

# REALITY IN PRACTICE

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**Abstract:** The continuities as well as the differences between Wittgenstein's late work and pragmatism received a number of readings, and it is relevant to consider that, while the Austrian philosopher concentrates his analysis on language, classical pragmatists have experience as a key element of their conceptual toolkit. Yet, it is worth acknowledging that the opposition between experience and language appears flimsy when one pays attention to the classical pragmatists' treatment of the notion of experience, according to which no experience can be outlined a part from the linguistic/semiotic tools that constitute human abilities and performances. Reminding that for pragmatist philosophers "language is the tool of the tools"- as Dewey asserts – allows one to appreciate the 'family resemblance' between Wittgenstein's, Peirce's and James' respective attempts to overcome the realist-antirealist opposition. First of all, it will be possible to point out the 'therapeutic' feature of their philosophy as the cornerstone of their common intent to show that our assertions about reality are embedded in the inter-actions of human communities.

**Keywords:** Wittgenstein, Peirce, James, reality, pragmatic antiscepticism.

The phenomenon of "de-realization" is one of the most disturbing mental disorders yet it is relevant to philosophical reflection. It is possible to suffer from de-realization episodically or continuously, but in both cases there is an inability to interact with the environment, both with physical objects and with other living beings, according to the cognitive-behavioural models usually shared by the community to which the person belongs. One could thus say that de-realization is a dysfunction of what Wittgenstein indicated as the normative system that supports our linguistic and epistemic practices, that complex of shared certainties that he represented with the metaphors of the 'river-bed' and the 'scaffolding' in order to describe the grounding function they perform with respect to the events that affect our knowledge (OC: §§ 94-105).<sup>1</sup> Hence one can hypothesize that it is precisely de-realization that is feared in a famous passage of *On Certainty* in which Wittgenstein alludes to the philosophical disease:

<sup>1</sup> The mental disorder of de-realization is apparently something different from the "feeling of unreality" mentioned in Wittgenstein (1980: §§ 125, 126, 155, 156, 535, 789). Yet, these paragraphs are relevant to the overcoming of the realism and anti-realism opposition on which I am focusing in the following.

I am sitting with a philosopher in the garden; he says again and again “I know that that’s a tree”, pointing to a tree that is near us. Someone else arrives and hears this; and I tell him:

“This fellow isn’t insane. We are only doing philosophy”. (OC: § 467)

The sensation of an arduous search for the consent of others regarding one’s own assertion of “knowing” what an object is, an assertion that anyone would consider completely obvious, is a fundamental element of the situation described by Wittgenstein; and it is possible to maintain that the retreat from the desire for certainty to which this passage implicitly refers is the deeply ethical *leitmotif* of Wittgenstein’s work after *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus*. There is a specular correspondence between the attitude of those who constantly ask for confirmation of their assertions of knowledge about reality, and the position of those who consider it necessary to take a stand in favour of a realism that is finally able to free itself from the presumed logical-semantic ‘obstacles’ to our most natural and well-rooted certainties.

Such a kind of realism is often maintained as opposed to the anti-realistic philosophical theories that apparently reject the very notions of truth and objectivity, stressing the mere linguistic nature of every epistemic approach to what we define as real or unreal and, consequently, assuming a sceptical attitude towards epistemic as well as ethical problems. However, the contraposition between these different philosophical trends appears flimsy since, while it is impossible to overlook the linguistic/semantic framework of our assertions about reality, it is not definitely appropriate to regard this framework as a sort of misleading approach to reality or even as its mask.

As an alternative to the polarization of realism and sceptical anti-realism, I would propose that the notion of reality is tightly interwoven with the concrete nature of practices relating to knowledge and value, given their complexity and the dynamism of the continuous interference of the logical/semantic and empirical factors which inform them. It is a standpoint that I will attempt to sustain by recalling some passages of Wittgenstein, Peirce and James that seem relevant in this respect. My intention is to show the “family resemblance” of their respective suggestions for bypassing the realist and anti-realist contraposition, rather than paralleling them at a theoretical/substantive level. In other words, I will attempt to show some *filles rouges* of their common intent to practice a therapeutic approach to traditional philosophy and particularly to the realist and anti-realist dichotomy.

The acknowledgment that, while Wittgenstein focuses his philosophical attention on language, Peirce and James take experience as a pivotal category within their pragmatism is an integral part of my proposal to compare some of their suggestions. At the same time, I consider the opposition between language and experience as flimsy as the dichotomy between realism and anti-realism, just because for both Peirce and James no experience can be accounted or is

considered relevant to epistemic level regardless of language.<sup>2</sup> As a matter of fact, Wittgenstein's idea that all we need is language marks a wide trend in contemporary philosophy. But it is not all granted that the split between language and experience can be really fruitful for a number of pivotal questions, especially for those regarding the content and meaning of the conceptual couple truth-and-reality that are necessarily complicated and hence requiring an analysis in which both language and individual as well as intersubjective experience play a central role.<sup>3</sup>

In his well-known polemic against the concept of common sense maintained by Moore, Wittgenstein suggested that the certainties of which common sense proves to be composed do not have a true empirical justification.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, they do not constitute knowledge but, rather, have a function similar to that of the rules of a game. Obviously, this is a very important function. Common sense beliefs are “the inherited background against which I distinguish between true and false” (OC: § 94), and this set of beliefs is similar to “a kind of mythology” shaped by “propositions describing this world picture”, and which are adhered to irrespective of the question regarding their correctness (OC: § 95). It is similar to saying that what counts is not the correspondence of such images to some ‘true’ reality, but rather the fact that such images exist, and this, in turn, means neither more nor less than that they function in the practice of language. Indeed, “Language did not emerge from some kind of ratiocination” (OC, §475). On the contrary:

You must bear in mind that the language-game is so to say something unpredictable. I mean: it is not based on grounds. It is not reasonable (or unreasonable).

It is there – like our life. (OC: §559).

Just as a person normally learns the basic rules of living in a particular natural and social environment by putting them into practice, the images of the world that function as a backdrop to our language games are not necessarily the subject of explicit teaching. They can be learned “purely practically” (OC: §95). They form “a system” which “belongs to the essence of what we call an argument”, that is: “The system is not so much the point of departure, as the element in which arguments have their life.” (OC: § 105).

In what manner, or on the basis of what “principle”, the beliefs of common sense and their normative force take form is a question that Wittgenstein – as can already be evinced from the phrases previously cited – removes from a

<sup>2</sup> See the essays collected in Hildebrand (2014), particularly Pappas (2014).

<sup>3</sup> The relevance of the pragmatist notion of experience to the issue of truth is defended in Misak (2014).

<sup>4</sup> A detailed and sound account of the Wittgenstein-Moore disagreement on common sense's conception is offered in Stroll (1994); see also Stroll (2009: 1-34).

possible definition in the traditional sense, and this seems to be an obstacle to the possibility of classifying him among the realists or the anti-realists. Indeed, this very possibility depends, more or less implicitly, upon the assumption typical of traditional foundationalism, that is to say, on the search for an absolute *primum* of our cognitive abilities – whether of logical-rational nature or of empirical-sensory nature. But this is an assumption which most of contemporary thought has shown to be impracticable.

Giving up the search for this sort of Archimedean point of knowledge, of our relationship with ‘reality’, is not necessarily equivalent to giving in to scepticism, much less to irrationalism.<sup>5</sup> Rather, it means making room for a plural notion of what we can name using the term ‘reality’ and, above all, it means reformulating, in a pragmatic direction, the concept of ‘foundation’. More precisely, the logical and semantic complexity of the term ‘reality’ is demonstrated, at the same time shifting the question of epistemic foundation to the manifold concreteness of human practices and of the language games that are interwoven with them, including the most highly specialized games of scientific research. It is in this direction that Wittgenstein seems to have applied his efforts to entrust the very criteria of certainty and of knowledge to the linguistic practice of the community, and it is not far-fetched to say that, for Wittgenstein, this linguistic practice is the ‘true reality’.

It is thus necessary to understand how the functional relationship between knowledge and the empirical-descriptive form of scientific propositions put forward by Wittgenstein should be decoded. In other words, is his philosophy realist or anti-realist? Indeed, one can find a powerful antidote to the opposition between realism and anti-realism precisely in the grammatical analysis of the notions of certainty and knowledge provided in *OC*, an analysis which clearly includes Wittgenstein’s previous invitations to shift the epistemic value of the concept of foundation into that of ‘description’.

It is not at all obvious that the substitution of “to describe” for “to found” guarantees the objective for which it is usually explicitly invoked, that is to say, it is not obvious that such a substitution is a protection against the dogmatic arguments that compromise the western foundationalist tradition, whether empiricist or rationalist. To be sure, it is possible to point out a number of cases proving that the neutrality of the descriptive attitude is little more than wishful thinking, probably based upon naïve trust in the self-sufficiency of the cognitive-explanatory power of our sensory abilities, and it is not difficult to show that the so-called ‘neutral description of facts’ is, very often, nothing more than a formula aimed at strategies of ideological power. It is enough to recall the

<sup>5</sup> My claim that Wittgenstein transforms instead of giving up the issue of foundation matches with the overall analysis of Conway (1989).

mass media and ordinary language practices where this attitude is imposed as an almost inescapable issue.

It is, therefore, necessary to admit that, as methodological rule, the criterion of description conveys a hidden interweaving among “description”, “empirical facts”, and “certainty” that threatens to undermine the very sense of the contrast between descriptive attitude and foundationalist attitude, precisely because it reiterates the anxiety of a knowledge that is in some way pre-packaged. Wittgenstein’s effort to give to the descriptive method a status that is clearly anti-essentialist is thus an attempt to warn us of this risk, an attempt that is, without doubt, an integral part of his grammatical analysis of the certainty of knowledge.

The crucial point of the arduous pages of *On Certainty* regarding the concept of reality can be identified in the splitting of the link between “empirical/descriptive” and “certain”. In fact, Wittgenstein reserves certainty to systematic propositions, subtracting them from the traditional foundationalist position and even from the possibility of obtaining a true epistemic justification. At the same time, he assigns a fluid nature, that is, a validity that is never definitive or self-sufficient, to the propositions that describe empirical facts. Knowledge is entrusted to these propositions, and defined as the construction of our information about the physical and natural world, with respect to which certainty can be at most “a tone of voice in which one declares how things are” (OC: §30), that is, something that concerns subjectivity and cannot count as a justification of the correct relationship between a proposition and a “fact”. Nor can the correctness of the relationship between cognitive propositions and reality be ‘founded’ upon our *representation* of knowledge as a mental projection of an “external process”, that is, as the “internalization” of a sensory perception of the objects in physical-material reality. In other words, knowledge is not a mental state that can be distinguished from belief on the basis of the presumed guarantees emanating from “clear and distinct” convictions, since, rather, the mental state of conviction: “may be the same whether it is knowledge or false belief”(OC: §42).

With the same anti-Cartesian intention, Charles S. Peirce asserts that “we think each one of our beliefs to be true”, and for this reason we cannot distinguish between true and false by appealing to the feeling of conviction or of satisfaction. On the contrary, according to his pragmatism, the state of satisfaction marks every belief: “whether the belief be true or false” (CP 5.375). Thus Peirce accuses Descartes of never having posed the question of distinguishing “between an idea *seeming* clear and really being so” (CP 5.391), assuming, finally, with his fallibilism, the same point of view as Wittgenstein, namely his statement that “‘Knowledge’ and ‘certainty’ belong to different categories” (OC: §308). In other words, for both of them certainty belongs to the

propositions which normally we believe and on the basis of which we act beyond any reasonable or – let us say – “healthy” doubt (OC: §§ 192-196 ), while knowledge is based on the possibility of giving reasons (OC: § 484), or, rather, it “depends on whether the evidence backs me up or contradicts me” (OC: §504), implying doubt.

In this respect, the analogy between Peirce and Wittgenstein becomes compelling. One does not doubt if one does not start from a belief (OC: §160). More precisely, doubt presupposes certainties and necessarily entails consequences. It must have precise motivations, and thus it cannot be a universal and necessary methodological rule as Descartes recommended. In short, the intellectualist notion of doubt should be rejected, and with it philosophical scepticism as well. From a structural point of view, scepticism is nothing but the other face of metaphysical realism, insofar as it presupposes the search for an absolute epistemic foundation for knowing and acting. Most importantly, the doubt of Descartes and of modern philosophers is as useless as it is senseless or even unhealthy, simply because it is based upon criteria which do not correspond to the actual ways language and thought operate. It does not correspond to their being rooted in what for Wittgenstein is the system of certainties that forms the “sense put in common” (cf. Borutti 2005: 98ff.), and for Peirce the network of prejudices in which we are immersed, the set of consolidated mental and behavioural habits in which all our critical arguments are necessarily embedded:

We cannot begin with complete doubt. We must begin with all the prejudices which we actually have when we enter upon the study of philosophy. These prejudices are not to be dispelled by a maxim, for they are things which it does not occur to us *can* be questioned. Hence this initial scepticism will be a mere self-deception, and not a real doubt; and no one who follows the Cartesian method will ever be satisfied until he has formally recovered all those beliefs which in form he has given up. [...] Let us not pretend to doubt in philosophy what we do not doubt in our hearts (CP 5.265).

The affinity between Peirce and Wittgenstein regarding the anti-intellectualist notion of doubt is particularly interesting because, for both, the practice of doubting is a crucial moment in the dialectic between knowledge and certainties that are shared by the community.<sup>6</sup> It is by virtue of this dialectic that the notion of reality gradually takes on more and more refined meanings and contents. I will only mention here, on the one hand, Wittgenstein’s affirmation of the interchange between “hinge” propositions of our language games and empirical

<sup>6</sup> I will refer here to Calcaterra (2003: 54). On this subject, see Tiercelin (2010). Among the most recent studies of the relationship between Wittgenstein and Pragmatism, cfr. “Simposia” (2012) in *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy* 2, 6-173.

propositions (OC, §§ 96-98), and on the other, Peirce's rejection of the presumed *a priori* truths supported by theories of common sense originated by Thomas Reid.<sup>7</sup> An appropriate account of this issue would require a detailed discussion of Wittgenstein's and Peirce's relationship with empiricism, which is certainly quite complicated for both of them. It is probably true that, while in the latter as in James, Dewey, and many of contemporary philosophers who have drawn on classical pragmatists – like Sellars, Quine, Davidson, and Rorty – one can find “an embracing of empiricism aligned with some myopia regarding problems implicitly inherent in it”, Wittgenstein suggested a number of therapeutic moves just for dissolving a number of these problems (Hutchinson and Read 2013: 163-164). More in general, it is true that, as Hutchinson and Read assert, “Wittgenstein's radical approach to philosophy – his ‘metaphilosophy’ ” is characterized by the lack of systematic accounts or arguments concerning philosophical question since one can, rather, find in his work only “*suggestions*” for facing with such questions according to a therapeutic stance instead of a resolving thesis” (Hutchinson and Read 2013: 168-169). To be sure, acknowledging the “therapeutic” nature of Wittgenstein philosophy is particularly important for avoiding parallels at the contention or reasoning level. This is, in fact, mainly relevant to the interpretation of Wittgenstein's and Peirce's relationship to empiricism. Nevertheless, it would be quite improper to overlook the therapeutic attitude practiced by the founder of pragmatism as well as his followers principally towards the traditional mistake of translating the epistemic relevance of empirical data into the so-called “myth of the given”. Suffice it to only mention such typical feature of pragmatist tradition which already received a huge attention in philosophical literature, and which is obviously an integral part of my proposal of drawing a comparison between Wittgenstein's, Peirce's and James' suggestions about the realism-antirealism debate. Such a comparison is, in my opinion, fruitful at least for indicating reasons why the theme of reality can be seen in a convincing light only if the opposition between realism and anti-realism is set aside or if we opt – as Rorty suggested – for its “benign neglect”.

It is a point of view that can be supported also considering briefly the new conception of normativity that Wittgenstein attempted to maintain beginning with the *Philosophische Untersuchungen*,<sup>8</sup> eventually tracing normativity back to the flexibility of language (OC, §§ 98, 167), to the practice of judging and speaking in which the 'community use' of rules unfolds, and to their reiteration or the modifications that they may undergo by virtue of their applications. The abstract notion of 'logical rule' thus gives way to the idea of a regularity that

<sup>7</sup> Whilst he credited Reid with having protected the importance of common certainties, Peirce defined his own pragmatism as “critical common-sensism” (CP 5.494). An interesting comparison between Wittgenstein's and Peirce's approaches to common sense is in Fabbrichesi (2014: Part II).

<sup>8</sup> See Wittgenstein (1953: §§ 193-197, 199, 201-202, 206).

reflects the nature of human action, which is never definitively completed: “Our rules leave loop-holes open, and the practice has to speak for itself” (OC, §139). It is at this level that doubt, error, and uncertainty are situated, and in fact these elements mark the concrete pace of the changes in our knowledge and in our forms of life (OC, §§ 84, 96, 167), although these changes may be very slow and laborious.

For his part, Peirce, like all the classical and contemporary representatives of pragmatism, assigned a normative nature to the system of beliefs established *within a* community, and identified the formation of new points of view from which to guide theoretical and practical conduct in the concrete occurrence of circumstances that could strain the validity of one or more beliefs that had been previously accepted in a nearly immediate way (CP 5.358-387: 185-203). How all of this comes about is a question that leads back to the intimate interlacing of the three categories theorized by Peirce, which are logical-semiotic and, at the same time, ontological: *Firstness*, *Secondness*, and *Thirdness*. “Firstness” is the pure and simple event of a phenomenon, whether physical or mental. “Secondness” is the encounter-conflict of human sensory and thinking abilities with otherness, both physical/material and psychical/mental. “Thirdness” is the idea or belief, inter-subjectively recognized, that *forms the rule*, the *habit* adopted by human subjects in order to deal with facts and grasp their specific qualities, as well as the intra- and inter-objective links.

It is important to stress that *Thirdness* concerns both cognitive activity and the physical-natural world, that is, it also embraces the regularities that we identify in the objective world, or rather, the set of those regular aspects that make the physical-natural world a possible object of knowledge. There is, in short, a *continuum* between knowledge and its objects, and precisely for this reason the objective value of *Thirdness* can be asserted, its nature being a structure that is interpretative of reality, but which includes, by definition, *Firstness* and *Secondness*. Indeed, *Thirdness* exists and functions only by virtue of the actual, reciprocal connections that each member of the logical-ontological triad brings into play. The “triadic” structure of Peirce’s system of categories can be considered the framework of the theory of meaning provided by his cognitive semiotic, according to which a sign has, in fact, a three-term meaning. One can see a parallel perspective in Wittgenstein (Mounce 1997), but a discussion on the matter would exceed the scope of my current annotations. Rather, I believe that is here important to emphasise that the idea of the *continuum*, as Peirce himself declared, is the «keystone» of his thought.<sup>9</sup>

It is worth noticing that this *continuum* gives shape to the relationship that ties the human being to the objective world that offers itself to their cognition. It is a vital relationship or, in the language of Peirce, a “pragmatic” relation, that is

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Peirce’s letter to James 25/11/1902, in James (1992-2004: vol. 10, 157-158).



a relation made up of interaction and reciprocity. For this reason, it is not possible to say that “true reality” is *in* things or *in* thought, because it should instead be sought in the *relationship between things and the human being* that comes to be established on each occasion. That all of this implies the community as the *terminus a quo* and *ad quem* of definitions of reality is what Peirce argued beginning from the essays of his youth, in which he laid the foundation of his cognitive semiotics. More precisely, one of his crucial theses is that the very concept of reality emerges from the occurrence of error, in that error is a deviation from the beliefs and the language practices that have been corroborated by the community. Already in 1868, Peirce wrote the following “manifesto” of his so-called “logical socialism”:<sup>10</sup>

And what do we mean by the real? It is a conception which we must first have had when we discovered that there was an unreal, an illusion; that is, when we first corrected ourselves. Now the distinction for which alone this fact logically called, was between an *ens* relative to private inward determinations, to the negations belonging to idiosyncrasy, and an *ens* such as would stand in the long run. The real, then, is that which, sooner or later, information and reasoning would finally result in, and which is therefore independent of the vagaries of me and you. Thus, the very origin of the conception of reality shows that this conception essentially involves the notion of a COMMUNITY, without definite limits, and capable of an indefinite increase of knowledge. (CP 5.311)

What is proposed, therefore, is a *contrastive* notion of reality, which excludes the link between individual subjectivity and certainty or truth by rejecting the epistemic value of immediate evidence, whether rational or sensory, consequently shifting the problem of the *primum* of knowledge into the question regarding its concrete functioning and evolving. However, all this certainly does not mean that it is impossible to identify the starting point of each specific process of knowledge. Rather, it means that *it is not possible to single out the original foundation of knowledge in its totality*. This question is actually a false problem because it rests upon the indemonstrable proposition that there is an *extra mentem* reality, which the knowing subject would be called upon to grasp and reproduce conceptually. But, according to Peirce, there would be no reality for us except for that with which we enter into a relationship, and this is always a relationship made up of signs. There is no sensory experience, just as there is no concept of any reality, that does not involve the structure of signs, their existence being something that refers *to* something else, and which will be a sign *for* something else, following a potentially unlimited chain of reference. This by no means implies that there is an infinite number of possible

<sup>10</sup> As well known, this wording was coined by K. O. Apel.

interpretations of what is real. On the contrary, semiotic processes always find a well-defined anchoring point in what Peirce calls “the final logical interpretant” namely the behavioral habit which accompanies the belief that comes to be affirmed inter-subjectively.<sup>11</sup>

Supporting the community-based interweaving between behavior and logical-semantic encodings of objective facts is not necessarily equivalent to the conventionalist definition of human relationships with reality. In the pragmatist view, the idea of “community agreement” is firmly anchored in the concrete challenges that the environment, both physical-natural and socio-cultural, come to pose to existing beliefs, and it is also anchored in the practice of inter-subjective scrutiny through which innovation of beliefs and actions are eventually justified as suitable answers to these challenges. This latter aspect includes the implementation of previously unanticipated habits and actions, and it is precisely in the area of action that the human ability to understand facts and real objects will be measured. In other words, action is, at one and the same time, a driving force and a testing ground - for all and for each person - of the validity of our ideas about reality.

Peirce’s assertion of a *continuum* between the objective world and the human subject is correlative to one of the cornerstones of pragmatist philosophy, that is, the *fallibility* of our assertions of philosophical as well as scientific propositions. “The principle of continuity is the idea of fallibilism objectified”,<sup>12</sup> Peirce declares. Hence, explaining that this principle can be traced back “within the history of Human Mind” as well as to the evolution of the sciences which are its specific expression, he asserts: “The historical opponent of this philosophical view has been, and is, in logic, the infallibilism, both in his mild ecclesiastic forms and in its disastrous materialist and scientist configurations” (CP 1.171).

As is well known, the term “fallibilism” was coined by Peirce, and it is worth bearing in mind that it means something very different from scepticism. In fact, in addition to the awareness of the *fallibility in principle* of our knowledge, fallibilism includes a solid trust in the *ability of self-correction* of human intelligence, and a concept of truth as regulative idea *à la* Kant. Moreover, Peirce’s cognitive semiotics require the rejection of the Kantian concept of noumenon (CP 5.254-258), so that Peirce eventually suggested that Kant’s philosophy should, after all, be considered a form of nominalism, given that, from Peirce’s point of view, philosophers are nominalist if they “block the road to inquiry” by imposing *a priori* a difference between knowledge and reality, and for him this is indeed the core of the Kantian idea of noumenon, according to which there is a part of reality that is absolutely unknowable. In

<sup>11</sup> For this aspect, see Calcaterra (1989: 146-173).

other words, for Peirce, the phenomena are not only our sole access to reality, but they are also the proper modes of being.<sup>13</sup>

Many interpreters maintain that Peirce's "pragmatism" consists of a quite complicated form of realism which, although it has a verificationist or neo-positivistic flavor, remains very different from this philosophical line, first of all because of Peirce's persistent plea to "would be's" and "would-do's" (for instance, see Hookway 2012a, 2012b). I believe that it is appropriate to acknowledge not only this difference from logical positivism but also the deep modification of the very concept of "realism" that the interweaving of Peirce's cognitive semiotic with Scotist realism puts into play, an intertwining which, notwithstanding Peirce's definition of his own pragmatism as realism, led him to "practice" or make use of the notion of reality in a way that goes beyond the customary realist-antirealist opposition.<sup>14</sup> As I mentioned, for Peirce reality is nothing but the outcome of the community-based interweaving between behavior or actions and logical-semantic framework of our approach to facts. This perspective is mostly dependent on his re-reading of Scotus' idea of the reality of the "generals" or "universals" according to which, on the one hand, empirical factors embedded to actions contribute to the construction of the logic-semantic tools shared and practiced by the community, on the other hand, these tools as well as every working belief are, by definitions, fallible, namely dependent on possible future arrangements of objective and human events.

Some commentators have suitably argued for a constructivist and historicist reading of Peirce's theory of generals (Margolis 1993, 1995; Pihlström 2003: 167ff.), and there are suggestions about the relevance of such theory to defending the ethical implications of his "scotish realism" (Pihlström 2009: 121ff). As a matter of fact, the fallible, future-dependent nature of conceptual tools is clearly an essential feature of Peirce's cognitive semiotic, especially of its pivotal notion of "interpretant", more generally, of his "logical socialism", as well as his definition of the "pragmatic maxim", where the category of action plays a constitutive role in regard to the concept of belief. Roughly speaking, for Peirce as for Alexander Bain, the belief is a disposition to action, and in this respect Wittgenstein shows apparently to agree with such a definition in *On Certainty*, where one can find the claim of the priority of action over the knowing or conceptual level of beliefs.<sup>15</sup>

Hence, the overall view of this text might be labeled "logical pragmatism" (Moyal-Sharrock 2003, 2007). However, this wording seems questionable firstly in so far as lacks to consider that Wittgenstein is generally far from indicating

<sup>13</sup> A critical analysis of Peirce's "anti-kantianism" and interesting proposal to reorganize his approach to the Kantian synthetic-analytic issue is in Maddalena (2015).

<sup>14</sup> For a detailed account of Peirce's relation to D. Scotus, see Mayoga (2008).

<sup>15</sup> A detailed account of the similarities and differences between Wittgenstein and Peirce on the matter is in Boncompagni (2014: ch. 4).

priorities of any sort and, in fact, he suggests that action and concept are strictly connected (Schulte 1993). Moreover, if the expression “logical pragmatism” is intended with reference to Peirce and the classical pragmatists, it is important to notice that no one of them actually assigned a priority to action over conceptions or to the “problem-solving knowing inquiries” – to use Dewey’s wordings. Rather pragmatists challenged the action/practice-theory dichotomy as many other dichotomies that mark western traditional philosophy, showing what I suggest to call the “virtuous circle” of practical/experiential level and theoretical/conceptual activity. Once again, the anti-dichotomic conceptual strategy establishes a “family resemblance” between Wittgenstein’s and pragmatist philosophical lines.

Many theoretical disagreements on Peirce’s part marked his sincere friendship with William James, and one may notice a widespread standard interpretations of their work as divergent basically because of the alleged “nominalism” of the latter (Hookway 2012b; Misak 2013). On the contrary, as I argued elsewhere (Calcaterra 2008), their writings represent paths of a common philosophical plan, and there is a generic shallowness in the tendency to read James’ philosophy as a “degenerative” version of Peirce’s pragmatism, namely to follow an interpretive perspective according to which the psychological framework of James’ thought makes it, by definition, philosophically less important or less correct than that one of Peirce, who rather organized his inquiries into a solid logical scheme.

In particular, the colloquial tone James adopted in several occasions has been often censured as an evidence of a theoretical naïveté, of a very superficial way of dealing with fundamental philosophical themes and problems, but this approach appears to be inadequate and off-track. Of course, it is important to consider the diverse intellectual biographies of these two thinkers, and their specific philosophical sensibility. One would also mention their different position within the scenario of theoretical debates—between James the psychologist, humanist, and moral philosopher, with his popular and immediately persuasive language, and Peirce the experimental scientist and sophisticated scholar of logic, with his specialized and conceptually arduous language. But finally one should ask whether focusing on these aspects might be really useful to clarify their respective suggestions about the problems in contemporary philosophy. My answer to the question is negative, simply because I think that their speculative contrasts should be considered as different ways of carrying out philosophical research—ways which, rather than excluding each other, testify to the fecundity of the pragmatist perspective that they initiated.

In support of such an interpretative framework, I will briefly point out how Peirce's suggestions to restructure, according to his pragmatist criteria, the old contrast between realism and anti-realism received a response by James that deserves theoretical attention, not least because of his typical commitment to combining psychology, philosophy, and metaphysics. Indeed, the "pluralist metaphysics" of James reflects the results of his previous psychological and philosophical analyses in the course of which he developed a viewpoint about the issue of reality that overcomes any claim to settling its boundaries once and for all. At the same time, his metaphysics does not concede exceptions to the pragmatist principle that real objects and events constitute the *terminus a quo* and *ad quem* of all human experiences. In other words, there is a plurality of cognitive and ontological "orders" that must be considered in order to recover the concrete value of the question of reality (James 1977),<sup>16</sup> and this means identifying the specificity and the reciprocal permeations that each 'order' of reality may objectively, namely in the realm of human practices, exhibit when analyzed. But, first of all, it must be considered that the question of reality makes sense only when it aims to put us in a position to discharge the illusions and pinpoint the errors that interfere with our acting and our being in the world. Like Peirce, James thus maintains a contrastive conception of reality, which appears since his early philosophical writings. For instance, in James's article *Great Men and Their Environment*, he challenges Spencer's determinism emphasizing the positive function of errors within human search of truth: "The error is needed to set off the truth, much as a dark background is required for exhibiting the brightness of a picture" (James 1880: 164). In any event, the interactive relationship between mind and world remains his pivotal argument: "anything is real of which we feel ourselves obliged to take account in any way" (James 1996: 101-102).

These assertions are consistent not only with the positions he reached in *Principles of Psychology*, but also with his own pragmatic version of correspondentism. In contradistinction to his supposed reduction of truth and reality to mere psychological formulas,<sup>17</sup> James emphasized their *nature as processes*, their dependence upon the development of practices that reflect our cognitive relations with the surrounding world:

The truth of an idea is not a stagnant property inherent in it. [...] Its verity is in fact an event: the process namely of its verifying itself, its *very-fication*. Its validity is the process of *valid-ation*. (James 1975a: 97)

There is, in fact, a strong value of our cognitive practices, so that:

<sup>16</sup> See also James (1981: vol. II, 287-291).

<sup>17</sup> See the responses of James to this type of interpretation in James (1975b: 90-98).

To “agree” in the widest sense with a reality *can only mean to be guided either straight up to it or into its surroundings, or to be put into such working touch with it as to handle either it or something connected with it better than if we disagreed.* (James 1975a:102)

It is similar to saying that, beyond the contingency and pluralism of our “pragmatic” definitions of the true and the real, our practices impose themselves as the determining criterion of truth and falsehood, of reality and illusion. But this implies that- just as for Peirce and Wittgenstein - psychological feelings of satisfaction cannot be sufficient to assert the correctness of opinions intended to be both subjectively and communally relevant. Accordingly, James firmly rejects the anti-realist or nominalist interpretation of his epistemology:

If the reality assumed were cancelled from the pragmatist's universe of discourse, he would straight away give the name of falsehoods to the beliefs remaining, in spite of all their satisfactoriness. For him, as for his critic, there can be no truth if there is nothing to be true about. Ideas are so much flat psychological surface unless some mirrored matter gives them cognitive lustre. This is why as a pragmatist I have so carefully posited “reality” *ab initio*, and why, throughout my whole discussion, I remain an epistemological realist. (James 1975b:106)

A proper analysis of James’ texts not only shows that he is far from embracing a straightforward nominalism but also that he provides arguments for capturing the pragmatic meaning of the realism-nominalism issue, and thus makes room for a “*via media* between these two extremes”, consisting of giving relevance to the ethical ground and consequences of the metaphysical question about our approach to reality (Pihlström 2009: 96-111). In addition, one can notice that reality is not simply an epistemological presupposition of Jamesian pragmatism, since it also includes a form of «natural realism of the common sense » shaped by a continuist ontology, which prevents the questioning of our ability to immediately perceive the objects of the physical world (see Calcaterra 2011). At the same time, it discharges the presupposition of traditional representationalism, according to which immediacy coincides with incorrigibility or, more precisely, it banishes the skepticism arising from the trivial observation that our immediate perceptions are not always veridical.<sup>18</sup>

It is to the skepticism implicit in such a way of thinking that pragmatists try to respond with their reference to the unitary nature of logical-semantic patterns, sensory experiences, and human actions. The inevitable, continuous interference of our thinking, feeling, and acting is, in their view, what qualifies the relationships that we establish with the real world and for this reason it is

<sup>18</sup> For a more articulated comment, see Calcaterra (2006: 207-225).

possible to see the dynamic character of human culture in the interchange among the various levels on which these relationships are elaborated. Once again, common sense is presented as the framework of notions of reality that science and philosophy bring into play. In the words of James, this is the “mother tongue of thought”. It is: “the more *consolidated* stage [of thinking], because it got its innings first, and made all language into its ally”. However, common sense is not unquestionable and, in fact, «if it were entirely truthful, science and critical philosophy would not break its constitutive connections». In particular, critical philosophy seems to act towards common sense like: “a general cataclysm that erases the pre-established references to real things”. Therefore, it is even more necessary to continue to ask:

[...] but ‘things,’ what are they? Is a constellation properly a thing? or an army? or is an *ens rationis* such as space or justice a thing? Is a knife whose handle and blade are changed the ‘same’? Is the ‘changeling,’ whom Locke so seriously discusses, of the human ‘kind’? Is ‘telepathy’ a ‘fancy’ or a ‘fact’? The moment you pass beyond the practical use of these categories (a use usually suggested sufficiently by the circumstances of the special case) to a merely curious or speculative way of thinking, you find it impossible to say within just what limits of fact any one of them shall apply. (James 1975a: 89-90)

Reality and truth are correlative terms and it must be admitted that some of James’ definitions (or those of Dewey, who, in this regard, mostly follows in his tracks), may turn out to be too generic. But it is also evident that most sophisticated contemporary discussions on these concepts and their different aspects, both epistemological and semantic, have to do with problems that the classical exponents of pragmatism suggested should be confronted, that is, clarifying the relationship of truth/reality with the various types of beliefs, with the aspirations and the linguistic expressions that make up the human universe. To be sure, for James this latter word must be substituted by the term “pluriverse”, and this means concentrating on the multifarious concreteness of our reality. It is properly such an attitude what pragmatism invites philosophers to practice when it gives value to the constructive relationship between common sense and philosophical criticism. Wittgenstein did not apparently show such a confidence as far as common sense is concerned, but it would be probably interesting to investigate from his perspective the pragmatist attention to the fruitful dialectic of the “inherited background” of our cognitive and behavioral practices with philosophical criticism, within which Peirce and James articulated the concepts of truth and reality together with fallibilism and anti-skepticism.

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