Undoing the Truth Fetish: The Normative Path to Pragmatism

Shamik Dasgupta
Draft of April 2020

What is pragmatism? I don't know of a succinct definition. The term encompasses a cluster of ideas associated with the American philosophical tradition running from Charles Peirce and William James through figures such as John Dewey, Nelson Goodman, and Richard Rorty.[1] But a central theme is a shift away from truth and onto *us*; onto our practices, interests, and needs. This yields distinctive views on a range of topics including the nature of inquiry, truth, justification, and meaning. Thus, while scientific inquiry is often said to aim at truth, pragmatists see it more as an attempt to make our lives better. Insofar as they talk of truth, pragmatists typically deny that it consists in "correspondence" with reality; instead, some understand it in terms of our epistemic practices, e.g. as that on which rational inquiry converges in the long run. This is to regard truth as "immanent" insofar as it cannot outrun our practices. And what justifies our methods of inquiry such as induction? While some philosophers think they're justified insofar as they track truth, pragmatists tend to disagree. For if truth just is what our methods converge on then the methods come first and must be justified, if at all, independently of truth. Thus we see Goodman (1955) "justifying" induction in terms of our practices, as something we do, not by measuring it against truth. As for linguistic meaning (or mental content), pragmatists tend to find notions like truth-conditions, representation, and reference unilluminating, and focus more on the practical upshots of language (or thought). These then are four core theses of the pragmatist tradition:

Pragmatic theory of inquiry: Inquiry aims at serving our interests.

Immanent theory of truth: Truth is that on which rational inquiry converges.

Immanent theory of justification: Our methods of inquiry are justified, if at all, in terms of our practices.

Pragmatic theory of meaning: Meaning is determined by practical consequences.

I used to find all this ridiculous. Isn't it *obvious* that some truths will elude rational inquiry, such as the exact number of brontosauruses that ever lived? Isn't it equally clear that climatology should aim to find the *truth* about climate change, not just what suits us? And if truth is the aim, aren't our methods justifiable only insofar as they lead to truth? As for the pragmatic theory of meaning, it seemed to me no more promising than the related verificationist doctrine that meaning consists in *observable* consequences—both struck me as effectively refuted by the spectacular successes of recent truth-conditional semantics. In short, I was a "truther": I thought that a human-independent notion of truth was central to philosophy and regarded these pragmatist theses as vestiges of an outdated naiveté.

Nonetheless, I've come to think that these pragmatist theses are right after all, and that they follow from a normative claim which is widely accepted by contemporary truthers! My aim here is to chart out this normative path to pragmatism.

---

[1] Misak (2013) presents an illuminating history of this tradition.

The normative claim is that truth is, in itself, normatively inert. Deflationists have long argued that it is *explanatorily* inert, but the claim is that even truth is explanatory it nonetheless holds no intrinsic normative significance. Sections 1-4 articulate this claim; sections 5-9 then argue that it leads to the four pragmatist theses.

I won't offer much argument for the normative claim. For one thing, it strikes me as almost self-evident once articulated properly, which is why half the paper tries to do just that. And I'll argue in section 10 that many would-be truthers already accept it anyway. Still, I'll conclude by describing the striking picture that results if you reject it. I find that picture uncredible, so I embrace the normative claim and the pragmatism that follows. But opponents of pragmatism may instead read the paper as revealing the picture they're wedded to.

As we'll see, the pragmatism I'll develop is distinctive insofar as it verifies much of what truthers say about the role of truth. For this reason I call it "transcendental pragmatism": it acknowledges the importance of truth but situates it in a sea of practices.[2] I won't do much in terms of scholarship to compare this with the pragmatist tradition. Pragmatists come in many varieties and I suspect that some will regard this as not *real* pragmatism, while others will see me as merely retracing well-trodden pragmatist ground. To the latter I suggest that it is worth retracing this ground in terms that contemporary truthers will likely accept. And to the former I say that I don't much care what we call it; my aim is to develop a distinctive position in the spirit of the pragmatist theses listed above.

1. How to go on

Our starting point is the Kripkensteinian question of how to go on.[3] Consider the sign '+'. You've used it a finite number of times to write down calculations such as '5 + 7 = 12' and '17 + 8 = 25'. Now you try calculating '68 + 57' for the first time, and imagine you've never calculated numbers greater than 50 before. What's the answer? We think it's obviously 125, but Kripke demurs. What's obvious is that *if you mean addition by '+'* the answer is 125. But what if you mean quaddition? Quaddition is the function that maps two numbers x and y to their addition when both are smaller than 50, and to 5 otherwise. If you mean quaddition, the answer to your calculation is 5! And Kripke's "skeptical argument" purports to show that there's no fact of the matter whether you mean addition or quaddition. Your past usage of '+' is consistent with both meanings, by hypothesis, and Kripke argues that nothing else about you—your dispositions, intentions, etc.—suffices to determine what you mean either. Hence there is no fact of the matter which answer is correct. In Wittgensteinian terms, there is no "right" way to go on using '+'.

The issue is whether there's a *correct* answer, but this bears clarification. By the correct answer, I don't mean what you'd be justified in believing. If you mean addition by '+', the correct answer is 125 even if you don't justifiably believe so and even if you don't *know* that you mean addition. Thus, the issue does not concern the epistemology of meaning or what "guides" us in applying an expression.[4] Nor does it concern the mathematical facts about addition and

---

[2] Thanks to Chris Peacocke for this evocative label.
[3] Kripke (1982), Wittgenstein (1953).
[4] These are important issues, just not the issues I focus on here. See Miller (2001), Wright (2001a), and Merino-Rajme (2015) for further discussion of them.

quaddition—these are not in question. The issue, rather, is whether '+' means addition or quaddition.

More precisely, the question is which of these sentences is correct:

(A)   68 + 57 = 125
(B)   68 + 57 = 5

Schematically, say that a sentence S is correct iff (i) S means that p, and (ii) p. Condition (ii) isn't at issue: I assume the mathematical facts that 68 added to 57 is 125, and that 68 quadded to 57 is 5. The issue concerns (i), of whether (A) means that 125 is the *addition* of 68 and 57 or their *quaddition.* If the former, (A) is correct; if the latter it isn't. Kripke's skeptical argument purports to show that there is no fact of the matter what (A) means and hence whether it's correct.

If you find talk of "meaning" obscure, we could instead say that a sentence S is correct iff (i) the correctness-condition of S is that p, and (ii) p. Then the issue again concerns (i), of whether (A) is correct iff 68 *added* to 57 is 125, or correct iff 68 *quadded* to 57 is 125. Here I'll slide freely between meaning and correctness-conditions—by 'meaning' I mean only that expressions have conditions of correct and incorrect application. What Kripke's skeptical argument purports to show is that the relevant facts about '+' do not suffice to determine correctness-conditions; they do not fix the "right" way to go on.

But if the issue is correctness, isn't this just an issue about *truth*? To be correct *is* to be true, the thought is, so the issue must really concern *truth*-conditions: whether (A) is true iff 68 added to 57 is 125, or true iff 68 quadded to 57 is 125. And that depends whether '+' *refers* to addition or quaddition. What Kripke's skeptical argument purports to show, on this reading, is that no facts about '+' determine its referent.

Seen like this, the issue would apparently be solved by showing that certain facts about '+' *do* determine its referent after all. This would amount to what Field (1994) calls an "inflationist" theory of meaning, on which meaning consists in reference and truth-conditions and the like. But I think this appearance is mistaken. Even if something does fix reference and truth-conditions *per* some inflationist theory, that in itself still doesn't fix the right way to go on!

2. The truth fetish

To see why, consider the inflationist theory associated with David Lewis (1984) on which reference is fixed by use plus naturalness. The idea is this. Suppose Kripke is right that addition and quaddition both fit your past usage of '+'. Still, not all functions are equal; some are more natural than others. Here we appeal to the metaphysical thesis that some entities (properties, relations, functions, whatever) are *perfectly natural*, and that amongst the rest some are *more natural* than others—green is more natural than grue, for example. Then the proposal is that the referent of an expression is whatever best satisfies the two constraints of fit with use and naturalness. If addition is more natural than quaddition, '+' refers to addition.

One can then define truth in terms of reference in the Tarskian manner. For example, a base clause might say that a sentence of the form 'a is F' is true iff the referent of 'a' has the

property referred to by 'F'.[5] Appropriately developed, this would imply that (A) is true iff the addition of 68 and 57 is 125. *Et voila*: (A) has a truth-condition after all!

On this theory, Kripke is right that facts about *you* don't suffice to fix reference. But reference isn't fixed just by you; it's fixed by you *and the world*, and the world helps determine that you refer to addition rather than quaddition. I said this theory is associated with Lewis, not that it is Lewis'—his considered view was more complex.[6] Still, it's a simple example of an inflationist theory on which reference and truth-conditions are fixed by some mixture of usage and the world. I claim that *such theories imply nothing about correctness*—by themselves they settle nothing about the right way to go on using '+'! This Lewisian theory illustrates the point because of its simplicity.

To see this, assume that the theory works as advertised: addition is perfectly natural, so '+' refers to addition. Still, if there's a property of perfect naturalness that addition has and quaddition lacks, there's also a property of perfect *quaturalness* that quaddition has and addition lacks. After all, properties are cheap: there's a property for every set. At least, this was Lewis' own view of properties, and likewise for relations and functions: there's a relation for every set of n-tuples and a function for every univalent relation. He posited perfect naturalness to distinguish a select few of these entities from the rest. This works *to an extent*: it distinguishes those that are natural from the rest. But if properties are cheap, there's also a property of perfect quaturalness that distinguishes a *different* set of entities from the rest. Addition may be perfectly natural, but quaddition is perfectly quatural!

So, if the relation of reference is fixed by use plus naturalness *per* the Lewisian theory, there's also a relation of *queference* fixed by use plus *quaturalness* in a precisely analogous manner. The queferent of '+' is that function which fits use and is most quatural, namely quaddition. Your expression '+' stands in *both* relations at once: it *refers* to addition and *quefers* to quaddition at the very same time!

And just as the Lewisian theory defined truth in terms of reference, there's an analogous notion of *quuth* defined in terms of queference—the analogous base clause would state that a sentence 'a is F' is *quue* iff the queferent of 'a' has the property queferred to by 'F'. Thus, if the Lewisian theory implies that (A) is *true* iff 68 added to 57 is 125, then, equally, (A) is *quue* iff 68 quadded to 57 is 125. There is nothing contradictory here, for truth and quuth are different properties: (A) has a truth-condition *and* a quuth-condition at the very same time!

We started with a normative question of how to go on using '+'. When computing '68 + 57' for the first time, what's the *right* thing to say? What's the *correct* answer? The hope was that the Lewisian theory settles this: if '+' refers to addition, the answer is 125. But don't be fooled, for it depends on whether it's right to go on in accordance with the referent of '+' or its queferent. If the former, the answer is 125; but if the latter it's 5! Remember, both relations are out there: '+' refers to addition *and* quefers to quaddition at the very same time. Thus, absent a further claim to the effect that reference is normatively significant—that the evaluation of speech as

---

[5] This is obviously a simplification—a more realistic theory might associate predicates with satisfaction-conditions or extensions instead of referents. But these details are not relevant here.
[6] See Weatherson (2012), Schwarz (2014), and Williams (2015) for further discussion.

correct or incorrect should reflect reference rather than queference—nothing in the Lewisian theory implies that the correct answer is 125.[7]

Similarly for truth. The Lewisian theory implies that (A) is true and (B) is not. Still, (B) is *quue* and (A) is not. Which is correct? That depends on whether the correct sentence is the one that's *true* or the one that's *quue*, and the Lewisian theory as stated doesn't say. More precisely, we said that a sentence is correct iff (i) its correctness-condition is that p, and (ii) p. The Lewisian theory describes (A) and (B)'s truth-conditions, but they also have quuth-conditions! Absent a further claim that truth is normatively significant—that truth, not quuth, serves as the standard of correctness—the Lewisian theory does not fix correctness-conditions after all.[8]

This is not Putnam's "just more theory" objection.[9] His point was that naturalness cannot be an extra constraint that helps fix reference along with fit with usage; there's just fit with usage, which may include fit with our use of the term 'naturalness'. But my point is the opposite. It's not that there are no extra constraints, it's that there are too many. There's an extra constraint of naturalness that fixes reference, but there's also a constraint of quaturalness that fixes queference. Without a further claim to the effect that naturalness is normatively significant, nothing follows about whether to go on using '+' according to its referent or its queferent.

Nor is this Kripke's objection to dispositional theories of meaning. Kripke argued (i) that our dispositions run out too soon (beyond some limit we have no dispositions to use '+' one way or another) and (ii) we can be disposed to use an expression incorrectly. The Lewisian theory employs naturalness to solve both problems: it fixes a referent even where our dispositions run out, and since naturalness competes with usage the referent may diverge from our dispositions of use. I don't deny that naturalness does this work; my claim is that if it does, quaturalness also does a parallel job of fixing a queferent. Again, absent a further claim that naturalness is normatively significant, nothing follows about how to go on using '+'.

The point is that on the Lewisian theory, truth is just one property fixed by one mixture of usage and the world. But quuth is another property fixed by a different mixture, and there are countless other mixtures besides. Which mixture is the standard of correctness, the one that fixes the right way to go on? This is where the further claim is needed. To forget this further claim and presume without question that it's the Lewisian mixture to *fetishize* that mixture over

---

[7] Stich (1990) makes a related point to the effect that 'water' stands in many relations at once to a number of chemical substances.

[8] I've heard it objected that truth must be significant because it satisfies the equivalence scheme:
     'S' is true if and only if S
To elaborate, if 'snow' refers to snow and 'white' refers to whiteness, the Tarskian definition of truth implies
     'Snow is white' is true if and only if snow is white.
And the objection is that if 'snow' quefers to grass (and 'white' quefers to whiteness), the definition of quuth would imply
     'Snow is white' is quue if and only if grass is white.
But this is too quick. The equivalence scheme ranges over interpreted sentences of the meta-language, and the meta-language can be interpreted according to reference or queference. Interpreted latter-wise, we should say
     'snow' quefers to *snow*
and definition of quuth then implies
     'Snow is white' is quue if and only if snow is white
per the equivalence scheme! Indeed, so interpreted it's *truth* that doesn't satisfy the equivalence scheme! Thus truth and quuth both satisfy the equivalence scheme depending on how the meta-language is interpreted.

[9] Putnam (1977) objected to a causal theory of reference along these lines; Lewis (1984) discussed how the objection would apply to the Lewisian theory under discussion. Thanks to Rohan Sud for a helpful discussion of this point.

5

the others. It is this fetish I want to undo. If you use 'true' to denote the Lewisian mixture, fine—the point is that we must not fetishize truth.[10]

I've discussed the Lewisian theory, but the same goes for *any* inflationist theory on which reference and truth-conditions are fixed by some mixture of use plus world, whether that mixture involves causation, teleological functions, or even some *sui generis* property not reducible to those of natural science. Whatever the mixture is, we must remember that mixtures of use plus world are cheap. In addition to causation there is quausation, a relation that overlaps with causation "around here" and diverges elsewhere. If our terms have referents fixed by some mixture involving causation, they *also* have queferents fixed by an analogous mixture involving quasation. Thus, it's not enough to identify some mixture of use plus world and call it "reference", for mixtures are two-a-penny and the normative question remains as to which one determines the right way to go on.

3. Realism and anti-realism about meaning

To be clear, I haven't said that no mixture is normatively significant. Perhaps one of them is—perhaps the Lewisian mixture. But if so, we can ask what makes it significant. What explains why *this* mixture plays the normative role of determining the right way to go on? Specifically, does it have this normative significance independently of us or because of us? The former is what I call "realism" about meaning, the latter "anti-realism". This distinction is central to what follows, for anti-realism is the normative claim that, I'll argue, leads to our four pragmatist theses.

But first let me explain the distinction. Our words stand in countless relations to the world, as we've seen. Communication requires that we organize around one relation and use it to evaluate speech as correct or incorrect. For the anti-realist, all relations are objectively speaking on a par. In principle, any relation would do. We use the one we do just because it suits us; because it serves our interests to evaluate speech with respect to it. If that turns out to be the Lewisian relation fixed by use plus naturalness, fine; the point is that it has no intrinsic significance and plays this normative role only because it suits us. Other groups of individuals with different natures or interests might do better to coordinate around queference, in which case the right way for *them* to go on would differ from ours. For the realist, by contrast, one relation is normative significant independently of us. It fixes the right way to go on *period*, regardless of anyone's interests. If that turns out to be the Lewisian relation, fine again; the point is that it plays this role independently of whether it suits us well. A group that goes on in accordance with queference is going *wrong* even if queference suits them better.[11]

Of course, it's a platitude that reference depends on use—had we used 'snow' differently it would have referred to something else. Realists need not deny this. What's independent of us, on their view, is not what the referent of 'snow' is, but that *reference* rather than queference determines correctness-conditions.

---

[10] You might instead use 'true' as a label for whatever the standard of correctness is, in which case it's analytic that truth is normatively significant. But then the question is whether 'true' labels the Lewisian mixture or some other mixture, and *that* depends on which mixture is normatively significant. This is just our question of normative significance all over again.

[11] I argued in Dasgupta (2018) that naturalness has no normative significance independently of us. Combined with the Lewisian theory of reference and truth, this yields anti-realism about meaning. But here I do not assume that naturalness has no independent significance, I'm just distinguishing realism from anti-realism.

This point is worth marking with terminology. Semantics, let's say, is the theory that assigns semantic values—e.g. referents, truth-conditions, etc.—to expressions. Meta-semantics is then the theory of what fixes the semantic value of an expression—the Lewisian theory that reference is fixed by use plus naturalness is an example. At the risk of multiplying hyphens, "meta-meta-semantics" is then the theory of why semantic values *matter*; of why reference and truth-conditions, not queference and quuth-conditions, play the normative role in evaluating speech. It's the theory that explains why semantics is in the business of assigning referents rather than queferents in the first place. Realism and anti-realism are theories of meta-meta-semantics. That's why realism is consistent with the platitude that reference depends on use, for that is a platitude of meta-semantics. Likewise, anti-realism is consistent with semantic theories on which meaning consists in reference and truth-conditions. It's also consistent with meta-semantic theories, like the Lewisian theory, on which reference and truth-conditions are fixed by some mixture of use plus world. Anti-realists may also agree that the worldly parts of that mixture, such as facts involving naturalness or causation, hold independently of us. What depends on us, on their view, is the normative fact that *that* determines correctness-conditions.

Anti-realism is therefore not what Boghossian (1990) called 'irrealism' about truth-conditions. This is the view that there are no true instances of

(*)   S has the truth-condition that p

either because all instances are false (error-theory) or because they aren't in the business of making claims that could be true or false (non-factualism). By contrast, anti-realists grant that sentences have truth-conditions and that there are true instances of (*); they just insist that truth-conditions have no normative significance independently of the fact that it serves our interests to evaluate speech with respect to that standard.[12]

I'm using 'interests' as a placeholder term that could be specified in various ways. Serving our interests could amount to satisfying our preferences or goals, suiting our history or culture, or fitting our biological or psychological make-up. Anti-realism is therefore a broad church: it includes views on which the relevant interests (and hence the standard on which they confer significance) can vary from culture to culture, as well as views on which they're uniform across humanity. It also includes views on which the interests are built into the constitutive natures of our activities. Suppose one says that assertion constitutively aims at truth; hence assertions are correct when they are *true*, not quue. Still, there is the alternative activity of quasertion which is like assertion except it constitutively aims at quuth. This is anti-realism, for truth is significant only because *we* engage in an activity that aims at it.[13]

In any case, this talk of interests should not be taken too seriously. While anti-realists *say* that reference and truth are normatively significant because they serve our interests, that's not

---

[12] Note, for the record, that Boghossian's objections to irrealism don't go through against anti-realism. Against error-theory, he objects that it is self-refuting: an instance of (*) can be false only if it has a truth-condition, in which case there is a true instance of (*) after all. But the same cannot be said against anti-realists since they doesn't claim that all instances of (*) are false. And Boghossian argues that non-factualism about any domain presupposes an inflationary notion of truth, such as the Lewisian notion, while non-factualism about *truth-conditions* in particular entails rejecting inflationary truth; hence non-factualism is also self-refuting. But again, the same cannot be said against anti-realism since it explicitly does not reject inflationary notions of truth.

[13] Enoch (2006) made this point about ethical norms and constitutive natures.

the best characterization of their view. For in addition to interests we also have *quinterests*, properties that stand to queference and quuth just as our interests stand to reference and truth. Quinterests are strange properties to which we pay little attention, but since properties are cheap we must have *some* such properties. Now suppose, as anti-realists say, that our interests single out reference and truth as the relevant standard by which to evaluate speech as correct or incorrect, right or wrong. Then, equally, our quinterests single out another standard in queference and quuth, whereby speech may be evaluated as *quo*rrect or inquorrect, *qui*ght or quong, depending on whether it's quue. 125 is the *right* answer to '68 + 57' and 5 is wrong, yet 5 is *quight* and 125 is quong! Both these standards serve *something* about us, our interests and quinterests respectively, and according to anti-realism—as I define it—our interests and our quinterests are objectively speaking on a par; neither property has independent normative significance over the other. Thus, while anti-realism implies

It is right to go on according with reference and truth, because they serve our interests.

it *also* implies

It is quight to go on according with queference and quuth, because they serve our quinterests.

What defines anti-realism is the idea that there is no further fact that breaks the symmetry and privileges one way of going on as "really-right". Any way of going on satisfies *some* standard that serves *something* about us, and that is all there is to say.

Realism should therefore be understood as the view that there is a further fact that breaks the symmetry. This further fact could concern the standards directly, e.g. that truth is normatively significant independently of us and determines the really-right way to go on. Or it could concern properties of us such as *interests*, to the effect that they have some prior significance over quinterests and hence the standard of truth they pick out determines what's really-right. In the latter case the realist would *say* that truth is significant because of our interests, contrary to how I characterized their view earlier. Still, the further fact concerning the significance of interests over quinterests would hold independently of us. Either way, then, *something* is normatively significant independently of us, either the standard of truth or the property of having certain interests, and for simplicity I'll continue to characterize realists as saying it's the standard of truth.

I've focused on linguistic meaning, but the issue of realism vs anti-realism also arises for mental content. Suppose you compute '68 + 57' in your head and draw a conclusion you'd verbalize as '68 + 57 = 125'. Is that the correct answer, the right way to go on in thought? Schematically, your mental state is correct iff (i) its correctness-condition, or "content", is that p, and (ii) p. As before, the issue is condition (i), of whether your mental state is correct iff 68 *added* to 57 is 125, or iff 68 *quadded* to 57 is 125.[14] To solve this, one might offer an inflationist theory on which mental states have truth-conditions fixed by some mixture of mind and world involving naturalness or causation. But this is not enough. For while your mental state has a

---

[14] Earlier the bearers of correctness were sentences, here they are mental states. It's less obvious how to individuate mental states than sentences, but the issues here would detract from the main thread. So long as we can individuate them without explicitly mentioning their correctness conditions—e.g. by their computational role—the same issues arise. See Boghossian (1990, p. 514) for discussion of this point.

truth-condition fixed by one mixture, it also has a quuth-condition fixed by another. It is true iff 68 added to 57 is 125, and quue iff 68 quadded to 57 is 125. Thus, whether you got the correct answer depends on which mixture is the standard of correctness. And if one mixture is normatively significant in this regard, we can ask what makes it so. Here we find the question of realism vs anti-realism again, of whether the mixture is normatively significant independently of us or because of us.[15]

This is not the widely discussed question of why true beliefs are valuable.[16] That question assumes that truth is the standard of correctness and asks what value there is in accumulating true beliefs. Whereas our question is what the standard of correctness is in the first place, and in particular whether it has this normative significance independently of us. You might say that truth is the standard because belief constitutively aims at truth. This may be, but it's just anti-realism. For if beliefs *just are* states that aim at truth, states that aim at *quuth* are "queliefs" and (by parity of reasoning) are correct iff they are quue. Thus, on this view truth is significant only insofar as *we* form beliefs, not queliefs.

The issue of realism vs anti-realism therefore arises for both language and thought. If thought is prior to language then the issue should ultimately be discussed in those terms. Still, I will focus on language because it avoids some distracting complexities. I believe that what follows carries over to thought, but I leave that for the reader to verify.

4. Deflationism

So far I've discussed inflationist theories of meaning, i.e. correctness-conditions, on which meaning consists in truth-conditions and related notions such as reference, which in turn are fixed by some mixture of use plus world. I argued that such theories must be supplemented by the further claim that the mixture is normatively significant, and I then distinguished two views, realism and anti-realism, about the source of that significance.

Deflationists, by contrast, claim that truth and reference play no role in a theory of meaning. How, if at all, does the realism vs anti-realism distinction apply to this approach? Let me examine the deflationist theory developed by Field (1994, 2001). I will argue that it amounts to a clear example of anti-realism—an example that will prove useful to keep in mind later on.[17]

---

[15] This question arises even for inflationary theories on which the mixture has normativity built into it. Consider David Lewis' (1983) actual theory on which content is fixed by fit plus humanity. Humanity, he says, calls for "interpretations according to which the subject has attitudes that we would deem *reasonable* for one who has lived the life that he has lived" (p. 375; my emphasis). So on this view content is fixed by a mixture of fit and *reason*, and one might think this mixture is normatively significant because reason is. Perhaps so. Still, the question of realism vs anti-realism then concerns what makes *reason* normatively significant; whether it's significant independently of us or not. Lewis doesn't say. He does offer a (partial) theory of reason in terms of naturalness: the bias towards reasonable interpretations is, he says, "a bias toward believing that things are green rather than grue" precisely because green is more natural than grue (p. 375). But if naturalness fixes reason, *quaturalness* will fix a parallel virtue of *queason*: if grue is more quatural than green, it'll be more queasonable to believe things are grue. Thus, if our mental states have contents fixed by fit plus reason, they also have quontents fixed by fit plus *queason*! It follows that reason and content are normatively significant only insofar as *naturalness* is normatively significant. Thus, even on Lewis' actual view the question of realism vs anti-realism arises and amounts to the question of whether naturalness has significance independently of us.

[16] See Loewer (1993), Goldman (1999), Alston (2005), and Grimm (2009).

[17] Field develops a variety of deflationist views; here I focus on the Quinean variety developed towards the end of (2001).

Field's theory is really a theory of meaning-*attribution*, of what we do when we say what something means. According to Field, meaning-attributions report good translations. To say that 'neige' means snow is to say that 'neige' is well translated as 'snow' in one's own idiolect. Likewise, to say that 'Neige est blanc' means that snow is white is to say that 'Neige est blanc' is well translated as 'Snow is white' is one's idiolect.

There are two core ideas here. The first is that in stating what an expression E means one states a relation between E *and another linguistic expression*, not between E and some non-linguistic entity that is its "meaning". In saying that 'neige' means snow I state a relation it bears to 'snow', not to stuff found on mountain tops. Likewise, in saying that 'S' means that p I relate 'S' not to some intensional entity such as a proposition or truth-condition, but to the sentence 'p'.

The second idea is that the relevant relation between expressions is good translation, where what makes for good translation is a pragmatic matter. Suppose I want my British friend to give me a cookie. What should I say? I look for a word she typically associates with cookies and causes her to hand over cookies, such as 'biscuit'. This is a good translation of 'cookie' not because it reflects some prior fact about what the terms mean, but because it gets me a cookie.

So it's not that each expression has *a meaning*, such that the job of translation is to pair expressions with the same meanings. Nor is there a prior relation of *sameness of meaning* that the job of a translation is to reflect. Rather, there are just facts about which translations between idiolects work well for the purposes at hand, and attributions of meaning simply report these facts.

What is an idiolect? For Field, my idiolect is my current understanding of language, which in turn consists in the computational role that each expression currently plays for me. An idiolect is therefore finely-grained: it is the idiolect of a *person* at a *time*. Field's theory then comes to this: to say that 'neige' means snow is to say that 'neige' is well translated as 'snow' *as one currently understands it*.

This is just a sketch, but it is clear how this theory bears on the Kripkensteinian puzzle of whether you mean addition or quaddition by '+'. For me to say that you mean addition is, on this view, to say that '+' in your idiolect translates well as 'addition' in mine. And *of course* it does—it would be utterly perverse to translate your '+' as my 'quaddition'! To be clear, this perverse translation is consistent with your past use of the term, and according to Kripke's skeptical argument your dispositions and intentions and so on don't rule it out either. Field's theory doesn't disagree, for the claim is not that the perverse translation would mis-represent some prior fact about what you mean by '+'. The claim is that translation isn't about reflecting such facts, it's about matching expressions to suit our needs and matching your '+' with my 'addition' obviously does the best job. Perhaps there are bizarre circumstances in which translating your '+' as my 'quaddition' would suit us better, but they'd be very alien to ordinary life.[18]

---

[18] See Horwich (1995) for more details about how deflationist theories bear on the Kripkensteinian question. Note that this resembles Kripke's "skeptical solution" to the puzzle insofar there is no claim to have found some mix of use plus world that determines meaning, just an account of what we do when we attribute meaning. But Field's theory does not lead to the impossibility of a private language, contrary to what Kripke claimed about his own skeptical solution. For while Field's theory only fixes A's attribution of what B means, it leaves open that A and B are the same person—or, more accurately, time-slices of the same person. Thus, a solitary person may coherently attribute their past (or present) self as meaning addition by '+'.

Field calls this a deflationist theory of meaning insofar as truth and reference play no role. Still, truth and reference may yet enter the picture in two ways. One way is with disquotational notions of truth and reference. To say that a sentence 'S' is disquotationally true, or $true_d$ for short, is just to say that S; the two statements are cognitively equivalent. Thus, all instances of the equivalence scheme

'S' is $true_d$ if and only if S

hold of 'conceptual necessity', as Field (1994) puts it, for any sentence 'S' in one's idiolect. Regardless of whether the English word 'true' is disquotational in this sense, deflationists can introduce '$true_d$' for its well-known expressive utility.[19] Likewise, they can introduce a disquotational notion of reference—or $reference_d$ for short—on which 'the $referent_d$ of 'N'' is cognitively equivalent to 'N'. These disquotational notions play no role in their theory of meaning-attribution, they're just useful logical devices.

The second way that truth and reference enter the picture illustrates why deflationism amounts to an anti-realist theory of meaning. To see how, note that deflationists shouldn't deny that there are interesting relations between word and world. I translated my friend's word 'biscuit' as 'cookie' because she says 'Biscuits!' when there are cookies present, she points at cookies when I ask "Where are the biscuits?", and so on. So the fact that it's a good translation presumably turns on some causal relation between 'biscuit' and cookies.[20]

But this causal relation might be what inflationists called "reference" all along! Have we therefore collapsed into an inflationist view on which good translation reflect prior facts about reference after all? Some deflationists argue not, on the grounds that other words work differently.[21] The idea is that gastronomic, scientific, and mathematical vocabulary are used for different purposes, so what counts as a good translation differs across these domains. Thus, good translation tracks one word-world relation for gastronomic vocabulary, another for scientific vocabulary, and so on. But if so just take the disjunction of these relations: good translation tracks *that* word-world relation across the board. Does this then amount to inflationism? Well, this relation fixes attributions of meaning, i.e. correctness-conditions, and we can join inflationists in calling it 'reference' if we want—though to distinguish it from disquotational $reference_d$ let's call it 'inflationary reference', or '$reference_i$' for short. Still, on Field's theory the relation plays this normative role in the evaluation of speech only because it serves our translational interests.

If we've collapsed into inflationism, then, we've collapsed into a manifestly anti-realist variety! As I see it, this is one of the central insights of Field's theory. No doubt there's *some* relation of $reference_i$ that fixes attributions of correctness-conditions, even if it strikes us as a disjunctive miscellany. And no doubt there's a corresponding property of "inflationary truth" which a sentence has if and only if its attributed correctness-condition obtains, even if it strikes

---

[19] To take the classic example, suppose you want to express agreement with what Smith said last night but can't remember what she said. Then instead of saying "Either Smith said 'Snow is white' and snow is white, or Smith said 'Grass is green' and grass is green, or…", disquotational $truth_d$ allows you to say "Smith said something $true_d$." Some deflationists argue that this is the only utility of truth and argue on that basis that $true_d$ is the English 'true'; see for example Horwich (1995).

[20] More fully, the fact that her word 'biscuit' translates well as my word 'cookie' turns on (i) the conceptual necessity that 'cookie' $refers_d$ to cookies, and (ii) the causal relation between her word 'biscuit' and cookies.

[21] See for example Price (2011, pp. 14-16).

us as equally disjunctive—call it 'truth$_i$' to distinguish it from disquotational truth$_d$. Still, on Field's theory reference$_i$ and truth$_i$ play this normative role in the evaluation of speech only because they serve our interests in translation. This is anti-realism through and through.[22]

Seen like this, Field's theory is really a theory of *meta-meta-semantics*, an anti-realist account of how reference$_i$ and truth$_i$ came to have normative significance. So understood, it's consistent with semantic and meta-semantic theories, like the Lewisian theory, on which reference$_i$ and truth$_i$-conditions play a central role. It is sometimes said that deflationism has been refuted by the tremendous fruits of truth-conditional semantics. My point is that this is wrong insofar as we see deflationism as primarily a theory of meta-meta-semantics, a theory of why truth$_i$ and reference$_i$ matter.

This is not to say that the collapse into inflationism is total. Some inflationists say that understanding consists in grasping referents$_i$ or truth$_i$-conditions, yet on Field's theory it consists in computational role. If the term "inflationism" is reserved for views on which reference$_i$ and truth$_i$ play a role in *understanding*, Field's theory doesn't count as inflationist. But that's a verbal issue; the substantive point is that Field's theory of *meaning,* i.e. correctness-conditions, amounts to an anti-realist theory of how a word-world relation comes to have normative significance.

Indeed, it's anti-realism of an extreme form. All anti-realists agree that some word-world relation has normative significance because it serves our "interests", but this leaves open whether our interests, and the relation they pick out, are uniform across humanity or vary from culture to culture. But on Field's theory these may vary from person to person—even across time-slices of the same person! For the relation is that which makes for good translation, and this could depend on the idiolect of the translator. In this regard, recall that Field's theory was advertised as a theory of meaning-*attribution*. This is understandable given the inter-personal variation just mentioned, for your attribution of what someone means may differ from mine and focusing on attribution side-steps the question of what they actually mean. But we may equally see this as an anti-realist theory of *meaning itself*, on which the word-world relation picked out as normatively significant can in principle differ from person to person thanks to differences in idiolect (though presumably communication depends on significant overlap).

Field also extends his theory of meaning to mental content. I believe that the same story unfolds there too: it amounts to an anti-realist theory on which a certain mind-world relation comes to play a normative role in the evaluation of mental states because it serves our interpretive aims. But for considerations of space I leave that for another time.

5. Pragmatism I: Meaning

So far I've just articulated anti-realism. I'll now argue that it implies the four pragmatist theses we began with concerning inquiry, truth, justification, and meaning. Since anti-realism is a claim of meta-meta-semantics, the core idea is that those theses follow *when interpreted as claims of meta-meta-semantics also*. This may or may not be what pragmatists traditionally meant by them, but put that aside: my claim is just that anti-realism implies distinctive views about these topics that verify the pragmatist theses, so interpreted. As we'll see, these views

---

[22] This idea that truth$_i$ is highly disjunctive is, in effect, what Wright (2001b) calls "pluralism".

also verify much of what "truthers" say about the centrality of truth to these topics. Thus, what anti-realism implies is not so much that truthers are wrong but that pragmatism is right.

The theses about truth and justification are where the real action lies, but let me warm-up with the theses about meaning and inquiry. While truthers think that meaning consists in truth-conditions and reference and the like, I said that pragmatists focus more on practical consequences:

Pragmatic theory of meaning: Meaning is determined by practical consequences.

As Peirce put it, 'there is no distinction of meaning so fine as to consist in anything but a possible difference in practice' (1955b, p. 33). Likewise, James wrote that 'if no practical difference whatever can be traced, then the alternatives mean practically the same thing, and all dispute is idle' (James 1975, p. 28). So central was this to their philosophy that it was dubbed the "pragmatist maxim".

I claim that this follows from anti-realism. This might be surprising, for anti-realists agree that a sentence's meaning is its truth$_i$-condition, and isn't that antithetical to the pragmatic theory? Not necessarily: it depends on *why* truth$_i$ plays this role. Anti-realists say it's because it suits us well. A sentence has myriad properties—a truth$_i$-condition, a quuth-condition, etc.—and the one that constitutes its meaning is whichever has the practical consequence of serving our interests. This is the pragmatic theory of meaning *when read as a claim about meta-meta-semantics*: it's the practical consequence that determines which property counts as meaning! By contrast, realism implies that truth$_i$-conditions are meanings regardless of their practical upshots, *contra* the pragmatic theory.

So interpreted, the pragmatic theory is not the claim that the meaning or truth$_i$-condition of a sentence is identical to its practical consequences—that's a claim of semantics, and an implausible one at that. Nor is it the claim that the practical consequences of a sentence fix its meaning or truth$_i$-condition—that is meta-semantics. It's rather a meta-meta-semantic claim about *why* truth$_i$-conditions play the normative role of meaning.

The same goes for notions like reference$_i$ and representation. Anti-realists don't deny that they play a role in semantics; their claim is that they do so only because they have the practical upshot of serving our interests. Again, this is the pragmatic theory at the level of meta-meta-semantics.

Read like this, the pragmatic theory agrees that meaning consists in reference$_i$ and truth$_i$-conditions—if *that's* all truthers had in mind, there is no quarrel. Is this then pragmatism in name only? No, for my reading implies that there can be distinctions in meaning only insofar as our interests are served by a property that draws such distinctions; hence no distinctions in meaning without a practical difference, just as Peirce and James said. This is a distinctively pragmatist constraint on meaning. Indeed, Kitcher interprets James along the same lines: not as rejecting notions like reference and representation but as proposing how they "play a role in explaining… success" (Kitcher 2012, p. 133).

Admittedly, some pragmatists appear to go further and reject such notions altogether. For example, Price writes that "representation… is a theoretical category that we should dispense with altogether" (2011, p. 10). But I think there is no substantive disagreement here. For as

Price goes on to emphasize, his point is *not* that "there is nothing to be said about the relation of our words to the natural world" (p. 11). Rather, his point is that discourses like science and ethics have such different functions that different word-world relations are relevant to each. Anti-realists can agree. The difference is that I've let anti-realists use 'reference$_i$' and cognates like 'representation' for the disjunction of such relations, while for Price they are words for something more unified and should therefore be abandoned. But that's just a verbal difference.

6. Pragmatism II: Inquiry

Turn now to the nature of inquiry. I said at the beginning that while truthers see inquiry as aiming at truth, pragmatists see it more as an attempt to make our lives better. As I put it,

Pragmatic theory of inquiry: Inquiry aims at serving our interests.

But this talk of "aim" bears clarification. When truthers say that inquiry aims at truth, this could mean (i) that the goal is to accumulate true theories and avoid false ones, or (ii) that truth is the standard by which a theory is to be evaluated as correct or incorrect.[23] The first claim is most implausible, for many truths are worthless: it would be a waste of time to discover exactly how many blades of grass exist. Human interests obviously influence *which* truths to accumulate, and indeed whether to accumulate *truths* in the first place since false theories can have great utility.[24] Instead, the truther I have in mind makes the second claim: that truth is the evaluative standard of correctness.

The pragmatic theory should therefore be read as a corresponding claim about evaluation too: that the relevant standard involves serving our interests. Thus, William James said that a theory is 'an instrument: it is designed to achieve a purpose' (1975, p. 33); hence it is to be evaluated primarily according to whether it works. And Charles Peirce (1955a) said that inquiry is a process that replaces doubt with "settled belief", which is worth doing because doubt paralyses action. So on his view the function of belief is to facilitate action; hence they should be evaluated as to whether they serve us well.

Does anti-realism imply this pragmatic theory? Well, anti-realists and realists agree that truth$_i$ is the standard of correctness and hence the "aim of inquiry"'. But the question is *why* truth$_i$, not quuth, plays this role. For anti-realists, truth$_i$ does so only because it serves our interests to evaluate theories with respect to it. Thus, it's our interests that pull the strings in determining the aim of inquiry. This is the pragmatic theory *when read as a claim of meta-meta-semantics*. So interpreted, the claim is not that the standard at which inquiry aims essentially involves our interests. The standard could be the Lewisian property, definable without mention of interests. It's rather a claim about *why* that standard is the aim, i.e. because it suits us. Put otherwise, the claim is that inquiry aims at *whatever standard serves our interests*, where this is a description that picks out a standard, not the standard itself. Since anti-realists think the description picks out truth$_i$, it follows that inquiry aims at truth$_i$. If *that's* all truthers meant, anti-realists don't disagree.

You might object that this reading of the pragmatic theory is too much of a stretch: anyone who says that inquiry aims at truth$_i$ must be far removed from the classical American

---

[23] These correspond to what Lynch (2009) calls the "goal of inquiry" and the "norm of belief", respectively.
[24] See Kitcher (2011, p. 105-111) for more on these points.

pragmatists, regardless of what meta-meta-semantic claim they tag on. I disagree, for two reasons. First, William James said that inquiry aims at what works, but he also defined truth as what works. In that sense even James would not deny that inquiry aims at truth!

Second, my reading leads to a kind of relativism associated with the pragmatist tradition. Suppose our interests are served by truth$_i$ but another community has interests better served by quuth. According to the pragmatic theory, the aim of inquiry depends on who you ask: for us it's truth$_i$, for them it's quuth. That is, a theory is correct *for us* iff it is true$_i$, and correct *for them* iff it is quue. What counts as successful inquiry therefore differs for each group because of their different interests. This is not relativism about truth$_i$—it could be that truth$_i$ is a human-independent property that theories have or lack *simpliciter*. It's relativism about *correctness*, about which property serves as the relevant evaluative standard.

Realism leads to none of this. On that view, truth$_i$ is distinguished as the privileged standard, the aim of inquiry, regardless of anyone's interests. There is therefore no relativism: a theory is correct *simpliciter* iff it is true$_i$. A community with interests better served by quuth may develop theories that satisfy that standard, yet they are incorrect nonetheless. This is what the truther view must be *if* it is to be an alternative to the pragmatism. But then it would be better expressed as the view that truth$_i$ is the "ultimate" aim, or an aim "in itself", for it is only this that my reading of the pragmatic theory rejects.

Pragmatists are sometimes accused of missing the obvious fact that inquiry aims at "getting the world right". Rorty invites this criticism in his more colorful moments when he says that inquiry aims at social solidarity.[25] But one cannot criticize my pragmatic theory of inquiry on these grounds. Insofar as "getting the world right" means being *true$_i$,* the pragmatic theory agrees that inquiry aims at getting the world right!

I've argued that anti-realism implies this pragmatic theory, but it also implies many related theses. Remember, if our interests distinguish truth$_i$ as the standard of correctness, we also have quinterests that distinguish quuth as the standard of quorrectness. We may evaluate theories for truth$_i$ or quuth, and both practices would serve *something* about us, our interests and quinterests respectively. If you don't think the latter practice counts as *inquiry*, fine; call it quinquiry instead. Whatever we call it, anti-realists think there's a symmetry between the standards. So, while anti-realism implies

> Truth$_i$ is the aim of inquiry because truth$_i$ serves our interests.

it *also* implies

> Quuth is the aim of quinquiry because quuth serves our quinterests.

Still, anti-realism does imply the first claim, and that suffices to verify the pragmatic theory of inquiry as a claim of meta-meta-semantics.

7. Pragmatism III: Truth

---

[25] See for example Rorty (1979). See Misak (2013, chapter 13) for a discussion of this objection.

We come now to the pragmatist thesis that truth is "immanent" insofar as it cannot outrun our practices. One finds this in Peirce, who said that 'the opinion which is fated to be ultimately agreed by all who investigate, is what we mean by the truth' (Peirce 1955b, p. 39). As I put it,

Immanent theory of truth: Truth is that on which rational inquiry converges.

By *rational* inquiry, I mean inquiry guided by our familiar methods such as perception, induction, logic, statistics, and so on. Thus, the immanent theory implies that an ideally verified theory—a theory as well-confirmed by our methods as possible—is *guaranteed* to be true, and indeed that *every* truth is verifiable by our methods! This may sound ludicrous. Truth is one thing and our methods another, you might think, so there is *obviously* no guarantee that our methods lead to truth, let alone the whole truth. David Lewis (1984, p. 221) was particularly incredulous, insisting without argument that the immanent theory is 'out of the question'!

Nonetheless, I claim that anti-realism implies this immanent theory—and in a striking form at that. The immanent theory is typically understood in terms of *counterfactual* convergence, stating that truth is what would be confirmed by our methods in epistemically ideal conditions. This raises notorious problems about what these ideal conditions are.[26] Still, the theory seems even less plausible when read in terms of *actual* convergence, for surely there can be no guarantee that our methods will *in fact* converge on truth! But that, I'll argue, is what follows from anti-realism. More precisely, suppose that rational inquiry comes to an end at some point— perhaps because humanity itself comes to an end, or because our epistemic situation becomes unimprovable, or whatever. Call our total theory at that point—the strongest theory that's well-confirmed by the lights of our methods—the "ideal theory". What anti-realism implies is that the ideal theory is, and exhausts, the truth.[27]

Why? Because according to anti-realism, the ideal theory is guaranteed to count as a success. Whatever it is, it will satisfy *some* standard of evaluation S and according to anti-realism S is objectively speaking on a par with any other. It's the standard *we* converged on and there is no further fact that distinguishes any other standard as normatively privileged. It therefore makes no sense to evaluate the ideal theory negatively just because it falls short of those other standards. Insofar as 'true$_i$' is an evaluative term, a word that denotes the standard by which to evaluate theories, it must therefore denote S. Or rather, it must denote a standard that the ideal theory satisfies "exhaustively"—a standard such that *everything* satisfying it is contained in the ideal theory—else we could evaluate the ideal theory negatively for missing something out. Hence the ideal theory is guaranteed to be, and exhaust, the truth$_i$!

The argument rests on two claims. The first is that according to anti-realism, inquiry is an "immanent" activity in the sense that wherever it ends up is a success. And the second is that 'truth$_i$' is an evaluative term. Let me elaborate on each.

The first claim is illustrated by sport. In cricket, one scores a six by hitting a ball over a boundary 70 yards away. Some people are better at this than others. Suppose we train the best

---

[26] Wright (2001b) discusses these issues in detail.

[27] If a theory is a set of sentences, the claim is that a sentence is true if and only if it's a member of the ideal theory. But I'm being deliberately non-committal about what theories are for the sake of generality. I'm also being deliberately vague about this notion of an "ideal theory", for presumably some trade-off must be made between strength and degree of confirmation. But these details don't affect the line of thought that follows.

hitters we can, producing "ideal hitters" who are as good as humanly possible. Still, they couldn't hit a ball 70 *miles*! So even if they excel at cricket they'd be terrible at *quicket*, a game like cricket but with 70-mile boundaries. Are they thereby failures? No, for quicket is not the appropriate standard of evaluation. It is just one game in the space of all possible games. We might note as a curiosity that our ideal hitters are bad at it, but to evaluate them negatively on that basis is to presume that quicket is a "natural joint" in the space of games, which is obviously absurd. And what if our ideal hitters are bad at cricket? Well, they'll be good at *some* game with shorter boundaries, call it *gricket*, and cricket isn't a "natural joint" in the space of games either. So if they're bad at cricket the moral is not that they fall short in any serious sense, but that cricket is not the appropriate standard of evaluation. Ideal hitters are therefore guaranteed to count as a success: they'll inevitably satisfy the standard of *some* game and there is no further fact that distinguishes another game as setting the "real" standard by which to evaluate them negatively. Thus, hitting is an immanent activity in the sense that the relevant standard of evaluation *just is* whatever standard the ideal hitters satisfy.

Anti-realism implies that inquiry is an immanent activity in the same sense. Standards for theories are as cheap as games: there's the Lewisian standard fixed by use plus naturalness, the corresponding standard fixed by use plus quaturalness, the "Tolkienian" standard of entailing every sentence printed in *The Lord of the Rings*, and countless others besides. The ideal theory won't satisfy most of these; certainly not Tolkienian standard. And even if it satisfies the Lewisian standard it may not do so exhaustively—it may not contain every sentence that does so. But there will be *some* standard it satisfies exhaustively and according to anti-realism there is no further fact that distinguishes another standard as privileged. We may note as a curiosity that the theory doesn't satisfy some other standard exhaustively, but to evaluate it negatively on that basis is to presume that this other standard is normatively privileged, *contra* anti-realism. The ideal theory is therefore guaranteed to count as a success. Thus, anti-realism implies that inquiry is immanent in the sense that the relevant standard by which to evaluate theories *just is* whatever standard the ideal theory satisfies exhaustively.

That's the first claim. The second claim is that 'true$_i$' is an evaluative term, a word that denotes the standard by which to evaluate theories. This is not in question, for I *stipulated* this when introducing the term in section 4. If you'd prefer to avoid talk of word-world relations like denotation, we could instead put the claim thus: that the sentence

(T)   Truth$_i$ = the standard by which to evaluate theories.

is analytic, or a core platitude governing 'truth$_i$'. If inquiry is immanent, that standard is whatever the ideal theory satisfies exhaustively; hence the ideal theory will be, and exhaust, the truth$_i$.[28]

Realism implies no such thing, for on that view inquiry is not immanent. The ideal theory is guaranteed to satisfy *some* standard, sure. But according to realism one standard is distinguished independently of us as the privileged standard by which to evaluate theories, and there is no guarantee that the ideal theory will satisfy *that* standard. If 'true$_i$' is an evaluative term, truth$_i$ = that privileged standard; hence there is no guarantee that the ideal theory will be true$_i$.

---

[28] Since it's trivial that 'truth$_i$' refers$_d$ (disquotationally) to truth$_i$, (T) implies that 'truth$_i$' refers$_d$ to the standard by which to evaluate theories. My talk of denotation earlier can therefore be understood disquotationally as an inessential shorthand. I'm slurring over details about how to formulate (T), but these need not concern us here.

Three clarifications are in order. First, the anti-realist slogan that truth$_i$ is significant because it serves our *interests* played no role in my argument. Does the slogan still hold, if truth$_i$ is whatever standard we converge on? Well, we converge on that standard by using our methods of inquiry, and those methods promote *some* property of ours—perhaps they make us healthy or happy. If we identify our "interests" with that property, it follows that truth$_i$ is significant because it's what methods *which promote our interests* converge on; in that sense the slogan holds. Still, what *ultimately* distinguishes that standard is that our methods converge on it. I said in section 3 that we needn't specify exactly what our "interests" are and we can now see why: the real work is done by our methods, our interests are just whatever they promote.[29]

Second, it is worth comparing this with Putnam's "model-theoretic" argument (Putnam 1977, 1980). Putnam argued that (i) the ideal theory has a model, i.e. an interpretation which makes it true, and (ii) this is the "intended" interpretation; hence the ideal theory is true. My claim that the ideal theory will satisfy some standard resembles (i), but there's a difference. A theory has a model only if it's consistent, so for Putnam the ideal theory must be consistent. I make no such requirement. A standard is just a property; to satisfy a standard is to have the property (I don't use 'satisfies' in the model-theoretic sense). Inconsistent theories have properties and hence satisfy standards in my sense of the term. My argument therefore shows that the ideal theory will be true$_i$ *even if inconsistent*! (Of course, the ideal theory will be consistent if our methods of inquiry have us reject inconsistencies, but that's a separate issue.)

Moreover, my argument is essentially normative. Given that the ideal theory satisfies a standard, I argue that it counts as *truth$_i$* on the normative grounds that no other standard has independent significance (anti-realism). By contrast, given that the ideal theory has an interpretation which makes it true, Putnam argues that no other interpretation could be "intended" because that would require that "the mind has mysterious faculties of "grasping concepts"" (1980, pp. 466). Instead of my normative premise of anti-realism, then, Putnam appeals to the descriptive premise that we have no such faculty.[30]

Third, this account of truth$_i$ is future-dependent. I said that the ideal theory is that which is well-confirmed *at the end of inquiry*, but which theory that is depends on the future stream of evidence we receive. Which standard counts as truth$_i$ therefore depends on how the future unfolds.

But the future-dependence runs deeper. I said that the ideal theory is that which is well-confirmed by the lights of *our familiar methods* like induction, but what exactly are our methods? As well as induction there is *quinduction,* a method that agrees with induction in cases we've encountered so far but diverges thereafter, and according to Kripkenstein's skeptical argument from section 1 our inferential practices so far do not determine whether we are inferring by induction or quinduction. Don't say that induction is distinguished as our method by being more natural, for quinduction is equally distinguished by being more quatural. So, if E is our total future stream of evidence, our inferential practices *up to now* leave it undetermined which theory "our methods" count as well-confirmed by E, and hence which theory counts as ideal, because they leave it undetermined what "our methods" are in the first place! Still, think of the ideal

---

[29] This still leaves open whether our "interests" are uniform across humanity or vary from culture to culture.
[30] Admittedly, I don't exactly know what Putnam means by this. It may be that when properly unpacked it amounts to a normative claim akin to mine. Still, my argument is distinctive insofar as it puts normativity front and center.

theory as that which is well-confirmed by E given *however we go on* in our inferential practices. Which theory that is, and hence which standard counts as $truth_i$, is only settled once we go on one way rather than another. *What $truth_i$ is* therefore depends on how we go on—$truth_i$ is what *we* make it!

This future-dependence propagates further. Since our interests are whatever property "our methods" promote, what property that is also depends on how we go on. Thus, when anti-realists say that $truth_i$ serves our interests, what this really amounts to is that our future practices determine what counts as $truth_i$ *and* our interests simultaneously, in such a way that the former is guaranteed to serve the latter. This future-dependence therefore infects the pragmatic theory of inquiry, on which inquiry aims at *whatever standard serves our interests*, for what that is depends on how we go on. You might wonder how we can aim for something if it's not yet settled what that something is, but remember that this talk of "aim" is not meant in the sense of something we intentionally strive for. The "aim of inquiry" is just its standard of correctness; the current point is that this is something *we* determine as we go on one way rather than another.[31]

Does this future-dependence mean that there is currently no fact of the matter which standard is $truth_i$? Not quite. If the future is as real as the present, as eternalists maintain, then there is (currently) a fact as to how the future will unfold and hence what $truth_i$ is. But if the future is "open" in the sense that there are no facts about future contingencies like how we'll go on, then there is currently no fact of the matter what $truth_i$ is either. Would it follow that '$truth_i$' currently has no determinate meaning? Not if we think like a deflationist. For me to say that your word '$truth_i$' means $truth_i$ is for me to say that your word is well translated as mine, which it is since we both treat (T) as analytic (or platitudinous). If inquiry is immanent, (T) implies that the ideal theory will be $true_i$ even if there is currently no fact of the matter which standard $truth_i$ is!

This is the immanent theory in the striking form advertised earlier. It's not that $truth_i$ is what our methods *would* converge on in epistemically ideal conditions. As we just saw, there may be no fact about what "our methods" *are* that could determine what they'd converge on in counterfactual situations. Rather, we just *do what we do*, going on however we happen to go on, and whatever we actually converge on counts as $truth_i$.

The immanent theory is sometimes described as an analysis of truth in epistemic terms such as rationality or confirmation. But that's not how I see it. The standard we converge on may be specifiable non-epistemically—it could turn out to be the Lewisian property fixed by use plus naturalness. If so, the immanent theory implies that $truth_i$ = the Lewisian property, in which case $truth_i$ would have a non-epistemic analysis *per* the Lewisian theory. Rather, the immanent theory is a theory about why that property matters, i.e. because we converged on it. Once again, this is a theory of meta-meta-semantics.

So understood, the immanent theory is consistent with the so-called "correspondence theory" on which a sentence is $true_i$ if and only if it corresponds to a fact! For relations are cheap: there is correspondence and quorrespondence, so a sentence may correspond to one fact and quorrespond to another at the very same time. The immanent theory is then a theory about why one relation matters, of why it deserves the title '$truth_i$'. I said at the beginning that

---

[31] Rorty (1999) argued that pragmatism is a distinctively American philosophy insofar as it refers all questions of success to the future. The future-dependence described here may be another way of getting at the same point.

pragmatists reject the correspondence theory, but that was too quick. What *my* reading of the immanent theory rejects is not necessarily that truth is correspondence, but that correspondence has any intrinsic normative significance. This may have been William James' point when he complained of the correspondence theory that "it is not self-evident that the sole business of our mind with realities should be to copy them" (1904, p. 467). As I read him, his point is not that correspondence (or copying) is objectionably obscure, though that is one complaint often levied against it. It's rather that correspondence has in itself no normative significance.[32]

Likewise, the immanent theory is consistent with much of what truthers say about the possibility of truth and rational inquiry coming apart. Suppose again that we converge on the Lewisian property, so that that property = truth$_i$. Still, we could have received a different stream of evidence, leading to an ideal theory that lacks the Lewisian property. Or we could have received the same stream of evidence but gone on in our inferential practices differently, again resulting in an ideal theory without the Lewisian property. In possible-worlds talk, these are worlds in which the ideal theory (understood *de dicto*) is not true$_i$ (understood *de re*). In *this* sense the immanent theory allows that the ideal theory could be false$_i$, just as truthers say.

Still, this common ground should not be overstated. According to the immanent theory, truth and rational inquiry cannot come apart in the sense that *whatever* stream of evidence we actually receive, and *however* we go on in our inferential practices, the theory we converge on will count as true$_i$. Truthers like Lewis will surely disagree.

And they'll disagree further. We'll never discover exactly how many brontosauruses ever existed, so the sentence

(1)   The number of brontosauruses that ever existed is even.

Is such that neither it nor its negation will be in the ideal theory. Call sentences like this "unverified". The immanent theory implies that truth$_i$ is incomplete in the sense that there are sentences, the unverified ones, such that neither they nor their negations are true$_i$. Here, again, truthers will surely disagree.

This raises a delicate issue. Given the equivalence scheme

'S' is true$_i$ if and only if S

it follows in classical logic that truth$_i$ is complete.[33] What gives? Wright claims that pragmatists must give up classical logic in favor of something "of a broadly intuitionistic sort" (2001b, p. 766), which presumably involves giving up excluded middle for unverified sentences like (1). But another option is to keep classical logic and restrict the equivalence scheme to verified sentences.[34] On this approach, pragmatists can accept

---

[32] Kitcher (2012) also argues that James doesn't really oppose the correspondence theory.

[33] Either S or not-S (excluded middle); if S then 'S' is true$_i$, and if not-S then 'not-S' is true$_i$ (equivalence scheme); hence 'S' is true$_i$ or 'not-S' is true$_i$ (disjunction elimination).

[34] The equivalence scheme implies the principle that 'not-S' is true$_i$ iff 'S' is not true$_i$, so restricting the former involves restricting the latter too.

(2)   Either the number of brontosauruses that ever lived is even, or the number of brontosauruses that ever lived is not even, but we will never know which.

Thus they needn't deny the platitude that rational inquiry is one thing and "reality" another, at least in the minimal sense expressed by (2). Since *disquotational* truth$_d$ satisfies the equivalence scheme, (2) implies

(3)   Either 'The number of brontosauruses that ever lived is even' is true$_d$, or 'The number of brontosauruses that ever lived is not even' is true$_d$, but we will never know which.

Hence truth$_d$ is *not* immanent: there are true$_d$ sentences on which rational inquiry will never converge.[35] But this is no surprise since 'true$_d$' is not evaluative like 'true$_i$', it's just a useful logical device. Thus, if the ideal theory leaves out some true$_d$ sentences, that is no basis on which to evaluate it negatively.

    I won't fully defend this approach over Wright's but I should address one obvious worry, namely that it renders unverified sentences like (1) meaningless. After all, anti-realists agreed that a sentence's meaning is its truth$_i$-condition (sections 4 and 5), yet on this approach unverified sentences would appear to lack truth$_i$-conditions. For what could they be? Not those given by the equivalence scheme, obviously. More generally, if truth$_i$ *just is* whatever standard the ideal theory satisfies exhaustively, we cannot expect that unverified sentences possess conditions of meeting that standard any more than, say, apples do. Isn't this embarrassing? Verificationists were ridiculed for saying that meaning requires being *verifiable*, yet here I am saying that it requires being *actually verified*!

    But I think this is not so embarrassing after all. Unverified sentences may lack truth$_i$-conditions, but they do have *quuth*-conditions. Standards are cheap and unverified sentences possess conditions for satisfying many of them, just not the standard of truth$_i$. Why does this help? Because which conditions count as *meanings* hangs on how the future unfolds! Remember, truth$_i$ is future-dependent: which standard it is depends on our future stream of evidence and how we go on in our inferential practices. So verified and unverified sentences are currently in the same boat: they *all* possess conditions of satisfying a range of standards, and which ones count as *truth$_i$*-conditions, i.e. meanings, depends on future events. For this reason, it's hard to see how truth$_i$-conditions could play a role in our current linguistic practices *even for verified sentences*. Understanding cannot be knowledge of truth$_i$-conditions, and meaning-attributions cannot be descriptions of truth$_i$-conditions, for it is not yet settled which conditions these are. This is already built into Field's deflationism: regardless of which conditions will turn out to be truth$_i$-conditions, I currently understand a sentence insofar as it plays a computational role for me and you can say what it means by translating into your idiolect. This goes for verified and unverified sentences alike. The point is that given the future-dependence of truth$_i$, *any* adequate theory of understanding and meaning-attribution must be like Field's in this regard. It is therefore no embarrassment if unverified sentences turn out to lack truth$_i$-conditions, for our current practice of understanding and meaning-attribution remains unaffected.

    But when anti-realists agreed that meanings are truth$_i$-conditions, what did that *amount to* if such things play no role in understanding or meaning-attribution? Well, by 'meaning' I mean

---

[35] Field (1994, p. 264) emphasized this point with this example of brontosauruses that I'm borrowing here.

correctness-conditions, so what anti-realists agreed is that truth$_i$ is the standard of correctness. This they maintain—indeed, it's the second premise in their argument for the immanent theory!

There is much more to say on this, but this is not the place.[36] My aim here is not to fully defend this reading of the immanent theory, but to explain how it follows from anti-realism.

8. Pragmatism IV: Justification

Let us turn finally to the question of justification. Rational inquiry, I said, uses our familiar methods such as induction and modus ponens, but what justifies these methods? There is of course some indeterminacy as to what "our methods" are, since our inferential practices up to now don't fix whether we use induction or quinduction. So the question is really what justifies *our practices*, the particular inferential transitions we actually make both past and future. But for brevity I'll continue to describe these as 'our method of induction' and so on.

So, what justifies these methods? In virtue of what are they the right way to reason? For truthers, a core factor is that they track truth. Putting aside exactly what 'tracking' means and whether other factors are also involved, the basic picture is clear enough: modus ponens is justified because it is necessarily truth-preserving, induction is justified because its predictions tend to be true, and so on. By contrast, pragmatists see justification as having more to do with *us*. As I put it,

> **Immanent theory of justification:** Our methods of inquiry are justified, if at all, in terms of our practices.

I claim that this follows from anti-realism. To see why, consider first what realism implies about justification. On that view, truth$_i$ is distinguished as normatively significant independently of us. If a theory doesn't meet that standard it can be evaluated negatively as incorrect. Therefore, our methods earn their keep only insofar as they track *that* standard. This clearly vindicates the truther's picture over the pragmatist's. It also paves the road to skepticism. For there is no guarantee that our parochial methods track that privileged standard of truth$_i$, and if we try to argue that they do we'll inevitably use our methods—the very methods we're trying to justify.

According to anti-realism, by contrast, no standard is normatively significant independently of us. Whatever ideal theory we converge on will inevitably satisfy *some* standard, and there is no further fact that distinguishes another standard as privileged. This is the immanent theory of *inquiry*. It follows that there is no Archimedean point from which to evaluate our methods, no privileged standard such that our methods earn their keep only insofar as they track *it*. At bottom they are simply the methods we use; they earn their keep thanks to being *ours*. No further justification is needed or possible. *We do what we do*—that is all there is to say. This is the immanent theory of justification.

---

[36] For one thing, what becomes of contemporary truth-conditional semantic theories which routinely assign truth-conditions to unverified sentences like (1)? Anti-realists can read these as assigning conditions of being true$_i$-or-quue-or…, with a disjunct for each standard left open by how we've gone on so far. (1) has such a condition thanks to having a quuth-condition, so the semantic theory is in good standing. We *call* the condition a 'truth-condition' for convenience, but whether it's a *truth$_i$*-condition strictly speaking depends on how the future unfolds. Since verified sentences are in the same boat, their "truth-conditions" should be interpreted likewise.

Of course, anti-realists also think that whatever standard our methods converge on counts as truth$_i$; in *that* sense our methods track truth$_i$. Skepticism therefore doesn't get off the ground: there is no question whether our methods track truth$_i$, they are *guaranteed* to because truth$_i$ *just is* whatever standard they track! We can of course evaluate our methods "internally", asking how one fares by the lights of another. What we cannot intelligibly ask is the "external" question of whether they track some independently privileged standard, for according to anti-realism there is no such thing.[37]

Thus, realists and anti-realists agree that justified methods are those that track truth$_i$. The difference is one of explanatory priority. For realists, the standard of truth$_i$ is independently significant, and then a method is justified in virtue of tracking that standard. Whereas for anti-realists, our methods are automatically justified thanks to being ours, and then a standard counts as truth$_i$ in virtue of being tracked by our methods. This is the immanent theory of justification *at the level of meta-meta-semantics*. It's a theory of why truth$_i$-tracking *matters*; of why methods that track truth$_i$, not quuth, deserve the honorific term "justified".

For anti-realists, then, there may be little cross-domain unity to justified methods. If mathematical, ethical, and scientific inquiry serve different purposes, our methods for each may differ accordingly—a point emphasized by contemporary pragmatists such as Misak (2009) and Price (2011). For realists, by contrast, justified methods are unified by the fact that they all track the independently significant standard of truth$_i$. Of course, anti-realists agree that justified methods track truth$_i$, but since truth$_i$ is whatever our methods track it is no less a disjunctive miscellany than the methods themselves.

The immanent theory has a relativist flavor: induction is justified *for us* but not for a community of counter-inducers. A common objection to relativism of this kind is that its proponents are in no position to offer *reasons* in support of their view. For if they present something that counts as a reason by the lights of their methods, their own view implies that those methods are justified only *for them*. Why then should their opponents care? But this objection ignores the fact that both parties might use the same methods. If an anti-realist argues for her view by modus ponens, for example, it would be a strange realist indeed who doesn't recognize it as an *argument*! No doubt some realists would claim not to care for modus ponens, but that just reflects the mundane fact that debate presupposes some common ground, if only in method.[38]

This point is underscored by remembering that the realism vs anti-realism dispute does not concern what truth$_i$ is. Realists and anti-realists might agree that it's the Lewisian property, for example. If so, they'll agree on which methods track that property of truth$_i$, and so agree that *those* methods are justified. If the anti-realist then uses those methods to argue for her view, the realist can hardly reject her methods! Perhaps the problem is supposed to be that on the anti-realist's view those methods aren't justified *simpliciter*, only relative to a community, and that's not *real* justification. But this is too quick. The anti-realist can concede the term and agree with the realist that a method is justified iff, *and because*, it tracks truth$_i$—call this "justification$_i$" to

---

[37] To be clear, we *can* intelligibly ask whether our methods track an external standard like the Tolkienian one, and there is no guarantee that they do. But since these standards have no independent significance this "skeptical" situation is of no concern.

[38] Boghossian (2006, chapter 6) makes this point, though he objects to relativism on other grounds. But his objection assumes that our epistemic methods are general principles or rules that have implications in potentially infinite cases. As the discussion of induction and quinduction illustrates, anti-realists reject this assumption.

avoid confusion. Since they agree what truth$_i$ is, they agree what justification$_i$ is too and, in particular, that it is *not* community-relative. So, the anti-realist's argument uses methods that both parties agree are justified$_i$ *simpliciter*—no relativity involved! Their disagreement just concerns *why* justification$_i$ matters, i.e. why truth$_i$-tracking is better than quuth-tracking. It's only here that the community enters the anti-realist's picture, and it's hard to see why that should render her argument ineffective. The realist agrees that her methods are justified$_i$, after all, and that justification$_i$ matters!

Still, justification in the original sense is relative. Some may find this disturbing. If events in 1942 had unfolded differently, the "scientific method" would now include Nazi medicine. Those suffering under the regime would then *say* that Nazi medicine is justified, and they'd be right. One naturally wishes for some privileged standard on the basis of which they could criticize their scientists, but according to anti-realism there is none. *We* can say that their methods are unjustified and don't lead to truth$_i$, but we can say that only because our methods are not theirs—those living under Nazi rule would have no such privilege. Their resistance must therefore be based not on arguments about truth$_i$ or justification, but on the strength of their personal convictions. Far from disturbing, I find this inspiring. Their liberation—if it comes—will genuinely be *theirs*, a system of standards and practices they created for the betterment of humanity. To my mind that is so much grander than merely copying some external standard. As Rorty put it, what pragmatists hope for "is not that the future will conform to a plan… but rather that the future will astonish and exhilarate" (1999, p. 28).

9. Transcendental pragmatism

I've argued that anti-realism leads to these four pragmatist theses. Let me now step back and sketch the overall picture that's emerged.

At bottom are our practices—*the things we do*. These include the utterances we produce, our reactions to other utterances, the mental states we transition to and from, and so on. Think of these as non-semantically specified for now: an utterance is just sound, an action is just bodily movement, a mental state is just brain processes. These practices include calling some utterances (and mental states) 'correct' and others 'incorrect', and this behavior is regulative insofar as it influences how we go on. So described, none of this is *true* or *rational*, it is just *what we do*. We are wolves howling in the wind.

Still, our howls stand in countless relations to the world—reference$_i$, queference, etc.—each fixed by some mixture of us and world. They have countless properties like truth$_i$ and quuth, each fixed by similar mixtures. Properties are cheap, so they are there anyway (we didn't "put them there") and each is a standard by which our practice could in principle be evaluated.

Whichever way we go on howling, then, in the end our howls will have *some* property P. Since our practice includes calling that way of going on 'correct', the howls we end up calling 'correct' will be those with P. In effect, our practice treats P as the evaluative standard of correctness. This is not because P has independent significance or because we were intentionally striving towards P. We were just wolves howling in the wind, doing what we do, and we happened to stumble upon P.

If we then introduce 'true$_i$' as a word for the standard of correctness, i.e. P, we verify much of what truthers say about the role of truth$_i$ while *also* verifying the pragmatist theses about why

24

truth$_i$ plays that role! A howl's *meaning*, i.e. correctness-condition, is its truth$_i$-condition (*per* truthers); yet truth$_i$ plays this role only because it's the standard we converged on (*per* pragmatists). The *aim of inquiry*—the standard by which to evaluate howls—is truth$_i$ (*per* truthers); but, again, only because we converged on it (*per* pragmatists). *Justified* methods track truth$_i$ (*per* truthers); but only because *our* methods are as "justified" as any, and truth$_i$ is what they happen to track (*per* pragmatists). And *truth$_i$* itself is a human-independent standard on which we might not have converged (*per* truthers); yet whatever we actually converge on is what counts as truth$_i$ (*per* pragmatists).

The truther slogans are therefore recovered insofar as they aptly describe these roles of truth$_i$. But the pragmatist theses are verified when we zoom out and ask the meta-meta-semantic question of why truth$_i$, not quuth, plays these roles. This is *transcendental pragmatism*: truth$_i$ is indeed central to philosophy, but its significance rests on a sea of practices.

Of course, *genuine* truthers—those who reject pragmatism—will regard this "recovery" as a sham. What *they* call 'truth$_i$' is a standard they take to have normative significance independently of us. They claim that *that* is the proper standard of correctness, the aim of inquiry, and the measure of justification, regardless of whether it fits our practices. Transcendental pragmatism does not recover *these* claims, of course, for it denies that there is any such standard.

10. The perils of realism

I've argued that anti-realism implies this pragmatist view, but I haven't argued for anti-realism. I find it immensely plausible and I hope my articulation of the view in sections 1-4 left you feeling likewise. But that's no argument, so "genuine" truthers who reject pragmatism could in principle grant everything I've said so far and respond by embracing realism.

The trouble is, realism implies a view about normativity that many would-be truthers will be loath to accept. This is that normative facts are *sui generis* in the sense that they are not identical or reducible to natural facts about the cosmos, or even super-natural facts about God. Normativity is its own, primitive component of reality. This is sometimes called 'non-naturalism' or 'robust realism', but 'primitivism' is perhaps a better descriptor.[39]

Why does realism imply this? It may not be obvious. According to realism, the fact that truth$_i$ is normatively significant holds independently of us. But why must it be primitive? Why couldn't it hold in virtue of something independent of us?

Well, it could. But if so we'll find primitive normativity elsewhere. Thus, suppose you say that some human-independent property P (such as naturalness) confers this normative significance on truth$_i$. Since properties are cheap, another property Q (such as quaturalness) will stand to quuth just as P stands to truth$_i$. So, for truth$_i$ to be normatively privileged over quuth, P must be normative privileged over Q too. If this fact is *sui generis*, we have primitivism. If instead you say that some further property P* confers that significance on P, there'd be another property Q* that stands to Q just as P* stands to P… and so on. At some point, *something* must be normatively significant all on its own, not in virtue of anything else. That is primitivism.[40]

---

[39] This view has a growing number of proponents; Enoch (2011) and Scanlon (2014) are examples.
[40] That's the argument in brief. There is much more to say, some of which I say in Dasgupta (2018).

To be clear, this is not primitivism about *content*, the view that *meaning p* or *having the content q* are primitive properties of utterances or mental states. Boghossian (1989) argues that the lesson of Kripkenstein's puzzle of how to go on using '+' is that we must reject 'the reducibility of content properties to naturalistic properties' (p. 540). But primitive content properties don't help, for all we have now is an extra property of '+'—it's "content"—and it doesn't follow that it has any normative significance in determining the right way to go on. What *would* help is primitive normativity, a *sui generis* fact to the effect that primitive content properties are normatively significant. But then the primitive normativity could attach to some naturalistic mix of use plus world that was there anyway and the primitive contents are redundant.[41]

The upshot is that realism implies primitive normativity. Therefore, anyone who rejects primitive normativity must embrace anti-realism. This includes normative naturalists, who reduce normativity to facts about the natural cosmos; constructivists, who reduce normativity to human natures or preferences; relativists, for whom normative requirements vary from culture to culture; and so on. Philosophers of these persuasions are *already* committed to anti-realism, and therefore (I've argued) to pragmatism! That's why I said at the beginning that my path to pragmatism proceeds from a claim that many would-be truthers already accept.

Having clarified that realism implies normative primitivism, I won't try to refute it. But let me end by gesturing at why I find it uncredible. In brief, even if there were *sui generis* properties, I see no reason to care about them. This objection to normative primitivism in the ethical domain is well known; see Dreier (2015) for an overview. I developed the objection in (Dasgupta 2017) and applied it to norms of metaphysics in (Dasgupta 2018). But the objection applies equally to norms of language and thought.

To see why, consider some platitudes about reference and truth: "birds" refers to birds; "pigs" refers to pigs; "Birds fly" is true if and only if birds fly; "Pigs grunt" is true if and only if pigs grunt. These are things we take ourselves to know about truth and reference pre-theoretically (hence no subscript $_i$ or $_d$). Now, realists claim that some word-world relation and standard have independent significance; call them *real*-reference and *real*-truth, respectively. But it could be that real-reference and real-truth don't satisfy the above platitudes—this is a coherent hypothesis about the actual world. Why? Because all it *is* for a standard to count as real-truth, we now know, is for it to possess some extra, *sui generis* property, and we can clearly entertain hypotheses on which that *sui generis* property is possessed by a standard that doesn't satisfy those platitudes, such as the Tolkienian standard. Thus, it could be that 'pigs' refers to pigs but really-refers to birds, in which case 'Pigs fly' is false but really-true!

What of it? One objection is epistemic: that realism engenders a strange skepticism on which for all we know, everything we take to be true—including our everyday beliefs and our best scientific theories—*is indeed true* but really-false![42] But my objection is different: it's that *this* kind of "error" shouldn't concern us in the slightest. The possibility we're contemplating is just that our best scientific theories don't meet a standard with some *sui generis* property. But so what? There are *countless* standards our theories don't meet, such as the Tolkienian

---

[41] Perhaps by primitive content Boghossian meant what I mean by primitive normativity. If so, fine. The important point is that primitive content in my sense does not, on its own, settle how to go on.
[42] See Button (2013).

standard—who cares if one of those standards has some *sui generis* property? It's a minor curiosity at most. No one should seriously suggest that we scrap 500 years of post-enlightenment science and develop a new theory on which pigs fly! Thus, even if some standard has this *sui generis* property, it's just another standard out there along with the Tolkienian standard. To strike out in a radical effort to uncover it, insisting that *pigs really do fly*, would be, quite literally, madness.

References

Alston, William (2005). *Beyond Justification*. Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press.

Boghossian, Paul A. (1989). "The Rule-Following Considerations". *Mind* 98(392): 507-549.

Boghossian, Paul A. (1990). "The Status of Content". *The Philosophical Review* 99(2): 157-184.

Boghossian, Paul (2006). *Fear of Knowledge: Against Relativism and Constructivism*. Oxford: OUP.

Button, Timothy (2013). *The Limits of Realism*. Oxford: OUP.

Dasgupta, Shamik (2017). "Normative Non-Naturalism and the Problem of Authority". *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 117(3): 297-319.

Dasgupta, Shamik (2018). "Realism and the Absence of Value". *The Philosophical Review* 127(3): 279-322.

Dreier, Jamie (2015). "Can Reasons Fundamentalism Answer the Normative Question?" In Gunnar Bjornsson, Caj Strandberg, Ragnar Francen Olinder, John Eriksson, and Fredrik Bjorklund (eds.), *Motivational Internalism*, pp. 167-81. Oxford: OUP.

Enoch, David (2006). "Agency Shmagency: Why Normativity Won't Come From What is Constitutive in Action". *Philosophical Review* 155: 169-98.

Enoch, David (2011). *Taking Morality Seriously: A Defense of Robust Realism*. Oxford: OUP.

Field, Hartry H. (1994). "Deflationist Views of Meaning and Content". *Mind* 103: 249-285.

Field, Hartry H. (2001). "Attributions of Meaning and Content". In *Truth and the Absence of Fact*, pp. 157-175. Oxford: OUP.

Goldman, Alvin (1999). *Knowledge in a Social World*. Oxford: OUP.

Goodman, Nelson (1955). "The New Riddle of Induction". In *Fact, Fiction, and Forecast*, pp. 59-83. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Grimm, Stephen (2009). "Epistemic Normativity". In *Epistemic Value*, edited by A. Haddock, A. Millar, and D. Pritchard.

Horwich, Paul. (1995). "Meaning, Use, and Truth". *Mind* 104(414): 355-368.

James, William (1975). *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. Originally published 1907.

Kitcher, Philip (2011). *Science in a Democratic Society*. New York: Prometheus Books.

Kitcher, Philip (2012). "Pragmatism and Realism: A Modest Proposal". In *Preludes to Pragmatism*, pp. 128-144. Oxford: OUP.

Kripke, Saul A. (1982). *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Lewis, David (1983). "New Work for a Theory of Universals". *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 61(4): 343-377.

Lewis, David (1984). "Putnam's Paradox". *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 62(3): 221-236.

Loewer, Barry (1993). "The Value of Truth". *Philosophical Issues* 4: 265-280.

Lynch, Michael P. (2009). "Values of Truth and Truth of Values". In *Epistemic Value*, edited by A. Haddock, A. Millar, and D. Pritchard.

Merino-Rajme (2015). "Why Lewis' Appeal to Natural Properties Fails to Kripke's Rule-Following Paradox". *Philosophical Studies* 172: 163-175.

Miller, Alexander (2001). "Introduction". In *Rule-Following and Meaning*, edited by A. Miller and C. Wright, pp. 1-16. Acumen.

Misak, Cheryl (2009). "Pragmatism and Deflationism". In *New Pragmatists*, edited by C. Misak.

Misak, Cheryl (2013). *The American Pragmatists*. Oxford: OUP.

Peirce, Charles (1955a). "The Fixation of Belief". In *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*. New York: Dover. Originally published in 1877, *Popular Science Monthly* 12(1): 1-15.

Peirce, Charles (1955b). "How To Make Our Ideas Clear". In *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*. New York: Dover. Originally published in 1878, *Popular Science Monthly* 12: 286-302.

Price, Huw (2011). *Naturalism Without Mirrors*. Oxford: OUP.

Putnam, Hilary (1977). "Realism and Reason". *Procedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 50(6): 483-498.

Putnam, Hilary (1980). "Models and Reality". *The Journal of Symbolic Logic* 45(3): 464-482.

Rorty, Richard (1979). *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Rorty, Richard (1999). "Truth Without Correspondence to Reality". Reprinted in *Philosophy and Social Hope*, pp. 23-46. London: Penguin Books.

Scanlon, (2014). *Being Realistic About Reasons*. Oxford: OUP.

Stich, Stephen (1990). *The Fragmentation of Reason: Preface to a Pragmatic Theory of Cognitive Evaluation*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Schwarz, Wolfgang (2014). "Against Magnetism". *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 92: 17-36.

Weatherson, Brian (2012). "The Role of Naturalness in Lewis' Theory of Meaning". *Journal for the History of Analytic Philosophy* 1(10): 1-19.

Williams, J. Robert G. (2015). "Lewis on Reference and Eligibility". In *Companion to David Lewis*, edited by B. Loewer and J. Schaffer.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig (1953). *Philosophical Investigations*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Wright, Crispin (2001a). "Critical Notice of Colin McGinn's *Wittgenstein on Meaning*". In *Rule-Following and Meaning*, edited by A. Miller and C. Wright, pp. 108-128. Acumen.

Wright, Crispin (2001b). "Minimalism, Deflationism, Pragmatism, Pluralism". In *The Nature of Truth: Classic and Contemporary Perspectives*, edited by Michael P Lynch, pp. 751-87. MIT Press.