EMPIRICIST PRAGMATISM[*]
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1. Truth and Sentiment

Mental representation takes place at two levels. On the one hand, internal states of the organism represent things as being a certain way. These include beliefs, which play a characteristic role in allowing the organism to attune its behaviour to features of the environment. On the other hand, conscious episodes can also represent things as being a certain way. They include the episodes in which belief is manifested in consciousness. Bertrand Russell, who referred to these episodes as judgments or beliefs, gives the following example of the phenomenon:

> If I say 'What day of the week is this?' and you say 'Tuesday', there occurs in your mind at that moment the belief that this is Tuesday. (Russell 1985: 81)

We can choose to explicate mental representation by focusing either on the inner states of the organism or on the conscious episodes. Here I'm going to focus on the conscious episodes, and, in particular, on those that we think of as manifesting belief. The term *belief* has been used by Russell and others to refer to these episodes. I think this is best reserved for the internal states that these episodes manifest. I am going to use Russell's other term, *judgment*, even though the element of spontaneity and voluntariness that this term sometimes conveys will be entirely absent from my construal of these episodes.

My goal is to outline an account of the representational character of judgments. This account belongs to the family of views that are usually labelled as *pragmatist*. My goal here is not to *defend* the account, but to try to understand what would be involved in adopting this approach and how it differs from other extant proposals. Obviously our account of the representational character of judgments can only invoke features of these episodes that don't presuppose that they are representations. My first task will be to outline a characterisation of judgments that includes only features of this kind—a description of these conscious episodes that abstracts from the representational power that we ascribe to them.

I want to take as my starting point David Hume's characterisation of the episodes that I'm calling judgments, but he identifies with beliefs, in the Appendix to the *Treatise*. He writes:

> belief consists merely in a certain feeling or sentiment; in something, that depends not on the will, but must arise from certain determinate causes and principles, of which we are not masters. When we are convinc'd of any matter of fact, we do nothing but conceive it, along with a certain feeling, different from what attends the mere *reveries* of the imagination. (Hume 1978: 624)

Belief, according to Hume, then, is a conscious involuntary reaction. What it is a reaction to is not, in the first instance, the possible state of affairs that the belief represents as obtaining, but the idea that serves as its representative in the mind:

> an opinion or belief is nothing but an idea, that is different from a fiction […] in the *manner* of its being conceiv'd. (Hume 1978: 628)

> An idea assented to *feels* different from a fictitious idea, that the fancy alone presents to us. (Hume 1978: 629)[1]

I want to focus on the phenomenon that Hume highlights, not as an account of belief, but as the basis for a characterisation of the kind of conscious episodes that I'm calling *judgments*. Judgments will have the basic character that Hume ascribes to beliefs—they are conscious episodes in which a mental item produces an involuntary reaction.

I am going to use the term *conviction* for the conscious, involuntary, re-identifiable reaction (Hume's feeling or sentiment) that figures in judgments. I'm going to complicate Hume's picture slightly by contemplating *negative conviction*, as the feeling associated with things not being as represented in consciousness, as well as *positive conviction*. I will refer to judgments as either positive or negative, depending on the sign of the conviction that figures in them. I want to emphasize that I'm thinking of conviction as a *feeling*. Conviction doesn't ascribe a property or concept to a possible state of affairs or to its mental representative,[2] nor is it the undertaking of a commitment of any kind. It is simply an involuntary feeling that some conscious items provoke.[3] Conceiving of conviction along these lines doesn't require assuming that it has a particularly rich phenomenology. There doesn't have to be a collection of phenomenological features that are present precisely in those conscious episodes that involve conviction. All that's required is that the subject has the ability to re-identify this feeling. Its type-identity conditions can then be defined in terms of the subject's verdicts.

To the conscious items that judgments are reactions to, I am going to refer as *conscious sentences*. They will be the representatives in the stream of consciousness of the possible states of affairs that we take judgments to represent as obtaining, leaving out of the picture for now the possible semantic properties of these mental entities. Like the sentences of a natural or formal language, they exhibit syntactic, combinatorial structure, being produced by the combination of constituents (*conscious terms*) according to specific patterns. Like Hume's ideas, conscious sentences will figure in conscious episodes other than judgments, including the conscious, episodic correlates of desire (the kind of conscious episode that occurs, for example, when you obey the order to close your eyes and

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[1] I am not adopting Hume's account of the difference between these episodes and those in which a possible state of affairs is merely imagined, in terms of "a superior *force*, or *vivacity*, or *solidity*, or *firmness*, or *steadiness*" (Hume 1978: 629).

[2] Hume considers and rejects this option, as the view that "belief is some new idea, such as that of *reality* or *existence*, which we join to the simple conception of an object" (Hume 1978: 623).

[3] See in this connection Terry Horgan and Mark Timmons' discussion of the phenomenological dimension of what they call *occurrent beliefs* in (Horgan and Timmons 2006). See also Jonathan Cohen's notion of *credal feelings* (Cohen 1992).

make a wish) or episodes in which we merely consider in consciousness a way for things to be, without taking any attitude towards it.[4]

Conscious sentences may appear spontaneously in the stream of consciousness, or they might be produced voluntarily. When a conscious sentence figures in the stream of consciousness, we may feel towards it positive conviction, negative conviction, or neither.[5] Which of these obtains in each case is not under the control of the will, but, as Hume indicates, it's not a random matter either—conviction arises "from certain determinate causes and principles". To judge, on my pre-semantic construal, is simply to feel conviction towards a conscious sentence.

I have characterised conscious sentences as certain re-identifiable items that can be brought to consciousness voluntarily or appear there spontaneously, and conviction as a specific involuntary reaction that we may or may not feel towards a conscious sentence that we are entertaining. Judgments are the episodes in which this reaction is produced. We think of conscious sentences and judgments as representing things as being a certain way, but our characterisation of these phenomena doesn't presuppose that they have this power. Hence the features that we have included in our characterisation are available to us as the materials on which to build our account of representation.

Our question is: how should we understand the idea that conscious sentences and judgments represent things as being a certain way? A central ingredient of this idea is the contrast between true and false representations—the thought that the way things are represented as being may or may not coincide with the way things are. This is the aspect of the notion of representation that I'm going to concentrate on in what follows. The position that I want to present aims at making sense of this thought. What needs to be explained is why it makes sense to assess conscious sentences and judgments as true or false. We need to vindicate the intelligibility of our assessments of these items as true or false—to understand what renders it meaningful to subject them to this particular kind of assessment, for which I'll use the label *alethic assessment*.[6]

2. Representationalism

The pragmatist approach that I'm going to present follows an explanatory strategy that is fundamentally different from the traditional approach, for which I'll use the label *representationalism*. It is important to understand the point at which pragmatism parts company with representationalism. For this purpose, I'm going to outline in this section the representationalist approach.

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[4] Notice that what I am calling conscious sentences are importantly different from the sentences of the language of thought postulated by the representational theory of mind. Conscious sentences, unlike sentences of the language of thought, are essentially conscious, enjoying no ontological status beyond the conscious episodes in which they figure.

[5] Conviction comes in degrees, and the phenomenon might be more accurately represented as a continuum between 1 and 0, with .5 as the complete absence of positive or negative conviction. However, I'm going to proceed, for the sake of simplicity, as if there were sharp boundaries between the presence of each type of conviction and their absence.

[6] On the decision to reformulate the question concerning the nature of truth as a question concerning the meaning of alethic assessment, see (Price 2013: 7-10).

The representationalist strategy for vindicating the meaningfulness of alethic assessments follows a familiar template: you explain the meaningfulness of assessing X's as Y by specifying what an X has to be like in order to count as a Y. The application of this template to our case is the central idea of representationalism. The representationalist seeks to render alethic assessments intelligible by specifying, in the first instance, what they assess judgments and conscious sentences as—what it is for one of these items to be true, or what determines whether it is true or false. For the representationalist, we explain what it is to assess a judgment or conscious sentence as true by explaining what it is for it to be true.

The requisite account of truth can be obtained as a by-product of a theory of content for conscious terms and sentences. The first step in this strategy is an account of the relation of reference, pairing conscious terms with worldly items—properties, relations and individuals. This will then give us, for any conscious sentence, the combination of items in the world (the referents of the terms that figure in the sentence) that the sentence represents as obtaining. The conscious sentence, and a judgment with it as its object, will be true or false depending on whether this combination actually obtains.

In sum, according to this approach, when we assess a judgment as true we are claiming that the referents of the terms that figure in the conscious sentence that the judgment has as its object are actually combined with one another as the sentence represents them as combined. This is clearly a version of the representationalist strategy. We have vindicated the intelligibility of alethic assessments by specifying what a judgment has to be like in order to deserve a favourable assessment.

However, as I am using the term, this particular approach is not the only possible version of representationalism. A view is representationalist so long as it seeks to render alethic assessments intelligible by specifying necessary and sufficient conditions for a judgment to be true, i.e. the feature that we are claiming to be present in a judgment when we assess it as true, whether or not this is achieved with the strategy that I have outlined. Any substantive account of truth will serve the purposes of the representationalist strategy. What won't do for the representationalist is a deflationist account of truth. A deflationist account of truth for conscious sentences would specify the conditions under which it would be correct to assess a conscious sentence as true in terms of the conditions under which the way the sentence represents things as being coincides with the way things are. But since it is the latter that we are trying to explicate, deflationism is of no use for the enterprise that the representationalist is engaged in.[7]

3. Pragmatism

Let me turn now to how the pragmatist proposes to render alethic assessments intelligible. The pragmatist rejects the representationalist project of achieving this with a specification of what we are assessing a judgment as when we assess it as true. What the pragmatist proposes instead is to render alethic assessments intelligible with a specification of the rules that govern the practice of assessing judgments in this way. For the pragmatist, alethic assessment is assessment that follows

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[7] On this point see (Collins 2002: 508): "if one goes to explain meaning in terms of truth, then one cannot appeal to a deflationist account of truth to ground one's target explication". As Collins points out, this line of reasoning against the compatibility of deflationism with an account of meaning in terms of truth can be traced back to the work of Michael Dummett. See (Dummett 1978: 7). See also (Horwich 1990: 71-74).

these rules, and "true" is the label that we apply to a judgment or conscious sentence in order to express a favourable assessment according to these rules. I am going to suggest that the practice of alethic assessment is governed by three rules: the Basic Rule, the Ascent Rule and the Interpretation Rule.

According to the Basic Rule, alethic assessment is necessarily driven by conviction. To assess conscious sentences in any other way is not to assess them as true or false:

> *Basic Rule*: Assess a conscious sentence as true if and only if it produces positive conviction; assess a conscious sentence as false if and only if it produces negative conviction.

Notice the parallel with some expressivist accounts of specific regions of discourse. According to a version of expressivism concerning moral discourse, to assess an action as morally right or wrong is to assess it according to your moral sentiments—to assess it as morally right when it produces moral approval in you and as morally wrong when it produces moral disapproval.[8]

Clearly the basic rule by itself doesn't provide a sufficient characterisation of alethic assessment. One major limitation is that it is compatible with a highly implausible subjectivism, as it makes no provision for treating as incorrect a judgment that follows the subject's convictions. We can see this in the first instance with respect to one's past judgments. A subject can presumably entertain a conscious sentence on two different occasions, and it is perfectly possible that it produces conviction on one occasion but not on the other, or that it produces positive conviction on one occasion and negative conviction on the other. This might happen as a result of changes either in the subject's state of information or in the processes that determine the production of conviction in her.

The Basic Rule gives no grounds for treating judgments of opposite signs concerning a single conscious sentence as incompatible with one another, or any sense in which the subject could consider her previous judgments as false. The Basic Rule by itself would confer on alethic assessment the behaviour of forms of assessment for which a subjectivist construal is perfectly adequate. Consider, for example, the plausible view that to assess an ice-cream flavour as delicious or revolting is to assess it according to your culinary taste—as delicious if it gives you gustatory pleasure and as revolting if it gives you gustatory displeasure. Tastes change and you might find that if you follow this rule you end up assessing pistachio ice-cream as revolting on one occasion and as delicious a few years later. There is no obvious sense in which these assessments are in conflict with one another. If the Basic Rule were the only rule governing alethic assessment, we'd have to treat in the same way the situation in which a subject goes from assessing a conscious sentence as true to assessing it as false.

In order to address this issue, we need to introduce a rule that enables us to go from assessments of conscious sentences to assessments of judgments:

> *Ascent Rule*: Assess a positive judgment of a conscious sentence as true and a negative judgment of the sentence as false if and only if you assess the conscious sentence as true;

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[8] The claim that I'm focusing on is that assessment of actions has to be conducted in this way in order to count as moral assessment, not the claim that the role of moral discourse is to express moral sentiments or a claim to the effect that a moral assessment is correct just in case it accords with the moral sentiments of the assessor.

assess a positive judgment of a conscious sentence as false and a negative judgment of the sentence as true if and only if you assess the conscious sentence as false.[9]

In order to abide by this rule, a subject who now feels negative conviction towards a conscious sentence but remembers feeling positive conviction towards the same sentence in the past will also have to assess as false her past judgment. The same would go for a subject who now feels positive conviction towards a conscious sentence but remembers feeling negative conviction towards it.

Notice that this feature of alethic assessment resembles a parallel feature of moral assessment. When we assess an action as morally right, we also assess as morally right moral approval of the action and we assess as morally wrong moral disapproval of it. Likewise, when we assess an action as morally wrong, we also assess as morally right moral disapproval of the action and we assess as morally wrong moral approval of it.

The practice described by the Basic Rule and the Ascent Rule still has a very important limitation—it imposes no restrictions on how I should assess the judgments of others. The limitation wouldn't exist if we could make sense of the idea that one of your conscious sentences is identical to one of mine, but it is hard to see how this could be achieved. For a single subject, we can think of the identity conditions of conscious sentences as given by the subject's inclinations—two conscious episodes involve the same conscious sentence just in case it seems to the subject that they do. For inter-personal identity there is no obvious correlate for this approach.

A plausible account of the rules that govern alethic assessment would have to impose conditions on our assessment of the judgments of others. It is an essential feature of the practice that we can assess as true or false the judgments of others, and there are some conditions that these third-person assessments have to satisfy in order to count as alethic. The basic intuitive idea of the rule we need is very simple: in order for your assessment to count as alethic assessment, you need to assess as true those judgments of others that agree with yours, and you need to assess as false those judgments of others that disagree with yours.

Unfortunately, however, the rule cannot be formulated in these simple terms, as we haven't yet made sense of the idea of someone else's judgment agreeing or disagreeing with one of yours. In order for your judgment to agree or disagree with mine, the way things are represented as being by the conscious sentence that produces your conviction has to coincide with the way things are represented as being by the conscious sentence that produces mine. But we can't assume that we have at our disposal the requisite notion of synonymy when we are in the process of making sense of the power of conscious sentences to represent things as being a certain way.

The way forward for the pragmatist at this point is to invoke the phenomenon of interpretation.[10] We have introduced conscious sentences as the representatives in the stream of consciousness of

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[9] This formulation of the rule presupposes that the sentences in question have no indexical features. Dealing with indexicality would require a more sophisticated approach. The same goes for the next rule.

[10] I think there are important similarities between the role that interpretation plays in this construal of alethic assessment and the role that it plays, according to Donald Davidson, in the concept of truth (Davidson 1990: 295-96). John Collins offers an insightful summary of Davidson's line of reasoning on this point:

> Where truth is characterised for our *own* language, then the determination of truth conditions is, as it were, built into our very understanding of the language, i.e., the translation of object language into metalanguage realised in instances of (T) is "merely syntactical" (the identity function: the object

possible states of affairs and the immediate objects of conviction. But conscious sentences play an important additional role: we use them to index or tag the representational states of others, including their judgments and the beliefs they manifest, in the procedure that we refer to as *interpretation*.[11] We can think of these indexings as conscious sentences that embed other conscious sentences, postulating a relation between our interpretee's judgment and the embedded conscious sentence. These interpretative conscious sentences, like our other conscious sentences, may or may not produce conviction, positive or negative, when they are brought to consciousness.

The judgments that we interpret as agreeing with ours are those that we index with conscious sentences towards which we feel conviction of the same sign (positive or negative); the ones that we interpret as disagreeing with ours are those that we index with conscious sentences towards which we feel conviction of the opposite sign. This feature of the practice is represented in our final rule:

> *Interpretation Rule*: Assess someone else's positive judgment as true and someone else's negative judgment as false if and only if you have indexed it with a conscious sentence that produces positive conviction in you. Assess someone else's positive judgment as false and someone else's negative judgment as true if and only if you have indexed it with a conscious sentence that produces negative conviction in you.[12]

This formulation of the rule would still be question-begging if interpretation were defined in terms of the goal of matching the judgments of others with conscious sentences of yours that are synonymous with the conscious sentences that serve as the objects of those judgments. The proposal needs to employ a construal of interpretation on which its goal is not defined in semantic terms.

One possibility at this point is to adopt Daniel Dennett's account of interpretation as a strategy for predicting behaviour:

> Here is how it works: first you decide to treat the object whose behaviour is to be predicted as a rational agent; then you figure out what beliefs that agent ought to have, given its place in the world and its purpose. Then you figure out what desires it ought to have, on the same considerations, and finally you predict that this rational agent will act to further its goals in

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language is mapped into itself). However, in general, the requirement of translation cannot be syntactical, where, e.g., *we* characterise truth for a language previously unknown to us. In such cases, *interpretation*—anthropology—is required. Thus, since we want a general concept of truth with empirical application to actual speakers, interpretation is a necessary part of the concept's characterisation. (Collins 2002: 520)

For a defence of the pragmatist character of Davidson's position, see (Rorty 1986).

[11] For the picture of interpretation as an indexing exercise, see (Churchland 1979: 100-07). In Churchland's version of the approach, the items that serve as indices are propositions, but he sees its viability as independent of any special view concerning the nature of propositions. He thinks the approach would work even if we thought of propositions as sentences.

[12] Huw Price has highlighted the need for a rule along these lines in the characterisation of our conversational practice:

> I want to maintain that in order to account for a core part of ordinary conversational practice, we must allow that speakers take themselves and their fellows to be governed by a norm […] which speakers immediately assume to be breached by someone with whom they disagree, *independently of any diagnosis of the source of the disagreement.* Indeed, this is the very essence of the norm of truth, in my view. (Price 2011b: 164)

the light of its beliefs. A little practical reasoning from the chosen set of beliefs and desires will in many—but not all—instances yield a decision about what the agent ought to do; that is what you predict the agent *will* do. (Dennett 1987: 17)

It would be easy to adapt this characterisation to our framework. Let's focus on the first step. We would need to assume that we have views about the circumstances that would produce in us positive or negative conviction in one of our conscious sentences. Then we would index a judgment of the interpretee's with one of our conscious sentences when these conditions obtain. This is, in essence, the procedure employed by Quine's field linguist (Quine 1960: Chapter 2). She interprets the judgment expressed by assent to "Gavagai" with her sentence "Lo, a rabbit!" when the judgment has been formed in circumstances in which this sentence would produce conviction in her.

I would argue, however, that the conditions in which we would form judgments is not what's ultimately driving the indexings. I have defined conviction as a feeling or sentiment, but it is often associated with a behavioural disposition, probably through its connection with the beliefs it manifests. These dispositions are necessarily complex, since their manifestation will depend on which other convictions and conative states are present. We usually have views concerning how our behaviour would be affected by positive or negative conviction in our conscious sentences. I want to suggest that these views are what ultimately drives interpretation. Interpretation aims at indexings that match the behaviour associated with conviction in the indexing sentences with the behaviour actually produced by the interpretee. I index the judgment expressed by assent to "Gavagai" with my conscious sentence "Lo, a rabbit!" when the judgment produces in the interpretee the behaviour that conviction in "Lo, a rabbit!" would produce in me.[13]

This is of course a process shot through with holism, as the specific behaviour that's associated with conviction in a sentence will depend on which other convictions we postulate. And the holism would be exacerbated once we take into account, as we must at some point, the indexing of conative states. In light of this, ties can't be ruled out, but if there were a unique set of indexings of the interpretee's cognitive and conative states that produced the best match between the behaviour that you associate with your conscious sentences and the behaviour displayed by the interpretee, that would be the right interpretation, on the position that I'm recommending to the pragmatist.

In spite of my quibble about the role of the interpretee's place in the world in the indexing of her cognitive states, I believe that this approach is in line with the spirit of Dennett's proposal:

> *It is not that we attribute (or should attribute) beliefs and desires only to things in which we find internal representations, but rather that when we discover some object for which the intentional strategy works, we endeavor to interpret some of its internal states or processes as internal representations. What makes some internal feature of a thing a representation could only be its role in regulating the behavior of an intentional system.* (Dennett 1987: 32)

The pragmatist proposal, then, is to take these three rules as defining the practice of assessing judgments as true or false. To assess judgments as true or false is, the pragmatist claims, to assess

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[13] Notice that on this construal, interpretation doesn't rely in any obvious way on the Principle of Charity. We can recognise in principle rabbit-oriented behaviour even if we think no rabbit is present.

them according to these rules. The pragmatist's claim is that these three rules are individually necessary and jointly sufficient for defining the practice.

The proposal will unquestionably have to be refined to deal with specific issues. One could argue, for example, that the ascent rule should be weakened to allow for exceptions in areas in which, intuitively, we don't think there's absolute truth. If I used to feel positive conviction towards "pistachio ice-cream is delicious" and I now feel negative conviction towards the same sentence, I might not want to assess my past judgment as false. Similarly, if I index one of your positive convictions with this conscious sentence I would not want to assess your judgment as false as a result. The ascent rule reflects the highest level of objectivity that judgments can attract. We would need to find a way of accommodating judgments that fall short of this—if indeed we want to think of them as genuine judgments.

We might also have to allow, in exceptional cases, alethic assessments that are in conflict with the subject's convictions—both assessments in the absence of conviction and assessments in the presence of conviction of the opposite sign. We can achieve a certain reflective distance towards the processes that produce conviction in us, and we can come to the conclusion that convictions produced under certain conditions—e.g. while intoxicated or tired—are rarely replicated in more standard circumstances. This will enable us to detach our alethic assessments from our current convictions. If, for example, after a few drinks, you feel positive conviction towards the conscious sentence "he is actually a nice guy", you might still be able to assess the sentence as false, on the grounds of your past sober negative convictions.

Alethic assessment can also come apart from conviction as a result of inferential links. Suppose that you feel positive conviction towards p and negative conviction towards q, but you take p to bear to q a relation R such that when a conscious sentence x bears R to a conscious sentence y, the combination of positive conviction towards x and negative conviction towards y is extremely rare, and when it occurs it doesn't usually last—one of the convictions is soon replaced by its opposite in circumstances that you regard as more conducive to stable convictions. In this kind of situation, the realisation that p bears R to q might make your conviction in p or in q change sign, but if it doesn't you might decide on an assessment of p or of q that is in conflict with your current conviction.[14]

Deference to the superior expertise of others will also supply cases of this kind. Suppose you interpret one of Carlo Ancelotti's positive judgments with the sentence "Arsenal will win the Champions League this year", but the sentence produces negative conviction in you. Suppose you've found in the past that Ancelotti's judgments always matched your convictions concerning the football-related conscious sentences with which you have indexed them, and on the rare occasions on which this didn't happen your conviction soon changed and matched Ancelotti's judgment. In this situation you might find that indexing one of his positive judgments with this sentence makes your negative conviction be replaced by positive conviction. However, it is also possible that the discovery

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[14] Your taking p to bear R to q would also have to be construed as a judgment—as positive conviction produced by a conscious sentence. The conflict could also be resolved by assessing this conscious sentence as false, in spite of your positive conviction.

doesn't have this effect, but you still decide to assess the sentence as true, taking Ancelotti's word for it, as we would put it.[15]

In sum, the pragmatist approach that I am presenting consists of an explanatory strategy and a specific proposal as to how to implement this strategy. The explanatory strategy is to explain the meaningfulness of alethic assessment in terms of the rules that govern it. Alethic assessment is assessment of conscious sentences and judgments that is governed by certain rules. The specific implementation of this strategy that I have put forward is the proposal that alethic assessment is defined as assessment of conscious sentences and judgments that is governed by the Basic Rule, the Ascent Rule and the Interpretation Rule. To assess a conscious sentence or a judgment as true or false is simply to assess it according to these rules.[16]

4. Anti-realism

The label *pragmatism* has been used for a wide range of views, some of which are superficially similar but fundamentally incompatible with the position that I am presenting here. In this section I want spell out how my proposal differs from two such views.

Clearly, on the pragmatist construal, alethic assessment is ultimately driven by the procedures that produce conviction in the assessors. The episodes of conviction these give rise to lead, by virtue of the Basic Rule, to the assessment of conscious sentences currently entertained. This leads, in turn, by virtue of the Ascent Rule, to the assessment of judgments regarding those sentences. Finally the Interpretation Rule enables us to advance from the assessment of our own conscious sentences to the assessment of the judgments of others and of the conscious sentences that they have as their objects.

One might try to use these conviction-producing procedures in a different account of alethic assessment, by defining, in terms of these procedures, the conditions under which a conscious sentence would qualify as true or as false. A conscious sentence would be true just in case the procedures that the subject associates with it favour conviction in the sentence.[17] In order for this proposal to have any plausibility, the procedures would have to be construed in such a way that it is in principle possible for them to recommend conviction in cases in which they actually fail to produce it. Otherwise the subject's judgments would be necessarily infallible. This could be achieved, for example, by focusing on what the procedures used by the subject would recommend under ideal conditions, or on what's recommended by the procedures that the subject would adopt under ideal conditions, or at the limit of a process of procedure-revision.

It should be clear that, far from being a reformulation of the pragmatist position that I have presented, an account of alethic assessment along these lines is a version of representationalism. It seeks to render alethic assessment intelligible with an account of what we assess conscious

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[15] This kind of situation could also lead you to assess judgments that you haven't indexed. If you don't know who Ancelotti thinks is going to win the Champions League this year, you might still assess his judgment on this matter as true.

[16] This account of alethic assessment occupies the space that I labelled as the *middle position* in (Zalabardo 2012: 181-86). As I hope to show in a sequel, it has the anti-sceptical potential that I ascribed to the middle position.

[17] Let's simplify matters by assuming bivalence—all the sentences that are not true are false.

sentences and judgments as—of the conditions that they would have to satisfy in order to merit a favourable assessment. The proposal is, in effect, a substantive theory of truth—one that happens to use conviction-producing procedures in order to specify what has to be the case in order for a conscious sentence to be true.

It may seem that the pragmatist position that I have presented carries a commitment to this kind of account of truth. However this impression is mistaken. It arises from failure to grasp the methodological contrast between representationalist and pragmatist accounts of alethic assessment. The pragmatist is not committed to this or any other account of truth—of the conditions that a conscious sentence has to satisfy in order to be true. The pragmatist's commitment to a view on the nature of truth doesn't go beyond the merely pleonastic—as what we ascribe to a conscious sentence or a judgment when we assess it according to the rules that govern alethic assessment.[18]

However, as Huw Price has emphasized, the pragmatist will accept as legitimate questions concerning the "function and genealogy" of alethic assessment—why we developed the practice of assessing conscious sentences and judgments in this way and what role it plays in our lives.[19] The pragmatist should "reject the assumption that an adequate philosophical account of truth needs to answer the question 'What is truth?'", and should pose instead *explanatory questions* concerning truth: "Why do we have such a notion? What job does it do in language? What features does it need to have to play this role? And how would things be different if we didn't have it?" (Price 2011b: 170).[20]

The conviction-producing procedures associated with each conscious sentence can be used to explicate alethic assessment in a different way. This proposal would not use conviction-producing procedures to define truth, and would generally refrain from providing a substantive account of truth. Instead it would use conviction-producing procedures to specify the conditions under which it would be correct for a subject to assess a sentence as true: it would be correct to assess a sentence as true just in case the procedures associated with the sentence recommend conviction. As in the previous proposal, the procedures would be construed in such a way that it is in principle possible for them to recommend conviction in cases in which they actually fail to produce it, and vice versa. In the versions of this approach that focus on public languages and assertion, rather than conscious sentences and judgment, the conditions that play this role are usually known as *assertibility conditions*. On this position, the representational features of a conscious sentence are given by its assertibility conditions. When used in this way, conviction-producing procedures would be construed as classifying, not possible states of the world, but states of information. This would make it possible for them to recommend convictions of opposite signs for different subjects, or for a subject at different times.

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[18] An analogy with contextual definitions might be instructive. Once we have given a contextual account of direction by saying that two lines have the same direction just in case they are parallel to one another, we can go on to say that the direction of a line is what is has in common with those lines that are parallel to it.
[19] Elsewhere Price characterises these questions as *anthropological*. See (Macarthur and Price 2007; Price 2015).
[20] Price's own answers to these questions focus on the role of representational language and thought in promoting "conformity across our linguistic communities" (Price 2011a: 272). I'm not endorsing Price's approach on this point and I'm not addressing these questions here.

It is important to see how a position along these lines differs from the version of pragmatism that I have presented. This can be appreciated by considering the contrast between the three rules in terms of which I am proposing to explicate alethic assessment and the rule invoked by this position:

> *Assertibility Rule*: Assess a conscious sentence as true just in case your state of information satisfies its assertibility conditions.

This rule is very different in character from the three rules I have employed. Those rules can be characterised as specifying conditions of *semantic* correctness: assessment that isn't governed by these rules simply doesn't qualify as alethic assessment. The Assertibility Rule, by contrast, doesn't specify conditions of semantic correctness. Someone who assess a conscious sentence as true when her state of information doesn't satisfy its assertibility conditions is not making a semantic mistake— her assessment may still count as alethic. The mistake that she would be making is rather *epistemic*—she could be assessing the conscious sentence as true in circumstances in which this assessment is not warranted or justified. This is the main respect in which this proposal differs from the version of pragmatism that I have presented. My approach doesn't invoke epistemic notions in the explication of alethic assessment. The conditions under which conviction would be warranted or justified don't play any role in my account of the representational character of conscious sentences.

5. Rationalist Pragmatism

The pragmatist approach seeks to explain the representational character of mental and linguistic items in terms of the rules governing the activities in which these items figure. Here I've outlined a specific implementation of the pragmatist explanatory strategy in terms of the three rules that govern alethic assessment. Other recent pragmatist views can be seen as offering alternative implementations of the same general explanatory strategy. Robert Brandom's ideas fall under this category. Brandom is explicitly committed to the pragmatist methodological approach. Here he presents his pragmatist explanatory strategy for understanding the conceptual:

> An account of the conceptual might explain the *use* of concepts in terms of a prior understanding of conceptual *content*. Or it might pursue a complementary explanatory strategy, beginning with a story about the practice or activity of applying concepts, and elaborating on that basis an understanding of conceptual content. The first can be called a *platonist* strategy, and the second a *pragmatist* (in this usage, a species of functionalist) strategy. (Brandom 2000: 4)

In earlier work, he presents a similar idea concerning specifically the explication of alethic assessment, not for conscious sentences and judgments, but for their linguistic correlates— declarative sentences and assertions. He characterises his approach as

> [...] the approach whose leading idea is that the special linguistic roles of truth ascriptions are to be explained in terms of features of the ascrib*ings* of truth, rather than of what is ascrib*ed*. The explanatory emphasis placed on the *act* of calling something true, as opposed to its descriptive content, qualifies theories displaying this sort of strategic commitment as 'pragmatic' theories of truth, by contrast to 'semantic' ones. (Brandom 1988: 75)

Leaving points of detail to one side, it seems unquestionable that the explanatory strategy that I've followed here is in line with Brandom's. However, at the level of implementation there are fundamental differences between Brandom's approach and mine. According to Brandom, following Sellars, the practice whose rules ground the representational character of mental and linguistic items is "the game of giving and asking for reasons" (Brandom 2000: 57).[21] Only by virtue of our participation in this practice do our mental and linguistic products acquire their representational character. He spells out the view in the following passage:

> Saying or thinking *that* things are thus-and-so is undertaking a distinctive kind of *inferentially* articulated commitment: putting it forward as a fit premise for further inferences, that is *authorising* its use as such a premise, and undertaking *responsibility* to entitle oneself to that commitment, to vindicate one's authority, under suitable circumstances, paradigmatically by exhibiting it as the conclusion of an inference from other such commitments to which one has become entitled. (Brandom 2000: 11)

I want to concentrate on the responsibility that, according to Brandom, we need to undertake in order to take part in the practice that will confer on our judgments and assertions the character of representations: we need to be prepared to 'vindicate our authority' regarding what we are saying or thinking, 'paradigmatically by exhibiting it as the conclusion of an inference from other such commitments to which one has become entitled.' In order to take part in this practice, we need to be prepared to provide reasons for what we are convinced of—to defend it with other things we are convinced of.

Richard Rorty highlights a similar feature of our cognitive practice as the basis of his pragmatist characterisation of semantic notions—namely "the need to justify our beliefs and desires to ourselves and to our fellow agents" (Rorty 1998: 26) or the hope "to justify our belief to as many and as large audiences as possible" (Rorty 1998: 39).

Thus, both for Rorty and for Brandom, the representational character of our mental and linguistic episodes is grounded in our acceptance of a commitment to offer reasons for what we believe, either to ourselves or to others. If we rejected this commitment, then we wouldn't participate in the practice that confers on mental and linguistic episodes the character of representations. Our own linguistic or mental output could not be characterised as 'saying or thinking that things are thus and so'. Brandom refers to this specific implementation of the pragmatist explanatory strategy as "rationalist pragmatism" (Brandom 2000: 11).[22]

It should be clear that the version of pragmatism that I have outlined here is not rationalist in this sense, and I'd like to mark the contrast by referring to this position as *empiricist pragmatism*. Empiricist pragmatism imposes no constraints on the procedures that might produce conviction and hence alethic assessment. These may include sub-personal processes that the subject is in no position to identify, let alone defend. The subject may of course have an interest in identifying reasons that would vindicate these convictions in her own eyes or those of her peers, but then again, she might lack this interest. The feeling of conviction might be all she needs to allow these episodes to inform her behaviour, and to assess the conscious sentences that provoke these

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[21] For discussion of the idea in Sellars, see (Sellars 1997).

[22] Rorty has used for this aspect of his position and Brandom's the label "conversationalism" (Rorty 2000: 237).

convictions as true, according to the Basic Rule. For Brandom and Rorty, the behaviour-informing conscious episodes of a subject who displayed this kind of attitude would not count as genuine representations or as fitting subjects for alethic assessment. Empiricist pragmatism doesn't have this consequence. Such a subject could be a full participant in the practice of alethic assessment. She would be able to assess her conscious sentences as true or false and to use these assessments as the basis for assessing the judgments of others, and her own past judgments. And the other participants in the practice would have no problem in principle in assessing her judgments as true or false, so long as they can be seen as making a difference to her behaviour that matches the difference that would be made in the interpreters' behaviour by conviction in some of their conscious sentences.

I think that this is a clear advantage of empiricist pragmatism over the rationalist alternative. Lack of interest in justification or proselytism might be reprehensible, but it's hard to see why it should be taken as depriving your linguistic or mental episodes of the character of representations and of legitimate objects of alethic assessment. Whenever I can see a mental episode of one of my peers as making the kind of difference to her behaviour that conviction in one of my conscious sentences would make to my behaviour, it will be right for me to interpret this episode as a judgment indexed with my conscious sentence. And if this sentence as a matter of fact produces conviction in me I will be able to assess that judgment as true or false, depending on whether or not it matches the sign of my conviction. This will be so whether or not the subject has any interest in finding reasons in support of her judgment or in producing matching judgments in others—i.e. judgments that would make the same difference to the behaviour of her peers that her conviction makes to her own behaviour.

Brandom's appeal to the game of giving and asking for reasons to ground representation is the justification he offers for his decision to focus on the linguistic notion of assertion, rather than its mental correlate—judgment (Brandom 1994: 153). This activity is essentially social. Hence it can only be conducted with respect to items that are publicly accessible. Notice that empiricist pragmatism has no need to follow Brandom on this point. Alethic assessment is certainly a social activity, but only, I would argue, contingently so. There's no reason to think that a subject in isolation would not be able to entertain conscious sentences and feel positive or negative conviction towards some of them, or that she couldn't develop the practice of assessing her conscious sentences according to the Basic Rule, and her past judgments according to the Ascent Rule. In fact the Interpretation Rule may also be invoked in the assessment of past judgments. If a past judgment is now seen by the subject as making the same difference to behaviour as a conviction that she currently feels towards a conscious sentence, then she might index the past judgment with this conscious sentence, and assess it accordingly, even if she doesn't see the object of her past judgment as type-identical with the conscious sentence she is indexing it with.

6. The Inexorability of Truth

I want to close by registering a familiar concern provoked by the pragmatist approach and hinting at the kind of considerations that might enable us to address it. I have in mind the suspicion that the pragmatist approach doesn't succeed in vindicating the reality of the contrast between true and false representations—between those that represent things as they really are and those that represent things as they are not. According to this complaint, the fact that we engage in a practice

with the rules that I have presented may show that we are under the impression that there is a genuine contrast between true and false judgments and conscious sentences. But showing that we are under the impression that this contrast is real does not suffice for showing that it is indeed real. Our impression might be entirely illusory. Contrary to how it seems to us, there might be no reality to the contrast between true and false judgments and conscious sentences and, a fortiori, to the idea that they represent things as being a certain way.

In order to show that the impression is veridical, the objection continues, in addition to describing the practice we would need to identify a level of reality to which the practice corresponds—a real contrast between true and false judgments and conscious sentences to which our alethic assessments are answerable. But including an identification of this contrast in our account of alethic assessment would be tantamount to abandoning the pragmatist approach in favour of some version of representationalism.[23]

I want to argue that this challenge fails to take account of a peculiar feature of alethic assessment. When we ask the question, whether the contrast between true and false representations is real, we are engaging in alethic assessment. We are asking, in effect, which side of the contrast we should place a representation of the contrast as real. Hence, raising the question whether the contrast is real requires assuming that it is. It follows that the question can only be coherently answered in the affirmative, by accepting the reality of the contrast. I am going to refer to this phenomenon as the *inexorability of truth*.[24]

The inexorability of truth has a direct bearing on the challenge under consideration. The complaint is that pragmatism fails to vindicate the reality of the contrast between true and false conscious sentences and judgments, because the existence of a practice with the rules in terms of which the pragmatist explicates alethic assessment is compatible with the hypothesis that the contrast is illusory. But the inexorability of truth entails that this hypothesis is incoherent. It follows that the task that the pragmatist is accused of neglecting is one that doesn't have to be discharged—ruling out an incoherent hypothesis. Hence the objection has failed to identify a shortcoming of the pragmatist approach—what the pragmatist doesn't do is something that doesn't need to be done.

The vindication of the contrast between true and false representations based on the inexorability of truth is undoubtedly different from what the objection envisaged. The objection is based on the assumption that we can undertake a coherent intellectual project of determining whether or not there is a genuine contrast in the world corresponding to our practice of alethic assessment. From this assumption, a vindication of the contrast would require a positive outcome for this investigation—the kind of result that a substantive theory of truth would secure. It should be clear that I am not defending pragmatism from the objection by claiming that this investigation can have a positive outcome. On the contrary, my defence arises from the observation that it follows from the

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[23] In recent work, Huw Price has come to the view that the 'in-game externality' arising from the rules in terms of which the pragmatist explains representation needs to be supplemented with an external notion of covariation (Price 2013: 36-38). Here I'm hoping to provide an in-game response to the challenge—based on the idea that, in the relevant sense, in-game externality is the only externality we can make sense of.

[24] I believe this phenomenon underlies Quine's rejection of 'cosmic exile' (Quine 1960: 275-76), as well as John McDowell's related metaphors concerning the impossibility of picturing content 'from sideways on' (McDowell 1994: 34) or 'as from outside' (McDowell 1987: 74), or the necessity of theorising about content 'from the midst of language as a going concern' (McDowell 1981: 248).

inexorability of truth that this investigation is an incoherent intellectual project, since the question that it would have to pose is one that can only be posed by accepting an affirmative answer.

7. Conclusion

I have sought to throw light on the idea that conscious sentences and judgments represent things as being a certain way. I have focused on a central ingredient of this idea—the fact that we can meaningfully assess these items as true or false. I have offered empiricist pragmatism as an account of alethic assessment. Empiricist pragmatism seeks to explain alethic assessment in terms of the rules that govern this practice—to assess a conscious sentence or a judgment as true or false is to assess it according to these rules. It claims that alethic assessment is governed by three rules: the Basic Rule, the Ascent Rule and the Interpretation Rule.

I have argued that empiricist pragmatism does not offer a definition of truth in terms of our conviction-producing procedures, and that it doesn't invoke rules concerning conditions in which conviction would be warranted or justified. I have then explained how empiricist pragmatism relates to the rationalist pragmatism of Robert Brandom. While both positions seek to explain representation in terms of our practices, there is a marked contrast in how they implement this general strategy. Rationalist pragmatism invokes for this purpose the practice of giving and asking for reasons. I have argued that participating in this practice is not a plausible requirement for one's mental and linguistic products to qualify as representations.

Then I have addressed the complaint that pragmatism fails to vindicate the contrast between true and false representations because it does nothing to rule out the hypothesis that our impression that the contrast exists is entirely illusory. I have argued that the inexorability of truth defuses this worry. The hypothesis that the contrast between true and false representations is not real doesn't have to be ruled out, because it is an incoherent hypothesis, since it involves placing the existence of the contrast on one side of the very same contrast that it is supposed to reject.

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