluded middle ($p \lor -p$). For it appears that the pragmatist must say that if we would not decide upon a question, it then has no answer; that 'p is true or p is false' fails to take hold of the candidate answers. But what about the statement that Churchill sneezed exactly 45 times in 1945, a statement for which the evidence has vanished? What about Goldbach's conjecture that any even number greater than four is the sum of two primes, a conjecture which cannot be confirmed and which may never be refuted?[13]

Peirce, who struggled long and hard with this issue, ended up with the thought that bivalence is a regulative assumption of inquiry.[14] We must, for any given question, assume that there would be an upshot to our investigations, that it would emerge either that p is true or that it is false. Otherwise, we simply could not explain why we inquire into the issue. Such an assumption is one which we have to make in order to make sense of our practices of deliberation, investigation, and belief. Indeed, the assumption of bivalence *is* our practice.

Nothing, however, about the need to assume bivalence makes it true. Peirce, in the days before overdrafts and lines of credit, compared the matter with the need to make the assumption that he has money in his account, if he is to write cheques on it. But of course the indispensability never affected his balance in the least. (CP 2.113, 3.432, 7.219) He thus turned his back on the opportunity to elevate the principle of bivalence into a necessary truth:

> Logic requires us, with reference to each question we have in hand, to hope some definite answer to it may be true. That *hope* with reference to *each* case

as it comes up is, by a *saltus*, stated by logicians as a law concerning *all cases*, namely the law of excluded middle. (NE iv:xiii)

A number of points will want to be made in the wake of the idea that bivalence for the pragmatist is a regulative assumption of inquiry. First, she will not deny bivalence of any statement which is the subject of a live inquiry. Any matter which we are investigating will be such that we think there is a truth-value to be discovered there.

Second, the pragmatist will not require the prospect of *proof* of a statement before sense can be made of its having a truth-value. We have reason to believe that Goldbach's conjecture may be true, for, hard as we try, we have not been able to refute it. Similarly, the fact that we can never confirm a universal generalisation need not have us deny that it is bivalent, that it or its negation would withstand the trials of investigation.

Third, even in the fact of the strongest claim that we will have no evidence at all for or against a statement, we can still think that bivalence holds. For questions regarding the remote past, for instance, the fact that the evidence has dried up does not alter the truth-value of the following conditional: had we been able to pursue inquiry, were we to have the relevant evidence before us, we would believe p or we would believe $-p$.[15] And as Blackburn (1989) has noted, we know what would count as having evidence for or against such statements; we know that they are the sort of statement for or against which evidence can speak.

The pragmatist thus has a number of reasons for thinking that bivalence holds of those statements for which it seems that it must hold. But nonetheless, bivalence must not be supposed to be a principle which governs every statement.

Perhaps there are whole discourses for which our practice is not, or should not be, assumed to be bivalent.[16] A discourse such as that about the objective tastiness of recognizably edible foodstuffs might be a domain where we think that bivalence fails to hold, where it is reasonable to think that there is only underdetermination. For any statement 'x tastes good', where x is something that some human beings are known to eat, and where the asserter refuses to qualify the statement with 'to me' or 'to so-and-so', we cannot say that the statement is either true or false. The realist, not being able to avail himself of any hidden indexicality, will not want to say it, thinking that there is no fact that makes it true. The pragmatist will not

want to say it, thinking that no amount of inquiry would settle on the right answer.

Perhaps there are also cases of genuine underdetermination in discourses where bivalence can be generally assumed to hold, questions to which we think that there might well be no right answer. Perhaps the question about whether light is a wave or a particle is such a case. Perhaps moral discourse is like this, with plenty of tragic choices and plenty of questions for which we despair of an answer, but must content ourselves with the least pernicious compromise.

Vague statements also seem not to be bivalent; neither do those statements which are such that by their very nature they are insulated from evidence. Statements such as 'being nothings nothing' and 'my colour spectrum is an exact inversion of yours' are such that nothing *could* speak for or against them.

Finally, bivalence seems not to govern the liar paradox. For if 'this proposition is not true' is true, then bivalence fails: it is also not the case that 'this proposition is not true'.

The point of these examples is to show that our intuitions about bivalence can pull against its unrestricted application and can thus pull against the DS holding everywhere. The disquotationalist must also try to cope with kinds of statements which seem not to be bivalent. He seems to be commited to the view that any declarative sentence can be slotted in for 'p' in the DS. But the sorts of sentences canvassed above seem not appropriately slotted in. Indeed, the liar paradox prompts a bald announcement from Horwich that the statement 'This proposition is not true' must not be substituted for p in the DS: 'permissible instantiations of the equivalence schema are restricted in some way so as to avoid paradoxical results'. (1990:41)

The disquotationalist, of course, has ways of dealing with what I have been suggesting are failures of bivalence. The principle of bivalence has it that every well-formed statement is either true or false and he can shift the burden to 'well-formed' in an attempt to understand as bivalent the examples I have marshaled. And Field (1994) grapples with vagueness by adding a primitive 'definitely' operator, Horwich by distinguishing between 'ordinary truth' and 'determinate truth'. (1990:82) My point is just that the disquotationalist also has some work to do here. The price of

their coping strategies, I would argue, is added unwanted complexity and the proliferation of different grades of truth.

Of course the pragmatist's view of bivalence also comes at a price. The DS will hold of a statement only as a regulative assumption of inquiry and only when we are prepared to assert the statement or to think that it is a candidate for a truth-value.[17] The DS is a definition of truth only in Peirce's very loose sense of definition—it is a helpful introduction to the concept. Pragmatism is in step with the thought which underlies disquotationalism—the idea that "'p' is true" amounts to the assertion that p, but it is very much out of step with the unrestricted application of this thought.

5. The Role of Truth in Inquiry and in Moral Deliberation

We have seen that there is considerable agreement that the concept of truth is internally related to the concept of assertion. We cannot understand "'p" is true' without understanding that it is the assertion that p. In what follows, I shall suggest that truth is also internally related to inquiry, reasons, and evidence.

We undertake certain commitments when we assert or believe. Think of the difference between the phrases 'I suspect that p' or 'It seems to me that p', on the one hand, and 'I assert that p' or 'I believe that p', on the other. What I do when I use the first two phrases is distance myself from the obligations which come with belief and assertion. Some of those obligations are as follows.

First, when I assert or believe that p, I commit myself to what the pragmatist calls consequences or expectations. Some of those consequences are practical. They will be specified in terms of actions and observations: 'if p is true, then if I do A, B will be the result'. And, as Peirce stressed, beliefs or contents are bound up in a web of inferential connections as well. If I believe that p and p entails q, then I am commited also to q.

Secondly, I commit myself to defending p; to arguing that I am, and others are, warranted in asserting and believing it. Of course, working out what it is to have warrant for a particular belief will be a difficult and controversial business. But that does not interfere with the thought that, whether or not one can live up to the commitment, assertion commits one to engage, if called upon, in defence. Failing to incur the commitment, failing to see that one is required to offer reasons for one's belief, results in the degradation of conviction into opinion.[18]

I also commit myself to giving up the belief in the face of sustained evidence and argument against it and to saying what *could* speak against the belief. Genuine beliefs are such that they are responsive to evidence for and against them. We might think of this as what is right in verificationism.[19] A 'belief' which thinks so well of itself that it claims to be immune from recalcitrant experience and reasoning is spurious; a 'belief' which is such that nothing could speak against it is empty.

Another way of putting the point is to say that part of what it is to be a belief, as opposed to some other mental state, such as an entertaining of an interesting but idle thought, a lie about what one believes, a self-deceit about what one believes, or a mere dogmatic opinion, is that there must be something that can speak for or against a belief and that belief must be responsive to what can speak for or against it.

One reason it must be so responsive is that, if it were not, it would be impossible to individuate beliefs. As David Wiggins puts it, if we are to interpret x for the belief that it is, as opposed to some other belief, then there must be something, distinct from x, which has to hold in order 'for x to succeed in its aim or be correct'.[20]

A second reason is that the psychological reality of belief is that the believer thinks that her belief fits best with the evidence and argument. I cannot get myself to believe that p by deciding that if the coin I am about to flip lands heads, I will believe it, and if it lands tails, I will not. In order to believe p I have to be convinced that I have good reason to believe it. If I were convinced that my coin had some special power to deliver true beliefs, then I could indeed get myself to believe p by its flip. But notice that then I have made a prior (mistaken) judgement that my coin delivers beliefs which fit the evidence and argument. I still aim at getting beliefs which would fit with and respond to the evidence, I simply go about the business in an odd way.[21]

In this quick account of what we are committed to when we assert or believe something, we have gone far beyond the DS. Truth is bound up with the practice of assertion, which then binds it further to expectations for experience, reasons, and inference. Contrary to the spirit of pure disquotationalism, a true belief is one which is and would continue to be assertible—a belief which would provide, as Peirce said, for a 'maximum of expectation and a minimum of surprise'.

The proof of pragmatism's success over disquotationalism, I suggest, will be in the pudding—in whether the pragmatist view of truth and

bivalence can make better sense of various areas of discourse and inquiry
than the disquotationalist view. Of course, this standard of proof might
well be weighted towards the pragmatist as it is itself a pragmatist
standard. But it is hard, I submit, to argue with it. The importance of the
phenomenology of our practices can be captured by the following entirely
general and entirely plausible requirement: a theory must try to preserve
the central features of the phenomenon which it is a theory *of*, otherwise
it ceases to be a theory of that phenomenon. In this case, our account of
truth must take seriously the thought that we aim at the truth. And it must
take seriously the picture various inquiries have of themselves. For
instance, it must take seriously whether our practice in an inquiry is to
take bivalence to govern or whether we take ourselves to be producing un-
derdetermined judgements. It is not that we should be slaves to those
pictures so that our theory must try to ape them. Rather, the requirement
is that the theorist give principled reasons when her view is revisionist
about the practice of inquiry. There is a defeasible presumption that our
theory of truth should try to preserve our deeply held convictions and our
ways of inquiring into various subject matters.[22]

Showing that the pragmatist makes better sense of our inquiries is a
major undertaking and here I can only hint at how it might be done.

The disquotationalist has great difficulty in fully engaging the
question of what kinds of statements the truth predicate applies to, of what
kinds of statements aspire to truth. He has trouble, for instance, engaging
in the long-standing debate over whether statements about what is just or
unjust, odious or acceptable, are such that they are either true or false, as
opposed to up to the standards of some local discourse or other. Horwich,
for instance, says that 'every type of proposition—every possible object
of belief, assertion, conjecture, and so on—will be a candidate for truth,
for the device of generalization is no less useful when the propositions in
question are normative than when they are naturalistic'.[23] There is no
more to a statement's being the kind of statement which takes a truth-
value than its being declarative and disciplined. Since all that one can, and
need, say about truth is what the DS says, we are left without resources to
deliberate about whether some statements are the sort that might be true
or false.[24]

Pragmatism, on the other hand, leaves plenty of space for vibrant
debate here. There is space, for instance, for a modest cognitivism to

assert itself—we can see moral judgements as falling within the scope of truth and knowledge, despite the fact that there might be many statements which are not bivalent.

It is an interesting question how much underdetermination and divergence the model can tolerate without losing its grasp on objectivity. One of the things we can say is that it would be a mistake to think that there is some well-defined cut-off point, if only we could find it. I have argued elsewhere[25] that another thing we can say is that there will be some determinate answers forthcoming—enough to support the idea of objectivity. If a true belief is one which best fits with the evidence and argument, then those views which turn on ignoring or denigrating the experience of some (e.g., women, blacks, Jews) are unlikely to reach the truth.

Truth or knowledge here is as the pragmatist sees it, but it is not for that reason a sort of second-rate truth and knowledge. The pragmatist will argue, *contra* Wright, that there is nothing higher or better with which to contrast it.

This cognitivism will not be a mere byproduct of a quietism which holds that *every* disciplined discourse admits of truth. For the various discourses, including moral discourse, will have to struggle to meet the pragmatist's requirements. A discourse might fail outright or it might fail to some extent. We might find within a discourse that certain kinds of judgements are more viable candidates for truth than others. And we should expect to find that, in a discourse like morality, there will be much underdetermination.

That is, there is an important distinction between a judgement's being a mere candidate for a truth-value and its being a good or likely candidate. A judgement which appears to aim at truth and which is subject to some discipline is a candidate for truth. But we have yet to satisfy ourselves that we are reasonable in thinking that it has a truth-value, that it has a decent chance at fulfilling its aspirations. When we have done that, then we can say that the judgement and the discourse of which it is a part, is, for want of a better word, objective.

Moral discourse has the requisite basic discipline; it is full of candidates for truth. We aim at getting things right, we distinguish between thinking that one is right and being right, we criticise the beliefs, actions and cognitive skills of others, we think that we can make discoveries and that we can improve our judgements, and we think that it is appropriate,

　　　　　　　　　　　CHERYL MISAK

indeed required, that we give reasons and arguments for our beliefs—that 'rational' persuasion is the means to getting someone to agree with us. Such phenomena are marks of objectivity; they are indications that an area of inquiry aims at or aspires to truth.

But we must ask whether or how often such aspirations might be met. I have suggested above that one feature a viable candidate for truth requires is that there be consequences of the belief which could in principle support or speak against it. What causes us to ask whether moral discourse is objective is that it is far from obvious that morality is like that. There is much disagreement about what standards of deliberation ought to be adopted; we often find issues to be contestable, thorny, and un-derdetermined. And much work must be done to make plausible the idea that moral judgements are responsive to evidence and argument which might overturn them. The challenge for the cognitivist is to say how all of this can be so without making moral discourse entirely unprincipled. There is no guarantee that the challenge will be met. And this is what gives the debate about whether moral judgements have truth-values its life.

I think that the challenge can be met—that the comparative paucity of agreement can be taken on board without leading us to abandon talk of truth in moral matters. This, however, is a very long story and here I will be content if I have managed to show that if we are to understand what truth is, we must link the notion to our practices. The disquotationalist, insofar as he holds that there is no distinction between ' "p" is true' and the assertion that p, joins the pragmatist in this project. But once one has accepted the point which underlies the DS, there is no good reason to stop oneself from going on to trace the implications of the relationship between truth and assertion and plenty of reason to go ahead.

Cheryl Misak

University of Toronto

NOTES

2. CP 5.569. References to Peirce's *Collected Papers* take the form CPn.m, where n is volume number and m is page number. References to his chronological *Writings* take the form CE,n, where n is page number. Ne,n refers to *New Elements of Mathematics*.

3. See Misak (1991:41f), (1992), (1995:121), and (forthcoming). In (1991), I sometimes referred to the hypothetical final state of inquiry. This was partly due to the fact that I tried to solve the problems traditionally associated with the Peircean view of truth. And it was partly because I did not yet appreciate just how important it is to stay away from such formulations.

4. Peirce offers us an account of content in terms of commitments or consequences. See Misak (1991, 1995) and, for similar accounts of content see Peacocke (1986) and Brandom (1994). For the argument that Peacocke puts too much of a burden on commitments to hold other beliefs and to make inferences, as opposed to the commitment to say what would be the case in the world were the belief true, see Misak (1995:178–193). I would argue similarly against Brandom.

5. I take the bearers of truth-values to be the contents of beliefs or claims, but will sometimes drop 'the claim that'. And, given the holistic nature of justification, inquiry into p will involve inquiry into many other issues.

6. Notice that a true belief may be believed, on good grounds, then doubted, on good grounds, then believed again. A true belief is one that *would be* found to be best, were inquiry to be pursued as far as it could fruitfully go.

7. Horwich (1990:2, 37), see also Soames (1984), Field (1986).

8. It must be said here that the disquotationalist does think that he can make sense of inquiry. Horwich thinks, for instance, that disquotationalism explains why we aim at truth. True beliefs are beneficial: if one's beliefs include beliefs of the sort 'If I perform action A then state of affairs S will be realized', then I can make the required inferences that will get me what I want, all within the structure of the disquotationalist theory. (1990:22–24, 44–46) The pragmatist will argue here that the aims of inquiry are not purely instrumental. Wanting to satisfy our desires is not the only reason we want the truth.

9. Wright takes the disquotationalist to think that truth *must* be merely good assertion. He then argues that truth cannot be so, that the extensions of the two concepts might well diverge. (1992:19, 49, 71) But the disquotationalist will want nothing to do with the claim imputed to her, thinking it a misinterpretation of the DS.

10. His remarks are directed against Peirce and Putnam. See Misak (1992) for a similar objection to Putnam.

11. (1992:38). In (1996:920n.9), Wright does not foreclose on the possibility that superassertibility holds everywhere—or at least for every minimally truth-apt discourse. If it turned out that Wright held the global thesis, one would have to see him straightforwardly as a pragmatist. The global thesis, however, seems to be in tension with the direction of argument in (1992).

12. Such as insufficient or divergent evidence, faulty reasoning, inattention, oversight, or malfunction of equipment. (1992:90ff, 175, 222). Another additional feature is to show that the discourse is such that we detect matters rather than matters being dependent on how we judge them. Another is to show that appeals to facts have a wide explanatory role; that the subject matter of the discourse figures in the explanations of other things.

13. Wright sees his pluralism as coming to superassertibility's rescue here. The objection relies on a robust truth predicate which is out of place in a discourse, such that about the comic, where we think that if p is true, then p must be knowable. (1992:51) I have suggested that pluralism about truth predicates comes at too heavy a price.

14. Blackburn (1989) also makes this suggestion.

15. Similarly, where the evidence is misleading or is caused in the wrong way, we can invoke such a conditional to make sense of the thought that the true belief is not the one we happen to get stuck with, but the one which would be best, were inquiry to proceed smoothly.

16. Given the connection between bivalence and the law of excluded middle, we must then say that logic here is not classical. In some discourses excluded middle is not a logical law, while in others it is. Perhaps the pragmatist here can reject the law of excluded middle *tout court*, but then reinstate it in most discourses as a theorem. So in most domains, we would be able to prove that $--p$ is equivalent to p; we could use excluded middle in our inferences. With respect to conditionals with antecedents from one discourse and consequents from another, we could not use it. Joe Heath suggested this line of argument to me.

17. And see the above note regarding the costs for classical logic.

18. Brandom also argues that when we believe p, we commit ourselves to giving reasons. But he seems to not take this commitment to be a constitutive norm of belief or assertion, for he suggests that 'bare assertion' need not come with reasons. One can just think that people with beards are dangerous and be unprepared to give any grounds for this belief. (1994:228–30) He does, however, think that the practice of bare assertion is parasitic on the practice of assertion with commitment to give reasons. My point is a little more exacting. A belief, in order to be a belief, must come with a commitment to give reasons.

19. Nothing in this thought rides on how the term 'verificationism' has often been used. The point could be made just as well by Brandom: beliefs are things that stand as and stand in need of reasons. To see how reasons might count as experience, see also Misak (1995) and (1996).

20. Wiggins (1991:151). See Jackson, Oppy, and Smith (1994) for some additional points about the very nature of belief and what that means for minimalism. One might well ask how the pragmatist can, in the absence of truth-conditions, think that the meaning of a content or belief is fixed across time. If meaning is fixed by the sorts of inferences the belief gets caught up in, then it is hard to see how we can understand the statements of others, even our ancestors, let alone think that others got the matter right or wrong. The pragmatist answer, I suggest, would begin from the thought that meaning is not fixed entirely by conceptual role. It is fixed by the practical, inferential, *and empirical* consequences of the belief.

21. If I decide to believe p if an expert believes it, I need not be making such a mistake. For I might have very good reason to think that the expert is the best deliverer of beliefs which are properly keyed to the evidence and argument.

22. There need not be anything conservative, or preserving of the status quo, about trying to have one's philosophical theory stay true to practice. As Peirce says: 'there is but one state of mind from which you can "set out", namely, the very state of mind in which you actually find yourself at the time you do "set out"—a state in which you are laden with an immense mass of cognition already formed, of which you cannot divest yourself if you would'. (CP 5.416) Notice that both the pragmatist and the disquotationalist give reasons for revising the thought that we aim at correspondence to mind-independent states of affairs.

23. (1993:73), see also Field (1986), (1994).

24. Horwich and Field respond to these difficulties, but space considerations prevent me from entering into how the responses are inadequate. See the brief discussion above about the disquotationalist's coping strategies for what I have suggested are failures of bivalence, and Misak (forthcoming).

25. Misak (forthcoming) and 1996.

REFERENCES

Blackburn, Simon (1989) "Manifesting Realism" in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 10, ed. P. French *et. al.*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Boghossian, Paul (1990) "The Status of Content," *The Philosophical Review*.

Brandom, Robert (1994) *Making It Explicit*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Field, Hartry (1994) "Disquotational Truth and Factually Defective Discourse," *The Philosophical Review*, vol. 103, no. 3.

_____ (1986) "The Deflationary Conception of Truth" in *Fact, Science and Morality*, G. MacDonald and C. Wright (eds.), Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Horwich, Paul (1994) "The Essence of Expressivism," *Analysis* 54.

_____ (1993) "Gibbard's Theory of Norms," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, vol. 22, no. 1.

_____ (1990) *Truth*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Jackson, Frank, Oppy, Graham, and Smith, Michael (1994) "Minimalism and Truth-Aptness," *Mind*, vol. 103, no. 411.

Misak, Cheryl (forthcoming) *Moral Deliberation: Truth, Conflict and Modesty*, London: Routledge.

_____ (1996) "Pragmatism, Empiricism, and Morality," in S. Lovibond and S. Williams (eds.), *Essays for David Wiggins: Identity, Truth and Value*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

_____ (1995) *Verificationism: Its History and Prospects* London: Routledge.

_____ (1994) "Pragmatism in Focus," *Studies in the History and Philosophy of Science*, vol. 25, no. 1.

_____ (1992) "Brian Ellis: *Truth and Objectivity:* Critical Notice," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 22, no. 3.

_____ (1991) *Truth and the End of Inquiry: A Peircean View of Truth*: Oxford: Clarendon Press.

_____ (1990) "Pragmatism and Bivalence" *International Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, vol. 4, no. 2.

Peacocke, Christopher (1986) *Thoughts: An Essay on Content*, Aristotelian Society Series, vol. 4, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Peirce, C. S. *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, C. Hartshorne and P. Weiss, eds., (I–IV) and A. Burks, ed., (VII and VIII), Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1931–58).

_____ *Writings of Charles S. Peirce: A Chronological Edition*, M. Fisch, ed., (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1982–).

_____ *The New Elements of Mathematics*, C. Eislie, ed. (The Hague: Mouton 1976).

Quine, W. V. O. (1987) *Quiddities: An Intermittently Philosophical Dictionary*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Soames, Scott (1984) "What Is A Theory of Truth?" *Journal of Philosophy*, 81.

Wiggins (1991) "Truth, and Truth as Predicated of Moral Judgements" in *Needs, Values, Truth: Essays in the Philosophy of Value*, 2nd ed'n., Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Wright, Crispin (1992) *Truth and Objectivity*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

_____ (1996) "Response to Commentators," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. LVI, no. 4.