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Hookway’s Peirce on Assertion & Truth

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Abstract

Charles Sanders Peirce famously claimed that ‘The opinion which is fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate is what we mean by the truth’ (W3: 273). Christopher Hookway has argued for a highly distinctive interpretation of this claim in terms of speech-acts and the normative commitments we incur in performing them.[[2]](#endnote-3) So-construed, Peirce’s conception of truth is difficult to compare with standard theories of the concept, which tend to focus instead upon some property or feature that is shared by all and only true propositions, and with whether or not that property is substantive or metaphysically significant.[[3]](#endnote-4) This paper examines Hookway’s interpretation of Peirce’s conception of truth in an effort to clarify its position in logical space. It then raises some difficulties for the way Hookway tries to accommodate Peirce’s remarks about the special status of assertion and belief in science.

Keywords: Peirce; Hookway; Truth; Assertion; Convergence; Semantics; Pragmatics; Speech-acts; Theory vs. Practice; Science

pragmatic clarifications of concepts and propositions are best seen as *accounts of the (experiential) commitments we incur when we assert or judge the proposition in question.* (Hookway, 2012, p. 69, emphasis added)

For those unfamiliar with the distinctive character and methodology of Peirce’s philosophy, it typically appears as though Peirce identifies truth with a particular epistemic property.[[4]](#endnote-5) On this interpretation, Peircean Truth is the view that *a true proposition is one that would, at least under certain (perhaps ideal) conditions, generate convergence of opinion among rational inquirers*, or something along these lines. Familiar objections to Peircean Truth arise quickly and easily from such interpretations – apparent counter-examples abound (seemingly undecidable propositions about the distant past or mathematical conjectures, etc.), and there is even tension between PT and a number of apparent platitudes about the concept of truth.[[5]](#endnote-6) However, one of Chris Hookway’s greatest contributions to Peirce scholarship has been to highlight and elucidate the distinctive character of Peirce’s approach to philosophical analysis. This distinctive character, Hookway writes, means that Peirce’s views ‘may not be assessable by the same standards that are appropriate to more familiar styles of philosophical analysis.’[[6]](#endnote-7) This paper represents an attempt to facilitate a properly charitable assessment of Peirce’s views *as Hookway understands them*, and anticipates some challenges and objections likely to arise in the process.

This paper addresses the views held by a fictional figure I shall call Hookway’s Peirce (hereafter, HP). This should not be taken in quite the same way as Kripke’s Wittgenstein, in that I take Hookway to be trying earnestly to reconstruct Peirce’s actual views, as faithfully and charitably as possible.[[7]](#endnote-8) Nevertheless, to avoid courting unnecessary controversy, I want to be clear that this is a paper about *Hookway’s interpretation of* Peirce. This paper is not an attempt to determine which is the correct or most historically/textually accurate interpretation of Peirce’s remarks about truth. Instead, I concern myself solely with clarifying the most tenable and plausible version of the views of HP, and in particular, the suggestion that truth is best understood in terms of ‘the experiential commitments we incur when we assert’ a proposition. At times such clarification requires bringing HP into dialogue with Peirce himself, but in those cases, the purpose of doing so is (again) not to establish what Peirce really thought, but to evaluate the prospects for Hookway’s interpretation of him.

The structure of the paper is as follows. In §1 I attempt to clarify what is distinctive about HP’s approach to the philosophical analysis of truth, by contrasting it with deflationary and inflationary theories of the concept, that is, with the two types of theory most familiar within the contemporary Analytic tradition. I sharpen this contrast with the aid of three precedents found in the work of Frege, Brandom and Engel, to argue that HP’s approach disrupts the inflation/deflation dichotomy. The central idea is that even if the *word* ‘true’ or the *predicate* ‘is true’ have no significant cognitive content, it remains both plausible and compatible with this thought that the concept of truth is vital for explaining the nature of certain speech-acts and the normative commitments they enable us to make. In §2 I briefly examine a second strand to HP’s position – the view that the concept of truth also plays an essential, though subtly distinct role in explaining assertion in a *scientific* or theoretical context. In §3 I raise a difficulty I think this second strand creates for HP’s approach, and consider some possible solutions.

§1 Inflationism, Deflationism & Something in Between

A theory of truth is typically said to be *inflationary* if it holds that the concept of truth picks out some substantive property. Thus, for an inflationist, to say that a proposition is true is to ascribe to it some kind of essential property – one that all true propositions have in common. A theory of truth is typically said to be *deflationary* if it holds that the concept of truth picks out – at most – an ‘insubstantive’ property. Thus, for a deflationist, to say that a proposition is true is equivalent to asserting that proposition, and nothing more. The deflationist holds that the concept of truth is merely a logical or linguistic device to facilitate assertion.[[8]](#endnote-9) In this section, I propose to show that HP’s conception of truth occupies a logical space in between these two positions – even though it is popularly assumed within the contemporary literature that the distinction between inflationism and deflationism is *exhaustive* and *exclusive*.[[9]](#endnote-10) What drives this assumption is the thought that the concept of truth either picks out a substantive property or it does not, hence there seem only to be two options here.[[10]](#endnote-11) In fact, I argue that one of Hookway’s great contributions to the debate about truth, as well as to the interpretation of Peirce’s work, has been to question and to disrupt the way such debates are typically framed. His questions are prompted by some Peircean ideas that bust (in characteristically pragmatist fashion) the overly simplistic dichotomy of inflation/deflation, as well as by Peirce’s distinctive approach to philosophical analysis.

In §1.1 I offer a prima facie case against interpreting Peirce’s approach as inflationist or deflationist respectively. In §1.2 I examine the motivation for and interpolate some further details of HP’s intermediate or hybrid position.

§1.1 Inflationist & Deflationist Misinterpretations of Peirce

Most of Peirce’s interpreters agree that his conception of truth centers on something like the following conditional (Hookway notes that some of Peirce’s remarks suggest he would accept it as a biconditional, and the label ‘D5’ is his, see his 2002, p. 49):

D5: If it is true that *p*, then anyone who inquired into the question whether *p* long enough and well enough (using good methods of inquiry) would eventually reach a stable belief that *p* which would not be disturbed by further evidence or investigation.

A claim like this one is often illustrated using Peirce’s metaphor of the *convergence of opinion* over time. That is, if D5 is true, then all those who investigate some true hypothesis H would eventually *converge* upon a stable belief in H, provided they are rational[[11]](#endnote-12), and they inquire long enough and well enough (or in accordance with Peirce’s *method of science*).

D5 is in some ways intuitively appealing. As Hookway puts it ‘Any evidence that a proposition would not be the object of a stable long-run consensus among competent inquirers should be taken as evidence that the proposition is not true.’ (p. 80) D5 offers us an explanation of why this is so – it says that it is a consequence of a proposition’s being true that the beliefs of rational inquirers would converge upon it under certain conditions.

Does someone who believes D5 is true advocate an *inflationist* conception of truth, in the traditional sense? No. For interpreting D5 as a claim about the essential property or feature that all true propositions have in common makes Peirce’s view implausible. Such formulations of Peirce’s views consistently raise the same, seemingly fatal objection. Unfortunately there are (in Peirce’s words) ‘minute facts of history, forgotten never to be recovered, to the lost books of the ancients, to the buried secrets’ (W3: 274). In plainer terms, the trouble with D5 is that there are propositions that seem apt to be true or false, even though it is highly implausible that anyone, however long or diligently they inquired, would ever plausibly reach a stable belief in them of the sort D5 describes. Yet this does not seem sufficient to rule out the very possibility that such propositions could be true. Thus, the proposition (call it N) that ‘the number of stars in the universe exactly a million years ago was an even number’ might be such an example. N is seemingly truth-apt, yet the consequent of D5 seems plainly false when N is its substituend.

One way to persist with an inflationary reading of D5, even in the face of these difficulties, is by simply accepting its counter-intuitive implications. Either one might insist that propositions like N are not after all truth-apt (and then explain away the appearances), or one might insist that they *would* be subject to the convergence of opinion, given sufficiently long and diligent inquiry (and then try to justify such remarkable epistemic optimism). There are some who believe some aspects of Peirce’s work support one or other of these strategies,[[12]](#endnote-13) but our focus here is Hookway’s Peirce, who – textual evidence suggests – does not wish to deny either that propositions like N could be truth-apt or that it’s possible that beliefs concerning them might never converge.[[13]](#endnote-14)

I think it is clear then that we cannot persist with an inflationary reading of D5. Doing so not only leaves HP’s view vulnerable to the problem of lost facts, it also neglects Peirce’s remarks about the pragmatic maxim and the grades of clarity. As Cheryl Misak has argued at length and in detail, these remarks clearly show that Peirce did not intend convergence to be part of a traditional reductive analysis or definition of the concept of truth (a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for a proposition’s being true).[[14]](#endnote-15) Yet the distinguishing mark of an inflationary theory of truth is precisely the provision of a reductive analysis of the concept.[[15]](#endnote-16) Thus, just as Hookway suggests, the key to understanding and evaluating a claim like D5, surely lies in understanding Peirce’s distinctive approach to philosophical analysis.

Might that distinctive approach be an early forerunner of what we now call ‘deflationism’, so that D5 is to be read as somehow part of, or at least consistent with some kind of minimalism or redundancy theory of truth? In his writing, Hookway admits that if we focus upon explaining first-order or explicit uses of the concept of truth, we will likely be lead to some kind of deflationism – specifically, to the conclusion that ‘the concept of truth has no substantive cognitive role’ (2002, p. 63). What, then, does D5 add to that conclusion? One thing it may add is what Peirce (following Kant) called a *regulative assumption*, which is to say, something that one must *assume* is true in order to engage in rational inquiry, but which we need not be (and perhaps *cannot be*) in any position to assert. Misak (2004) and Howat (2013) develop this interpretive proposal in detail, and argue that it avoids the difficulties arising from the problem of lost facts.

Read as deflationist however, Peirce’s conception of truth now looks scarcely worthy of the name. For what D5 expresses no longer appears to be a fact about the nature of *truth*, or the meaning of the word ‘true’, or the linguistic function of the truth predicate. Instead, what D5 expresses is some sort of epistemological or pragmatic claim about the constraints upon *inquiry*. Thus, on this interpretation of D5, it appears Misak is correct when she asserts that the ‘dispute between deflationism and pragmatism looks more and more like a non-dispute.’ (2007, p. 80). If this were correct, then Peirce’s work would amount to little more than deflationism about truth coupled with some largely unrelated epistemological observations about the nature of inquiry.[[16]](#endnote-17) This however seems plainly unacceptable.

As noted above, Peirce’s remarks on truth are supposed to be the product of applying the pragmatic maxim. The maxim is, as Hookway has argued in detail, a methodological rule for the clarification of concepts. On the deflationist reading just outlined, D5 is not obviously a clarification of the concept of *truth* at all. Instead, it is at best a clarification of the concept of inquiry, and the assumptions one must entertain when engaging in it. What it says about truth seems to be a mere generalization (since it seemingly admits of possible exceptions for lost facts), that adds nothing philosophically substantive to deflationism. Let us therefore also set aside a deflationist reading of D5.

The above is a prima facie case for interpreting HP’s approach, and D5 in particular, as occupying some kind of space in between inflationist and deflationist theories. This case is greatly bolstered by some of Hookway’s explicit remarks, as well as by several precedents in the work of other philosophers. We now turn to those remarks and precedents.

§1.2 From Sense to Force via Brandom and Frege

I suggest that HP avoids the problems discussed in the last section, and straddles the inflation/deflation dichotomy, by interpreting Peirce’s conception of truth as concerned with we might now call a *pragmatic* claim about the *speech-act* one performs by means of the concept of truth.[[17]](#endnote-18) This, I will argue, is the best way to make sense of Hookway’s remark, with which I opened, about elucidating truth by reference to *normative commitments* incurred through assertion and judgement.

The general thought is that D5 should be read as a norm of assertion. Such a *pragmatic* reading of D5 is not obviously vulnerable to the problem of lost facts. Clearly, to assert seemingly lost facts or ‘buried secrets’ like N wouldbe a mistake – it would, for example, be epistemically unwarranted, given that we cannot reasonably expect opinion to converge upon N, even under the best of conditions, and even in the long-run. As I shall argue later on, it also appears that when read in this way, D5 delivers something genuinely distinct from deflationism (as it is traditionally formulated) and thus still promises to deliver us a *substantive* notion of truth. Before we consider this thought in detail however, let us first turn to what motivates the shift from a traditional semantic approach to theorizing about truth, to the pragmatic approach I think Hookway has in mind.

Why should a theory of truth address something like speech-acts or normative commitments? Why should we be concerned with acts of commitment we perform when we use the concept of truth, rather than (as is traditional), the literal content of what we say when we use the word or the predicate? The key, Hookway suggests, lies in an idea that we shall call *Force Equivalence,* which is italicized in the following passage:

What motivates such a performative analysis, for the pragmatists no less than for later theorists, is the special relation that obtains between the force or practical significance of an act of taking-true… and the force or significance of a straightforward assertion. *In asserting ‘It is true that p’, one asserts that p, and vice versa. The force or significance of the two claims is the same.*[[18]](#endnote-19)

It is this claim that explains why, by examining assertion, one is also learning something about truth, and vice versa. Note how this already suggests a way to answer the deflationist worry that D5 is not telling us anything about *truth* at all, but only about inquiry or regulative assumptions. That is, here we find the seeds of a response to the objection that HP is merely a deflationist drawing our attention to various contingent epistemic phenomena. In fact, given *Force Equivalence –* the extremely close connection between assertion and truth – D5 *must* amount to a more substantive claim than this worry allows.

A strikingly similar thought can be found in (at least some of) Frege’s work, as noted here by Bar-On and Simmons:

If Frege is right, truth is implicated in the assertoric force with which a sentence is uttered. For what is distinctly characteristic of acts of assertion is that they present a thought as true. So when we explain assertion, we ourselves use the truth locution and employ the concept of truth. Thus, even if we grant, as does Frege, that first-order uses of “true” submit to the equivalence thesis, we may need to employ the concept of truth for explanatory purposes.[[19]](#endnote-20)

It may help here to borrow some more of Bar-On and Simmons’ terminology, so as to make the nature of such a position, and its relation to deflationism, a bit clearer. There are, they argue, at least three different things often meant by ‘deflationism’, which they believe are often mistakenly conflated, and need not entail one another:

*Metaphysical Deflationism:* the view that truth is not a genuine property, or does not belong in our ontology.

*Linguistic Deflationism:* any story concerning the role of the word/predicate ‘true’/‘is true’ according to which the word/predicate lacks any cognitive content (e.g. redundancy theory, minimalism, prosententialism, etc.)

*Conceptual Deflationism:* the conviction that there is nothing more to be said or learned about the concept of truth beyond what is contained in one’s preferred form of *Linguistic Deflationism*.[[20]](#endnote-21)

Bar-On and Simmons argue that *Metaphysical* and *Linguistic* deflationism do not jointly or separately entail *Conceptual* deflationism, and also offer various compelling arguments against the latter. I believe HP’s conception of truth corresponds to a similar combination of views. HP seemingly claims he can accept *Linguistic Deflationism*, remain neutral on *Metaphysical Deflationism*[[21]](#endnote-22) while denying *Conceptual Deflationism*. How is this possible? The Fregean approach, according to Bar-On and Simmons, is as follows:

even if “true” in its first-order uses is correctly treated by the linguistic deflationist, truth may nevertheless be a substantive concept, one that we invoke as we reflect on the nature of language use. If, like Frege, you are deflationist about first-order uses of “true” but you think asserting is presenting as true, you have not yet combined a truth-based account of assertion with a genuine form of conceptual deflationism.[[22]](#endnote-23)

Thus, for the Fregean the key thought is this. Even if one accepts a deflationary story about the role or function of ‘true’ and ‘truth’, one need not conclude that the concept of truth is not substantive, in the sense that it has no explanatory role to play. Indeed, it appears that the concept is vital to being able to explain the nature of the speech-act of assertion, since what makes assertions distinct from other speech-acts is precisely that they involve presenting a proposition *as true*.

This Fregean thought however does not pressure one to accept inflationism. Instead, it suggests truth might be substantive (*qua* explanatorily significant) without possessing an essence or nature, i.e. a metaphysical or epistemic property common to all true propositions. The concept may be substantive in a different sense, specifically, in that it does more for us, or has more practical significance than merely serving a logical need (of the sort met, for example, by disquotation).

To what kind of analysis of the concept of truth does this approach lead? Bob Brandom’s work, cited approvingly by Hookway himself, provides further illumination. Hookway rightly notes that in Peirce’s work, we see a different emphasis than the one familiar in the Analytic tradition – an emphasis upon *the act of calling* something true (or the act of *taking it to be* true) instead of upon the descriptive content thereby associated with the relevant proposition. This is the first of several components of a novel approach to the clarification of truth that Brandom claims to find in the classical pragmatists. In Brandom’s view, there are five in all:

1. The clarification of truth should be the product of a performative, anti-descriptive strategy, ‘emphasizing the act of calling something true rather than the descriptive content one thereby associates with what is called true’.
2. The act in question is one of taking up a normative stance or attitude (committing oneself to a claim).
3. This commitment is a matter of adopting it as a guide to action (where this can be cashed out in inferential terms).
4. The approach thereby includes ‘some sort of not merely subjective measure of [the] appropriateness [of making the relevant commitment], namely, the success of the actions it leads to.’
5. ‘once one has understood acts of taking-true according to this four-part model, one has un- derstood all there is to understand about truth.’ (Quotes from Brandom, 1988, pp. 76-7.)

Like HP, Brandom sees such an approach as largely compatible with traditional deflationism. Thus, we have here one model of how a Peircean pragmatist about truth might avoid some of those familiar objections and counter-examples that plague more orthodox inflationist/deflationist interpretations of Peirce’s remarks.[[23]](#endnote-24)

As suggested by Brandom’s model, the main thing that HP wishes to add to *Linguistic* *Deflationism* is an account of the normative commitments truth enables us to make, through its connections with other related concepts – chiefly assertion, belief and inquiry. As a particularly clear example of this approach at work, consider Pascal Engel’s critique of Richard Rorty (an arch *Conceptual Deflationist*), which I shall quote extensively, since it so nicely encapsulates the general approach:

There are certainly highly specific conceptual relations between assertion, beliefs, and truth, which characterize what I would call the belief-assertion-truth triangle:

1. to affirm something or to make an assertion by means of the statement, is to express one's belief that the statement is true (this link is evident in the paradoxical character of statements like “I believe P but P is false,” which give rise to what is called Moore’s paradox).
2. Truth is the aim or norm of assertion, in the sense that an assertion is correct if and only if it is true (one may of course lie, speak ironically, and so on, but these uses of assertion are derivative with respect this primary aim and are made possible by it).
3. Truth is also the norm of belief: a belief is correct if and only if it is true. This is often what we mean when we say that beliefs “aim at truth”. One can express the same idea by stating that it is a fatal objection against a belief to say that it is false and that a rational subject, if she discovers that one of her beliefs is false, must change it (a subject who admits that she believes a proposition for a reason other than the fact that it is true is irrational in some fashion or else does not have a genuine stance of belief with regard to this proposition).[[24]](#endnote-25)

Engel rightly anticipates the objection from the deflationist that the above are merely platitudes – namely ‘to assert that P is to affirm that P is true’, ‘to assert that P is to affirm that one believes that P’, ‘to believe that P is to believe that P is true’ and ‘to believe that P is to believe that one has reasons to believe that P’. The resulting objection is that the pragmatist, by emphasizing these connections, is *not* after all showing that there is anything *substantive* about the notion of truth (which surely requires more than trivialities or platitudes).

With the help of Simmons & Bar-On’s terminology however, we can see how this objection misses the mark. In one sense the objection is correct – HP is not attempting to add a substantive claim if that means adding a reductive analysis, or something *metaphysically* substantive. HP, as mentioned above, wishes to remain neutral with respect to *Metaphysical Deflationism*. However, in a different respect, this objection fails, since Engel’s story, which echoes HP’s, clearly *does* involve a rejection of *Conceptual Deflationism*, as Engel himself insists:

I maintain on the contrary that these conceptual relations are not as trivial as they may seem at first glance. A subject who does not understand that a correct assertion or belief is a true assertion or belief, and that he must satisfy this condition in order to have a rational beliefs and utter his assertions correctly, is missing something essential to the notion of truth. By the same token, to describe a community’s linguistic use of the word ‘true’ by saying simply that this word serves to quote and disquote statements the community holds dear is to miss something essential, which is that this word expresses a norm of assertion and belief.[[25]](#endnote-26)

HP’s view is structurally similar to Engel’s, but he endorses his own unique set of claims about the relations between assertion and truth, and his emphasis is upon normative commitments rather than conceptual relations.[[26]](#endnote-27) One of the best sources of these views is the following rich passage from Peirce:

If a man desires to assert anything very solemnly, he takes such steps as will enable him to go before a magistrate or notary and take a binding oath to it… At any rate, it would be followed by very real effects, in case the substance of what is asserted should be proved untrue. This ingredient, the assuming of responsibility, which is so prominent in solemn assertion, must be present in every genuine assertion. For clearly, every assertion involves an effort to make the intended interpreter believe what is asserted, to which end a reason for believing it must be furnished. But if a lie would not endanger the esteem in which the utterer was held, nor otherwise be apt to entail such real effects as he would avoid, the interpreter would have no reason to believe the assertion. Nobody takes any positive stock in those conventional utterances, such as “I am perfectly delighted to see you,” upon whose falsehood no punishment at all is visited. At this point, the reader should call to mind...that even in solitary meditation every judgment is an effort to press home, upon the self of the immediate future and of the general future, some truth...Consequently it must be equally true that here too there is contained an element of assuming responsibility, of “taking the consequences”.[[27]](#endnote-28)

My impression of these and other remarks – by both Peirce and Hookway – suggest that they together endorse some version of at least the following four claims, the first three of which amount to what some have called a *commitment view of assertion* (a view about what *constitutes* an assertion), and the fourth of which captures truth *qua* norm of assertion (a view about what makes an assertion illegitimate or unsuccessful, in some sense yet to be specified):

*Assertion:* a person asserts a proposition *p*, only if they take responsibility for the truth of *p*.

*Evidence:* a person takes responsibility for the truth of *p*, only if they undertake a commitment to provide reason to believe that *p*.

*Sanction:* one undertakes a commitment to provide reason to believe that *p*, only if one accepts some real consequences of being wrong (i.e. should *p* prove false or should one’s belief in it prove unwarranted), such as chastisement, harm to reputation, etc.

*Convergence:* if a speaker does not reasonably believe that rational inquirers would converge on the belief that *p*, then it is wrong for the speaker to assert that *p*.[[28]](#endnote-29)

If the first three conditions are not fulfilled (and taken by one’s interlocutor to be fulfilled, if uptake is required), then one has not asserted. If the antecedent of the fourth condition is fulfilled, then one may have asserted but one’s assertion will be unwarranted. Thus, hereafter let us say that for HP, *everyday assertion* is a speech-act that involves making a commitment to (taking responsibility for the truth of) a proposition *p*.[[29]](#endnote-30) This is the sense in which, for HP, the concept of truth plays an important or substantive normative role in our practices of assertion, belief and inquiry, even in situations where the predicate ‘is true’ or the word ‘truth’ do not make an appearance in the propositions believed or asserted.

Notice that HP’s conception of truth still falls short of an *inflationist* theory of the concept. HP is not concerned with identifying some existent *property* that is picked out by the concept of truth, akin to popular notions like correspondence with reality, coherence with other propositions we believe, etc. The main reason it fails to ‘inflate’ in this fashion is that the conception is *pragmatic* (it is concerned with speech-acts, or things we *do* with the concept of truth)*,* whereas traditional inflationist theories are decidedly *semantic* (they are concerned with what the predicate ‘is true’ refers to, or what is the literal meaning or cognitive content of a proposition of the form ‘p is true’).

§2 The Role of the Concept of Truth in Scientific/Theoretical Contexts

In §1 I showed that HP’s conception of truth has a distinctively *pragmatic* character, and that this character helps to illuminate a logical space in between deflationist and inflationist theories of the concept, and thus disrupt that unhelpful dichotomy. However, in addition to its role in explaining the nature of assertion and the norms governing it, there is a second reason why HP holds that the concept of truth is substantive or philosophically significant. This is that truth plays an important and distinctive role in the sciences. That role, according to HP, is one of articulating an ideal against which we might measure scientific hypotheses, an ideal that any real scientific hypothesis can only hope to approximate.

We have already noted how HP motivates his distinctively pragmatic approach by appeal to *Force Equivalence –* the claim that ‘In asserting ‘It is true that p’, one asserts that p, and vice versa. The force or significance of the two claims is the same.’[[30]](#endnote-31) Hookway writes:

every assertion that we make involves a commitment to the *truth* of the asserted proposition. This is reflected in the common insistence that to assert something is to assert that it is true, to believe something is to believe that it is true. Hence, we manifest our mastery of the concept of *truth* when we make assertions or hold beliefs, even if that concept is not a constituent of the proposition asserted.[[31]](#endnote-32)

Given that it is the very basis for the pragmatic or performative approach, it is initially puzzling to discover that HP later *denies* that *Force Equivalence* holds in all cases. More specifically, HP denies that it holds for abstract statements in science, and maintains that ‘a responsible inquirer can ‘successfully’ assert propositions that she thinks are almost certainly not (strictly) true’ (p. 64). This raises the worry that HP’s approach might be self-undermining, in the sense that it is motivated by a claim which it then finds reason to deny. I will set this worry aside for now, and return to it in §3. For now I will consider instead the rationale for HP’s position on scientific assertion, and for Hookway’s making this surprising move.

For HP, there are in fact a *variety* of ‘assertoric stances’ one might take up in employing the concept of truth, and thus (presumably) *Force Equivalence* may need more careful articulation, or as Hookway puts it, it may at least admit of ‘one important qualification’ (p. 64). Here Hookway is drawing upon some of Peirce’s later works (especially his entry on truth for *Baldwin’s Dictionary of Philosophy*) in which Peirce says some initially puzzling things about the relationship between assertion and truth with respect to abstract statements in science:

Truth is a character which attaches to an abstract proposition, such as a person might utter. It essentially depends upon that proposition's not professing to be exactly true… Truth is that concordance of an abstract statement with the ideal limit towards which endless investigation would tend to bring scientific belief, which concordance the abstract statement may possess by virtue of the confession of its inaccuracy and one-sidedness, and this confession is an essential ingredient of truth.[[32]](#endnote-33)

To make sense of these remarks, Hookway proposes the following interpretation:

The suggestion seems to be that when an assertion is made by someone who carries out inquiries in the scientific spirit, this does not involve a firm commitment to the *truth* of the proposition. It involves quite a complex propositional attitude, one that uses the concept of truth to articulate an ideal to which the asserted proposition does not fully measure up. In that case, asserting a proposition commits me to its ‘approximate truth’, not to its exact truth. If that is correct, a difference opens upon between *asserting that p* and *asserting that it is true that p*.[[33]](#endnote-34)

Hookway then suggests that the ideal in question might be something like what Wright (1992) calls *superassertibility*.[[34]](#endnote-35) The introduction of this gap between asserting that p and asserting that it is true that p has some interesting results. One is that if, in a scientific context, one explicitly claims that a proposition *is true*, one commits oneself more strongly than if one merely asserted the proposition. Hookway writes: ‘Peirce might argue that if I claim that a proposition *is true*, I go beyond this commitment to approximate correctness: using Wright’s terminology, perhaps I think that it is superassertible, not just assertible.’ (p. 65)

A crucial suggestion here is that there is some kind of distinction between the norms governing assertion in scientific contexts, and those governing assertion in everyday contexts. In science, assertion is governed by a permissive norm, which allows for the possibility of asserting things that are not ‘exactly’ true. The explicit attribution of truth to a particular hypothesis or claim will then invoke a more restrictive or demanding norm, that of superassertibility. HP seems committed to the idea that this disparity in normative strength is a unique feature of what we shall call *scientific assertion*, whereas, in the case of *everyday assertion*, the norm (expressed, presumably by D5) stays the same whether one employs the predicate or not, per *Force Equivalence*. For my part, I am not sure I find this distinction compelling. I also do not see how it can be reconciled with the heavy reliance upon *Force Equivalence*, to protect the Peircean from a particular deflationist objection. Let us now consider these challenges for HP, and how they might be overcome.

§3 Scientific vs. Everyday Assertion

In this section I raise and attempt to answer a worry about the coherence of HP’s position, as articulated in §§1-2. The general worry is easily stated, and has already been briefly sketched. How can Hookway on the one hand motivate his entire approach by appeal to *Force Equivalence,* only to deny that it holds in all cases? I will suggest some ways in which I think Hookway might try to answer this question, and point out some difficulties I think those potential solutions will face. First, however, let us recapitulate they key portions of the dialectic thus far, to make the problem emerge more clearly.

According to my interpretation of HP, he advances three claims concerning what constitutes an assertion (the felicity conditions *Assertion, Evidence* and *Sanction*) and one further claim about the nature of the truth-norm that governs assertion (*Convergence*). We saw that these claims are perfectly consistent with *Linguistic* *Deflationism*. That is, HP’s view is consistent with there being some linguistic story which explicates the *semantic* function of the truth predicate, and has the consequence that this function is semantically redundant or eliminable (e.g. disquotationalism). We then saw how HP’s view nevertheless conflicts with *Conceptual* *Deflationism*. That is, HP’s view conflicts with the further claim that the correct form of *Linguistic Deflationism* (whatever that may be) tells us *everything there is to know* about the concept of truth, and that the concept of truth is therefore *wholly* redundant or eliminable. HP wishes to deny this claim, on the grounds that the *semantics* of the truth predicate is only a part of the whole story about our concept of truth – there is also its *pragmatic* dimension, or what the concept allows us to *do* (*viz*. to make certain normative commitments). The idea of *Force Equivalence* (to assert that *p is true* is equivalent to asserting *p* and vice versa) purportedly shows that the concept of truth is inextricably tied up with the speech-act of assertion, and thus, an adequate theory of truth must account for those ties. If in doing so, the connection between truth and assertion turns out, as Frege’s work suggests it might, to be explanatorily significant, then that may entail the falsity of *Conceptual Deflationism*.

Thus, it seems clear that *Force Equivalence* is, for HP’s style of pragmatism, *the central phenomenon* that we must understand and explain if we are to clarify our concept of truth. It is also vital to distinguishing HP’s view from deflationism – vital to showing that the ties to assertion are part of what truth *is*. Remember that Hookway cites Brandom for inspiration here, and that for the latter, the first and most important claim in a classical pragmatist approach to truth is 1 – that is, the clarification of truth should be the product of a performative, anti-descriptive strategy, ‘emphasizing the act of calling something true rather than the descriptive content one thereby associates with what is called true’.” *Force Equivalence*, and the claim that it is the central phenomenon for truth-talk, is the motive for 1.

It is thus awkward at best if HP denies that *Force Equivalence* holds in all cases, by insisting that there are special cases of (scientific) assertion or truth-talk to which it does not apply. Such a denial raises the possibility that assertion and truth are not inextricable in the way our Fregean suggested. In particular, HP has alleged that the assertion that *p* and the claim that *it is true that p* come apart in scientific contexts. This is because, HP says, simply asserting *p* in a scientific spirit involves adopting a more complex normative stance, something like ‘some approximation or precisification of *p* is true’. Moreover, in those contexts, explicitly asserting that some proposition *p* *is true* commits one to ‘*p* is superassertible’. The questions now are whether or not HP has some good reason to think this exception (a) is really supported by good evidence or linguistic data of some kind, (b) does not undermine the motivation for the pragmatic approach he has adopted. We shall address (b) first, since we first need to know what we are looking for by way of evidence or linguistic data.

§3.1 What (if anything) prevents the exception undercutting HP’s view?

Central to Hookway’s argument is the idea that there are two competing strategies for clarifying our concept of truth. One strategy is the *Linguistic Deflationist’s*, which focuses exclusively upon accounting for explicit uses of the concept of truth in ordinary language. Hookway describes it thus:

One strategy would focus on occurrences of the concept of truth or the word ‘true’ in propositions and their expression: what commitments do I incur when I assert a proposition of the form ‘p is true’? […] If this is the route to take, then we are likely to conclude that the concept of truth has no substantive cognitive role. […] This may lead naturally to a minimal or redundancy theory of truth: we could eliminate occurrences of ‘true’ from our assertions without loss of content.[[35]](#endnote-36)

As we have seen, Hookway then argues in favor of a second strategy, call it the *Pragmatist’s*, which focuses upon normative commitments.

Since to assert a proposition is to put it forward as true (to commit oneself to its truth), I can also express my commitment to its truth without using the concept of truth. I commit myself to its being true that diamonds are hard simply by asserting that diamonds are hard. The second route to an understanding of our concept of truth insists that the content of this concept is most directly manifested in our practice of making and evaluating assertions. Once we have explained what commitments we incur through asserting something (or though believing or judging it) we have clarified the concept. […] It is easy to see that adopting this second strategy might lead to a richer analysis of truth, one that described substantive commitments involved in assertion.[[36]](#endnote-37)

Hookway relies upon *Force Equivalence* as a premise here. This is what makes him vulnerable to the charge of self-defeat when he later denies that it holds in all cases. However, I want to suggest that *Force Equivalence*, whilst crucial, should be construed as a *discovery*, or a *result* of applying that second pragmatist strategy, not, as Hookway here implies, its justification. Instead, I take it that (though he does not say so explicitly) what Hookway *really* thinks justifies the second strategy is something like Peirce’s *pragmatic maxim*. That is, the reason normative commitments are even relevant to the issue of what truth *is*, is a particular view about *meaning*, a view something like the one Peirce introduced in *How to Make Our Ideas Clear*, and continued developing throughout his work on the maxim and the semeiotic. Over the years, Hookway has come to see this 1903 formulation of the pragmatic maxim, from the *Harvard Lectures on Pragmatism*, as the best or most productive in capturing this picture of meaning:

Pragmatism is the principle that every theoretical judgment expressible in a sentence in the indicative mood is a confused form of thought *whose only meaning, if it has any*, lies in its tendency *to enforce a corresponding practical maxim expressible as a conditional sentence having its apodosis in the imperative mood.*[[37]](#endnote-38)

The maxim compels us to examine what practical difference it makes when a concept is employed, if we wish to know its pragmatic meaning. HP’s answer in the case of truth then seems to make sense – the difference that is made by someone’s employing the concept of truth (e.g. by making an assertion) is that they make a normative commitment. The ‘apodosis in the imperative mood’ is typically something like – *expect future inquiry and experience to go on supporting belief in this proposition, and if it does not, consider the assertion unwarranted.* Notice the word ‘typically’ however. There is nothing in the above formulation that clearly commits Peirce to the view that every particular judgement of the form *p is true* is going to (tend to) enforce one and the same ‘corresponding practical maxim’. There is, it appears, room for variation, depending of course upon the content of the particular judgment and its context of usage.

Read in this way, HP’s observation about assertion in science no longer seems in danger of undermining the claim that initially motivated it. For on this reading, the real motivation is simply *to apply the pragmatic maxim* to theoretical judgements of the form *p is true*. On this reading, the distinction between everyday and scientific assertion that was causing such trouble is simply the thought that sentences of the form *p is true* sometimes involve the straightforward normative commitment, and sometimes involve a more complex commitment. Scientific inquiry presumably provides an example of a context in which the complex commitment is perhaps more (or most) common.

Even if this neutralizes the threat of self-defeat, there remains the question of what evidence or observations lead to the conclusion that this more complex, tentative type of normative commitment exists and is common in the sciences. We still need to understand why examining the pragmatic meaning of judgments of the form *p is true*, yields some cases where *Force Equivalence* holds and some cases where it does not. We turn, finally, to this issue.

§3.2 What (if anything) justifies an exception to Force Equivalence?

As noted above, Hookway’s primary source regarding the special character of scientific assertion seems to be Peirce’s entry in Baldwin’s *Dictionary*. Later in that entry Peirce writes – concerning his definition of truth in terms of the approximation of an ideal – that:

The same definitions hold for the propositions of practical life. A man buys a bay horse, under a warranty that he is sound and free from vice. He brings him home and finds he is dyed, his real colour being undesirable. He complains of false representations; but the seller replies, “I never pretended to state every fact about the horse; what I said was true, so far as it professed to be true.” In ordinary life all our statements, it is well understood, are, in the main, rough approximations to what we mean to convey.[[38]](#endnote-39)

Immediately prior to this passage, Peirce writes that the same definitions apply to the ‘normative sciences’ and to ‘pure mathematics’. Thus, it looks as though Peirce is here endorsing the view that the complex normative commitment (which he labels ‘positive scientific truth’) is equally available in both scientific/theoretical and everyday/practical contexts. Thus, I take it that we would be misinterpreting Peirce if we thought he were making some kind of special exception or qualification to *Force Equivalence* specifically or solely for those ‘carrying out inquiries in the scientific spirit’ as some of Hookway’s remarks seem to imply.[[39]](#endnote-40) If it is not the special character of the sciences that explains the existence of those complex normative commitments, what does?

I will close with a suggestion of my own, that seems (at least initially) to provide some linguistic precedent for the sort of distinction HP has mind. It faces a significant problem however, in that I suspect it clashes with quite a few of Peirce’s remarks, in particular his distinction between ‘positive scientific truth’ and ‘transcendental truth’. Nevertheless, I shall offer a brief sketch of the possibility in hope it might stimulate and enhance future discussions and assessment of Hookway’s work.

Peirce of course claims that the ‘pragmatic meaning’ of a concept is one of three ‘grades of clarity’, the other two being (1) the ability to deploy a concept successfully (‘clearness’) and (2) the ability to define it in other terms (‘distinctness’). This is why HP’s conception of truth has such a distinctive character when compared to conventional theories of the concept – Hookway takes seriously the idea that Peirce is interested in the *pragmatic meaning* of truth, and *not* in providing a traditional conceptual analysis. However, a frequent source of controversy in interpreting these remarks concerns the relationship between the different grades. At times, Peirce writes as though the third grade is the only one that really matters (e.g. ‘our conception of these effects is *the whole of our conception of the object*.’ CP 5.402, my emphasis). Later in his career Peirce bemoans this as a misinterpretation of his remarks, and seems to recognize that any account of the third grade must remain faithful to the other two:

I believe I made my own opinion quite clear to any attentive Reader, that the pragmatistic grade of clearness could no more supersede the Definitiary or Analytic grade than this latter grade could supersede the first. That is to say, if the Maxim of Pragmaticism be acknowledged, although Definition can no longer be regarded as the supreme mode of clear apprehension; yet it retains all the *absolute* importance it ever had, still remaining indispensable to all Exact Reasoning.[[40]](#endnote-41)

This allows for the possibility that the precedent we seek for an exception to *Force Equivalence* actually lies in the second grade of clarity concerning the concept of truth, rather than the third. Consulting any dictionary will reveal that the word ‘true’ is polysemous – it has multiple related meanings.[[41]](#endnote-42) Specifically, most dictionaries will recognize some version of the following two meanings of ‘true’ – (1) *correctness* (or being in accordance with the facts), (2) *accuracy* or *exactness*. Note that while truth as *correctness* is a binary notion (a proposition is either a correct or an incorrect representation, hence true or false), truth as *accuracy* comes in degrees (allowing that there may be more or less exact representations of reality). Note how closely this mirrors the proposed distinction between *everyday assertion* and *scientific assertion*. The former is categorical in the sense delineated by *Force Equivalence* – to assert is to present a proposition as true, and vice versa. The latter however is a matter of degree – to describe a proposition as true in this sense may well point (perhaps via implicature) to some more accurate or exact proposition, where the latter is (one hopes) true *qua* correct, or perhaps superassertible.

My suggestion regarding where to find a precedent for an exception to *Force Equivalence* is therefore as follows. Perhaps when speaking about ‘positive scientific truth’ in *Baldwin’s Dictionary*, Peirce has in mind truth as *accuracy*, not truth as *correctness*. By contrast, perhaps in his *other* remarks about assertion, where he describes it as *taking responsibility* for the truth of *p*, he has in mind truth as *correctness*, and perhaps this is the notion he thinks fits best with most everyday acts of assertion. (There are some clear precedents for this in the linguistic data – think of how often ‘true’ is used in everyday conversation simply to concede a point or to agree with what one’s interlocutor has just said, and thus make a very simple sort of normative commitment.)

On this interpretation, HP’s remarks about the ideal limit, towards which scientific theorizing tends, pertain to ‘truth’ as *accuracy*, and this is the notion he thinks typically fits best with assertions in scientific or theoretical contexts. Thus, as Cathy Legg has recently argued, what she calls the ‘limit conception of truth’, is not the only ‘rich story’ about truth one can find in Peirce’s works. It is rather, a single story that relies upon a mathematical metaphor (‘the limit of a convergent series’) – a metaphor most apt in the case of formal, theoretical and/or scientific investigation, but whose aptness need not be confined to such contexts.[[42]](#endnote-43)

How though could these two meanings of truth be related to one another, according to HP? That is, how can we be sure that both the simple and the complex types of normative commitment are ‘practical bearings’ belonging to one and the same concept? The answer to this might lie in the theme of *Convergence* underlying D5, which looms large in both cases. In everyday assertion, *Convergence* acts as a constraint on which assertions are felicitous or epistemically justified.[[43]](#endnote-44) The same thought applies in scientific assertion, except that there *Convergence* operates at a slight remove, making the norm somewhat less restrictive. The thing on which we would expect convergence is a more exact version of *p*, and thus provided the thing one asserts is a reasonable approximation of *p*, one’s assertion will be warranted (allowing that context may help determine what level of approximation will count as ‘warranted’; an illuminating analogy might be with statistical significance, margins of error, etc.).

Though I believe this polysemy proposal is at least a small advance on HP’s approach, in that it provides a somewhat plausible linguistic precedent for a normative ambiguity in truth and assertion, it remains very difficult to reconcile with everything Peirce says.[[44]](#endnote-45) Peirce does claim, in his first ‘logical’ *Dictionary* definition of truth, that it centrally involves the idea of degrees of (in)exactness or (in)accuracy. The polysemy proposal has it that what Peirce has in mind here, is the way in which scientific descriptions or theories of natural phenomena gradually become more and more precise representations of reality over time. However, Peirce explicitly mentions a strikingly similar idea to this one under a *different* ‘transcendental’ definition of truth later in the entry:

But ***truth*** is also used in senses in which it is not an affection of a sign, but of things as things. Such truth is called ***transcendental truth***. […] Among the senses in which transcendental truth was spoken of was that in which it was said that *all science has for its object the investigation of truth, that is to say, of the real characters of things.* It was, in other senses, regarded as a subject of metaphysics exclusively.

In support of the idea that this exactness conception of truth may not quite fit Peirce’s logical definition, there is also the OED’s definition – “Agreement with a standard, pattern, or rule; exact, accurate, precise; correct, right.”[[45]](#endnote-46) Again, this definition is not obviously well suited for application to things like scientific hypotheses. When HP suggests a scientific hypothesis might be considered ‘approximately true’, does he mean to imply it is in (some degree of) agreement with a standard, pattern or rule? Presumably not – *ex hypothesi*, he means it is in (some degree of) agreement with another more precise proposition, which is superassertible or correct. That is at odds with the dictionary definition, suggesting this linguistic precedent does not quite fit what HP is trying to achieve. Finally, there is the worry that were lexical ambiguity the true source of HP’s insight about scientific assertion, this would fly in the face of the Peirce’s contention that one cannot learn much of anything simply by studying definitions or the second grade of clarity.[[46]](#endnote-47) Thus, I am not confident my suggestion provides a way for HP fully to explain and justify the putative distinction between cases where *Force Equivalence* holds (i.e. the normative commitments made in asserting that *p* are simple), and cases where it fails (i.e. the normative commitments made are complex and tentative). This, of course, does not amount to a decisive objection to HP’s view. It is only intended to set out a challenge I believe the view will have to meet.

In this paper I have argued that HP offers us a distinctive new approach to theorizing about the concept of truth. This approach has many clear advantages. It disrupts the unhelpful dichotomy between inflation and deflation that still pervades most contemporary work on the concept within the Analytic tradition, thereby opening up new possibilities for philosophical analysis. It thus challenges a set of assumptions, both substantive and methodological, that I suspect often block the road of inquiry. I have also argued that there are still many facets of Peirce’s views on truth that I think have yet to be accommodated successfully into a single coherent and persuasive framework. In particular, there remain significant substantive and interpretive challenges in relation to Peirce’s often peculiar remarks about the role of assertion and belief in science. Yet there can be no doubt that Hookway’s work provides one of the very finest examples of an attempt to take *all* of Peirce’s diverse thoughts on these issues seriously, and to approximate a framework on which I hope all philosophers would converge.

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NOTES

1. I felt enormously honored and fortunate to a part of conference celebrating Chris’s work. As my dissertation adviser, his contribution to my thinking and research has been – and continues to be, through his extraordinary scholarship – profound and immeasurable. I am also deeply indebted, for invaluable feedback on earlier drafts and presentations of this paper, to Richard Kenneth Atkins, Kenneth Boyd, Paniel Reyes Cardenas, Shannon Dea, Gabriele Gava, Diana Heney, Bob Lane, and Cathy Legg. My sincere thanks too to Bob Stern, Jenny Saul, Jo Hookway and Kees de Waal for their efforts and kindness in organizing the conference and this special issue. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
2. I will draw primarily from Hookway 2002, chapter 2 and Hookway 2012, chapter 3. Hookway does not talk explicitly about ‘speech-acts’, but for reasons that will become clear, I find the term useful for capturing what is distinctive about Hookway’s interpretation of Peircean Truth. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
3. For more on the difficult relationship between Peircean truth and the notion of a property of truth, see my 2014. This paper is in many ways a continuation of the work I began there. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
4. An especially influential example of this interpretation appears in Wright 1992. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
5. Howat 2014. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
6. Hookway 2002, p. 60. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
7. Kripke is candid in admitting that he is primarily interested in Wittgenstein’s views *as they struck him*, and not as they are in themselves. See Kripke 1982, p. 5. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
8. See Horwich 1990 for example. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
9. To be fair, Wright has attempted to *argue* for this position, particularly in his 1992. However, as Miller 2001 shows, this argument fails. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
10. This is Legg 2014’s diagnosis. Peirce’s *Scholastic Realism* alone seems to me sufficient to undermine this dichotomy, but I will not argue for this here. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
11. I think this is important to add, since we cannot not rule out *a priori* the possibility of individuals holding intractable false beliefs. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
12. Hookway seems *at times* to entertain this approach, such as when he describes Peirce’s apparent claim that there may be reality, even where there is no truth (Hookway 2002, section 5). Atkins 2011 argues Peirce is committed to the view that N would have to be *assertable* in order for the inference to be valid. Thus, since N is *ex hypothesi* not assertable, the inference to the conclusion that opinion would converge upon it will be invalid in Peirce’s view. Legg 2014 argues that formulations of the problem of lost facts either involve a logical fallacy (quantifier scope ambiguity), or hypotheses likely to *become* truth-apt in the course of inquiry, or a misguided commitment to ‘Enigmas’ (propositions concerning entities essentially undetectable by us) that are meaningless according to the pragmatic maxim. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
13. Hookway writes: ‘I am thus agreeing with Cheryl Misak when she denies that Peirce was committed to the claim that there are no lost facts or buried secrets.’ (p. 61). [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
14. See Misak 2004, esp. chapter 1. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
15. I take this to be orthodoxy in contemporary philosophical debate about truth. It is almost entirely taken for granted, for example, by the influential Horwich 1990. It is more explicitly acknowledged in Horwich 1998, esp. pp. 28-9, 70-1 and chapter 4. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
16. I develop this objection in detail in my 2014. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
17. Peirce’s work pre-dates Charles Morris’s distinction between semantics and pragmatics, which may rest on a misunderstanding of Peirce’s semeiotic (see Halton 1986). There is therefore a danger of anachronism here. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
18. Hookway, 2002, p. 63. Emphasis added. Note that Hookway is drawing upon Brandom 1988 and 1994 here. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
19. Bar-On and Simmons 2007, p. 77. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
20. Based on Bar-On and Simmons 2007. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
21. HP’s conception purports to be metaphysically neutral. See Hookway 2002, p. 77. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
22. *Ibid.* p. 78. Bar-On and Simmons motivate this idea through a thought experiment involving a foreign or alien language (call it *L*), which has ‘no semantic vocabulary at all’, yet in which one can still make assertions. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
23. Despite supplying both a model and a motivation for HP’s approach, Brandom is – I think – an awkward ally for HP. For, given what Brandom writes about truth it seems clear that he – unlike HP, if I’m understanding him correctly – is quite content to endorse *Conceptual Deflationism*. I propose to address this point in greater detail in forthcoming work. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
24. Engel 2007, pp. 13-14. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
25. *Ibid.* p. 15. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
26. I suspect that Hookway’s talk of ‘normative commitments’ is dialectically safer, since it is more explicitly pragmatic (in the sense now commonly contrasted with ‘semantic’). It is entanglement with traditional, non-Peircean semantics that I suspect often fuels Analytic misinterpretations of Peircean claims like D5. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
27. CP 5.546 [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
28. I have formulated these claims based on Peirce’s remarks (see CP 1.274, CP 2.315, CP 5.31, CP 5.546, MS75 cited in Ketner 1984), as well as work by other Peirce scholars, Hookway’s remarks, primarily in his 2012. Above all I’m indebted to a compelling argument that Peirce endorses a commitment view of assertion in Boyd forthcoming. Note that the final claim, *Convergence* is not standardly a component of the commitment view. The modifier ‘reasonably’ is important for indicating that a speaker cannot be excused for an unwarranted assertion on the grounds that they possessed unreasonable or irrational expectations regarding the prospects for the vindication of a belief in *p* by future inquiry. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
29. The significance of the descriptor ‘everyday’ will become clear in §2. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
30. Brandom 1988, p. 78. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
31. Hookway 2002, p. 62. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
32. CP 5.565. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
33. Hookway 2002, p. 64. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
34. A proposition *p* is ‘superassertible’, according to Wright, iff ‘*p* is or can be, warranted to assert, and some warrant for the assertion of *p* would survive arbitrarily close scrutiny of its pedigree and arbitrarily extensive increments to or other forms of improvement of our information.’ See Wright 1992, p. 48. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
35. Hookway 2002, p. 62. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
36. Hookway 2002, p. 63. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
37. CP 5.18. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
38. CP 5.568. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
39. Though this would perhaps be an understandable error, since at times Peirce argued (rather implausibly) for a hard and fast theory/practice distinction, which came with the idea that there is a special form of scientific ‘assent’ or belief distinct from ordinary assent/belief. See Hookway 2002, chapter 1. I regret that space prohibits a fuller exploration of this issue here. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
40. MS 647, p. 2. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
41. It was Cory Wright who first suggested to me that this feature of ‘true’ might be philosophically significant. See his 2012, esp. p. 103, fn. 15. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
42. Legg 2014. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
43. Given the problem of lost facts, HP cannot say that the assertion of an undecidable hypothesis is *false*, so I will assume the vice it exemplifies is either a *pragmatic* one, rather than a semantic one, and use the term coined by Austin 1975, or an *epistemic* one (given the connection between truth, assertion and belief), or perhaps both. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
44. I am grateful to Robert Talisse for raising this in conversation. [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
45. OED, definition 4. [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
46. I am grateful to Gabriele Gava for raising this objection. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)