

**SEMANTIC CONTENTS AND PRAGMATIC PERSPECTIVES: THE SOCIAL AND THE REAL IN BRANDOM AND PEIRCE**

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper compares Charles Peirce's and Robert Brandom's conceptions of normative objectivity. According to Brandom, discursive norms are instituted by practical attitudes of the members of a community, and yet the objectivity of these norms is not reducible to social consensus. Peirce's conception of normative objectivity, on the contrary, is rooted in his idea of a community of inquiry, which presupposes a consensus achievable in the long run. The central challenge in both cases is to explain how the norms that all members of a community take to be correct differ from those that are correct *objectively*. I claim that Peirce's conception meets the challenge of reconciling the social character of knowledge and the objectivity of norms shared by a community of knowers better than Brandom's.

**Keywords:** Community; discursive norms; inquiry; perspectival objectivity; pragmatic maxim; realism; score-keeping

## 1. Introduction

It is often believed that the view of communication that considers what we *mean* in terms of what we *do* runs the risk of ruling out realism (see, e.g., McDowell 1984; Brandom 1994: 30-55). It seems intuitively obvious that, when meanings are construed entirely in terms of social practices, it becomes unclear under what conditions this takes into account the world the expressions conveying those meanings are *about*. Besides, this view implies that the fundamental normative relationship is not the one between an individual mind and the world, but between an individual and her community. Hence, the central challenge in this case is to explain how the norms that *all* members of a community take to be correct differ from those that are correct *objectively*. Robert Brandom believes that, to reconcile the social character of communication and the objectivity of meanings is to begin, not with the relationship between the individual "I" and the communal "We," but with the fundamentally recognitive relationship between "I" and "Thou." This approach cancels the privilege of the community be-

cause it presupposes that there is no bird's eye view over and above individual communicative perspectives, and that objectivity is a feature inherent in every such perspective due to the special way it relates to other perspectives. But having thus smudged the communal "We" out of existence, Brandom has to meet the challenge of explaining how exactly, given that individual attitudes are all there is to communication, these attitudes can obtain an objective status. To meet the challenge, Brandom offers a "perspectival" interpretation of the objectivity of norms based on his asymmetric double-entry bookkeeping model of communication. Charles Peirce, on the contrary, assigns a crucial role to the communal "We." Like Brandom, he recognizes the "I-Thou" relationship, but only in the restricted sense that the discovery of the fact that some of my beliefs are erroneous as compared to yours. This, according to Peirce, gives only an initial, negative definition of reality as something one can be mistaken about. The awareness of error as an outcome of the "I-Thou" relationship provides a link between objective opinions and the social character of knowledge, but errors committed by individuals, Peirce insists, can ultimately be corrected only by a communal inquiry carried out "sufficiently far" (Peirce 1982-, 3:274). Whereas Brandom makes the "I-Thou" relationship the basic atom of the global social-recognitive web of discursive practices, for Peirce the tension between *ego* and *non-ego* by itself amounts only to the recognition of the brute force of 'the other,' which stands in need of an additional link to the ultimate communal "We."

Both Peirce and Brandom insist on a connection between objectivity and modality. Brandom's modal thesis tells us that descriptive language does not constitute an autonomous discursive practice, and that a prerequisite for one's ability to make use of descriptions is the mastery of the practical skills needed for understanding modal talk. The meaning of an expression, according to Brandom, is defined against two interrelated sets: a set of counterfactual claims about the compatibility of the expression with the speaker's background beliefs, and a set of consequences of the expression's applications.

Similarly, according to Peirce, what constitutes the meaning of a statement is the sum total of the conditional propositions that describe “would be” results of the speaker’s interactions with the object, to which the concepts applied in the statement are ascribed (Peirce 1982-, 3: 266-267). Both Peirce and Brandom use their accounts of modal realism as tools devised to enrich the idea of normative objectivity. In presenting modal vocabulary as capable of specifying not only discursive norms, but also objective facts, Brandom attempts to show how our *recognitive* attitudes towards each other are interwoven with our *cognitive* stance towards the world. Peirce’s realism, in turn, is based on the distinction between “would-bes,” or “thirdnesses,” expressible in series of conditionals and related to each other by means of laws, and “secondnesses” understood as concrete realizations of the would-bes and related to each other by brute causal force (Peirce 1931-1956, 1:420). Consequently, Peirce attempts to show how the *reality* of laws is interwoven with the *actuality* of facts and events.

In this paper, I claim that Peirce’s approach to normative objectivity, combined with his modal realism, meets the challenge of reconciling the social character of knowledge and the objectivity of norms shared by a community of knowers more effectively than Brandom’s. Brandom insists that what is *ultimately* the case is out of our expressive reach, and that the unrestrained fallibility of our individual acts of knowledge does not constitute any threat to the perspectively construed objectivity. Prima facie, this is also the case with Peirce, who claims that what we think is correct at any moment of our inquiry, is correct by our best lights only. I will argue, however, that Peirce’s idea of a community of inquiry reconciles the fallibility of our beliefs and the objectivity of norms, while Brandom’s perspectival approach cannot guarantee the same result. I will begin by identifying a problem within Brandom’s account. I will then show that, although Peirce’s regulative idea of the end of inquiry amounts only to rational hope (Peirce 1931-

1956, 1:405), it is supported by a statistically construed method, which at least it tells us something important about the role statistically interpreted errors play in our obtaining reliable experience-based knowledge about the world.

## 2. Perspectival objectivity and conceptual articulation

According to Brandom, norms we rely on when participating in discursive practices are already implicit in those practices. Yet the norms can be made explicit by being inferentially articulated in judgments we make. Every judgment constitutes a move in what Brandom, using David Lewis’s seminal idea, calls the “scorekeeping game” (Lewis 1979). Making judgments is inseparable from tracking other players’ moves and, as every judgment entails accepting some new normative commitments and rejecting some previously made ones, it inevitably changes the score the participants of the game keep on each other and on themselves. Keeping track of what a claim represents, therefore, involves keeping track of how the claim shifts from perspective to perspective (Gibbard 1996: 703; Scharp 2012: 117-122; Wanderer 2008: 41-48). Brandom’s inferentialist semantics is thus an account of “how propositional content incorporates norms of application as roles that are *played*, not as roles that are *described*” (Shapiro 2004: 149). Making a move in the game is *doing* something in a social environment.<sup>1</sup> The trick, according to Brandom, is

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<sup>1</sup> Brandom considers this attention to actions as opposed to descriptions an overarching pragmatist aspect of his theory as a whole. In *Reason in Philosophy: Animating Ideas* (2009) and *Perspectives on Pragmatism* (2011), Brandom describes this aspect as a result of his reinterpretation of Kant’s constructivism in light of his Hegelian view of social communication. It has been claimed that Brandom’s transition from Kant to Hegel opens access to the problem of objectivity most effectively (Bransen 2002; Prien 2010; Prien and Schweikard 2008: 89-114). However, in reading Kant and Hegel, Brandom ignores certain core elements of their thought that do not fit his own project. This makes both Brandom’s Hegel and Brandom’s Kant subject to a wide range of criticisms (Habermas 2000; de Laurentiis 2007; Pippin 2007; Rockmore 2001). Due to the unresolved difference in opinions among scholars, I chose to discuss the problem of the objectivity of discursive norms in Brandom

to see the game as a rule-guided activity without presupposing a normative grid of explicitly stipulated rules that sits outside of actual discursive practices. The social dimension of the game, he insists, is constituted in its entirety by individual practical attitudes. In communicating with each other, all we have is interrelated practical assessments made from a variety of individual perspectives. It is this intersubjective exchange, not an overarching communal “We” that, in Brandom’s jargon, allows us to treat communication as “the social production and consumption of reasons” (Brandom 1994: 474).

Each scorekeeper keeps two sets of books, the first one containing commitments undertaken by other scorekeepers according to her, the second one containing those actually acknowledged by other scorekeepers (646). Conforming to the first set, a scorekeeper accepts responsibility for the inferentially embedded collateral commitments which, according to her counterpart, she should acknowledge, but which she does not necessarily actually acknowledge.<sup>2</sup> Being entitled to attribute a commitment thus has priority over undertaking one. Undertaking may be understood in terms of being entitled to attribute, but *not* vice versa: One can count as having undertaken a commitment whenever others are entitled to attribute that commitment (596). And it is the *asymmetry* this stance entails—the one between being entitled to attribute a commitment and undertaking one—that allows Brandom to finally take account of the objectivity of discursive norms. What is objectively correct, he says, is what is taken to be correct by the scorekeeper who is entitled to attribute a commitment—as opposed to what is acknowledged by the one to whom this commitment is attributed. As attributions and undertakings are mutual, we can construe the difference

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without making much use of the transition in question.

<sup>2</sup> To take a well-known example of Brandom: Senator McCarthy believed that the specter of communism was haunting Europe, but had no knowledge of the fact that this is exactly what the first sentence of Marx and Engels’ *Communist Manifesto* says. Consequently, had someone asked him whether he believed any of the claims of the *Manifesto*, McCarthy would have denied it (MIE: 516). Meanwhile, he should have undertaken a commitment to this belief even though he had no idea what the first sentence of the *Manifesto*, in fact, says.

between objective normative statuses and our subjective practical attitudes as a social-perspectival distinction between practical attitudes alone (597). Thus, although discursive norms support our capacity to distinguish correct performances from incorrect ones, they are not practice-transcendent (Wanderer 2008: 17-19). The distinction between correct applications of norms and those that are only taken to be correct is, according to Brandom, nothing but a structural feature of each individual practitioner’s perspective, or a social-perspectival *form* of it. Due to the implicit agreement that individual attitudes create, some of them project, as it were, beyond dispositions to apply them. To use a Wittgensteinian metaphor, Brandom’s phenomenalist solution of the objectivity of discursive norms looks like “a ladder that needs to be thrown away after one has climbed up on it” (Grönert 2005: 166). Brandom insists that we are capable of making the distinction between correct and incorrect applications of norms not because our discourse has an omniscient Master, but because the objectivity of those norms is a structural feature common to each perspective captured by the non-coercive authority of reasons interlocked by the mutual accountability of all participants (Brandom 1994: 595).

Many philosophers have considered Brandom’s account of normative objectivity controversial. Some treat Brandom’s phenomenism about norms as a version of semantic eliminativism, which, in prioritizing individual practical attitudes, simply explains norms away (Loeffler 2005: 58-59). Some others claim that if Brandom’s theory cannot find a proper ground for normativity outside individual assessments, his inferentialism results in indeterminacy of meaning (Whiting 2006). This criticism is supported by arguments showing the circularity of the relationship between objective normative statuses and subjective practical attitudes (Kiesselbach 2012; Lauer 2009). My own concern about Brandom’s account, although it echoes all of the above criticisms, is whether this account succeeds in reconciling the fallibility of individual perspectives and the objectivity of discursive norms. Brandom acknowledges that, as all scorekeepers

have different perspectives, there are always possible circumstances in which any application of a norm may be discovered to be incorrect. Although the very fact that we know what we know by our best lights only by itself constitutes no predicament for giving some sort of an account of normative objectivity, there is a problem. It is that Brandom's double-entry bookkeeping model stipulates nothing at all either about applications of norms, or about the way the scorekeeping game is generally played, that might prevent some of our applications from remaining ever unchanged—and therefore infallible—even though Brandom admits that they can be proven wrong in the long run.

Here is one way of seeing the problem. Brandom's asymmetric relation between being entitled to attribute a commitment and undertaking it implies that what allows me to take the commitment as objectively valid is its being present in the book containing commitments undertaken by me according to others. Now, although Brandom insists that objectivity requires something *in excess* of the sum total of the opinions of the others, there is nothing for me to rely on at any particular moment of the game except the status quo based exactly on the sum total of those opinions. In the absence of the communal "We," all I can hope for in fixing my beliefs is perspectival objectivity understood as some sort of interpretive equilibrium, which Brandom defines as a situation in which "external interpretation collapses into internal scorekeeping" (Brandom 1994: 644). The collapse of external interpretation into internal scorekeeping presupposes that there is an implicit normative residue in every act of giving and asking for reasons, i.e., something that I might not be aware of, but that I will have to acknowledge once it takes the form of an explicit statement that happens to contradict my beliefs. The very fact of the normative residue implies that there is a difference between how things ought to be and how all of us take things to be. The latter might not reflect the former, as all members of a community can go wrong. But how exactly what I learn from the book containing

commitments undertaken by me according to others can help me *now* if perspectival objectivity presupposes that all of us, at this particular moment of the game, can go wrong? Given that the scorekeeping community as a whole is ultimately nothing but a sum of individual perspectives, what exactly guarantees that a wrong opinion, which every member of the community is holding at the moment, will ultimately be corrected in accordance with some norm? True, the norms implicit in discourse might presuppose the possibility that, at some point in the game, a new fact will be discovered which would set our inquiry on the right track, even though everyone is wrong at the moment. But those norms by no means *guarantee* that such discovery will ever take place. The scorekeeping game itself prescribes no method that might ensure that an appropriate normative residue will ever be enacted in practice. The all-encompassing recognitive machinery of discourse embraces all individual perspectives. It precludes ascribing commitments by direct coercion, but it does not necessarily make discourse properly self-corrective. It can discipline the way we go about our beliefs, make our perspectives mutually adjusted, and help us get things right most of the time. What it *cannot* do though is guarantee anything beyond our capacity to persist in making the same mistakes over and over again. If *all* of us are wrong about something from the get go, whatever the norms we follow at the moment imply, there is no guarantee we will ever get it right.

An example might help. Suppose you and I share the view that my brother has committed a felony. In spite of our agreement, beliefs that constitute our respective networks of collateral commitments, and the way we act on those beliefs on occasion, might still be incompatible. From my perspective, the fact that I believe that my brother has committed a felony might not necessarily presuppose the legal consequences it would presuppose from your perspective if you were a judge. Brandom seems to imply that, due to the tight inferential connections between our uses of the word "felony," the mis-

match between our systems of collateral beliefs can never get big enough for the meaning of “felony” *not* to be shared by us. This might well be true; after all, there are norms which, when inferentially articulated, should make it explicit that my idea of “felony” is wrong. And yet it is quite possible that you and I keep using the term without a slightest trace of disagreement on a number of occasions when my particular attitude toward the relative is not explicitly involved. In fact, as the scorekeeping game implies a potentially unlimited number of contexts in which the term “felony” can be applied, it is theoretically possible that we spend a lifetime discussing/acting on our beliefs about “felony” without ever contradicting each other, given that our claims/actions do not involve the difference in our commitments.

This example is a simplification, but it can serve as a model for similar, yet more complex situations in which larger scorekeeping groups might get involved in much more than just an everyday confusion of terms. For instance, whereas “felony” represents a case in which, even though there is a discrepancy between our uses of the term, there are also norms that imply certain objective standards, the terms like “cold fusion” involve a more sophisticated scenario. True, “cold fusion” refers to many things that form a part of the already existent inferential web of the scorekeeping game. These include our general knowledge of nuclear reaction, the practical skills we need in order to conduct experiments involving [electrolysis](#) of [heavy water](#), and our expectations of how cold fusion, were it to occur, might change our ideas of matter and the laws of thermodynamics. However, as the very existence of the object of “cold fusion” is not a fact, not all possible uses of the term can be implied by existent norms. This creates an agreement that is much weaker than in the felony case. Hence, even if we are consistent in our uses of “cold fusion,” there is a real possibility that some of the key (albeit ultimately wrong) uses of the term will never be corrected. In cases like this, the game seems to require from scorekeepers something more than just being consistent. Namely, it seems to require some sort of *guidance*, especially in the

situation in which a discrepancy between different systems of beliefs is crucial for the principal aim of cooperation to be achieved.

It might be objected that, if we agree with Brandom that the objectivity of our concepts is anchored in the world that is itself conceptually framed, we should admit that the norms are always already there in discourse, waiting to be inferentially articulated eventually *in every case* (cold fusion included). But this objection implies two scenarios, none of which fits well within Brandom’s account. On the one hand, if the conceptual relations of the world merely ‘sit’ there waiting to be unfolded in the inferentially articulated structures of discourse, then we ultimately end up confronting the world that guarantees the objectivity of our norms before we even institute them as such (DeMoor 2011: 344; Habermas 2000: 340). If this is right, Brandom’s conceptual realism makes his idea of constructive human endeavor rather weak. We institute and acknowledge the norms that govern our thought and behavior, but, at the same time, we always already have a warrant of adequacy from the conceptually pre-structured world—which, to be sure, demotivates every one of our individual constructive efforts.

On the other hand, although in many cases we do reach a workable agreement on what our uses of a term imply, Brandom discards the idea of the end of inquiry (even in a purely regulative, Kantian sense), and so there is no guarantee it will ever happen in this or that particular case. Within Brandom’s model, the fallibility of our current beliefs, together with the fact that some of those beliefs can persist indefinitely in spite of their being wrong, is not compensated by the possibility of our knowing, at some point in future, that some of our assessments are correct. According to Brandom, our hope for correctness is only hope for the fact that our game of giving and asking for reasons is a structurally sustainable and a well-ordered one. But all we are able to acknowledge in this case is that a given conceptual content is applied correctly simply because it works *for now*. In spite of the normative residue, which supports the asymmetry between being entitled to attribute a com-

mitment and undertaking one, what all members of a community deem to be correct at any particular moment of the game may in fact be indistinguishable from what is correct objectively. When nothing prevents the whole community from holding a set of wrong beliefs indefinitely, the objective norms' being there might make little or no difference at all. What is thus acknowledged as correct (whether rightly or wrongly) is what is represented by a useful vocabulary—until this vocabulary is out of use (cf. Rorty 1998: 138-152). According to Brandom, to say that our communication is perspectival in its form is, therefore, simply to say that our rationality is inherently such that it organizes our reasons in an autonomous space, within which sometimes we *may* be able to understand others and hold each other responsible for what we say and do.

In *Making It Explicit*, and later in *Articulating Reasons* (2000) Brandom strengthens his perspectival construal of objectivity by claiming that individual perspectives are interlocked by 'anaphoric chains' and 'substitutional commitments.' Anaphoric connections link expressions that involve demonstratives, indexicals, and proper names into repeatable linguistic structures. These structures, says Brandom, "can express conceptual contents by being governed by indirectly inferential substitutional commitments" (Brandom 1994: 592; cf. Knell 2008; Armour-Garb and Beall 2005). Brandom's principal point is that the commitments can be cashed out grammatically through the difference between *de re* and *de dicto* content ascriptions.<sup>3</sup> But can the fact that, thanks to

<sup>3</sup> According to Brandom's example, if we translate the *de dicto* ascription "X believes *that* the inventor of lightning rod invented bifocals" into the *de re* ascription "X believes *of* the inventor of lightning rod that *he* invented bifocals," the ascriber's explicit acknowledgement of a commitment, which follows from the ascription, becomes a part of the meaning of the ascription (Lance 1997: 69-71). Such translations enable us to deal with ambiguities and to substitute one subsentential structure for another, making it clear, for instance, that by "the inventor of the lightning rod" we mean "Benjamin Franklin" (Brandom 2000: 178-183). Anaphoric uses of pronouns in *de re* ascriptions like "X believes *of* the inventor of lightning rod that *he* invented bifocals" initiate referential chains that tie different perspectives together and help us direct our intentions in understanding what we are talking *about*.

anaphoric chains and substitutional commitments, we are in agreement with others as to what we are talking *about*, tell us whether *what* we are talking about is not wrong? I think not. Anaphoric chains and substitutional commitments supplement the idea of recognition-based perspectival objectivity, but they cannot guarantee that our current mistaken beliefs will ever be corrected. Brandom implies that his inferentialism is not meant to equip us with instruments that could help us to sort out our substitutional commitments in every particular case. Once we succeed in mastering the dialectical relationship between the explicit and the implicit parts of discourse, we can explain our scorekeeping capacities by simply pointing at the way our linguistic rationality works. After all, it seems natural for a Wittgensteinian to answer the question "How do you know that this is red?" by simply saying, "I know English" (cf. Rorty 2000: 186). From the Brandomean perspective, we would do well simply by relying on the capacity of the scorekeeping game to fix inferential networks by means of implicitly established discursive norms. Yet this claim is between the Scylla of weakened constructivism (if we admit that discourse already contains norms that should be at work in every particular case), and the Charybdis of criteria for a workable agreement (if we admit that Brandom owes us an explanation of how exactly new norms are introduced).

In *Between Saying and Doing* (2008), Brandom makes an amendment to his thesis about anaphoric chains and substitutional commitments. He says that discursive practices are "*not* the kind of thing that can be separated from the objects they involve" (Brandom 2008: 177). Earlier in *Making It Explicit* he goes as far as calling the practices "solid" and even "corporeal" (Brandom 1994: 332). According to Brandom, discursive practices include not only what we say, but also how we interact with each other, as well as with facts and events of the world. But this amendment raises the same question: Can the Wittgensteinian claim that we don't use words in a vacuum and that our uses are constituted by

the situational interplay between language and environment, provide a proper support for the idea of objectivity, given that the very term “objectivity” is quite tellingly absent from the vocabulary of *Philosophical Investigations*?

### 3. The end of inquiry

What I suggest Brandom’s theory lacks is the regulative notion of a theoretically perfect intersubjective agreement obtainable under ideal conditions—a notion similar to Peirce’s idea of the end of inquiry. Peirce defines it in his “Some Consequences of Four Incapacities” (1868) as “a community without definite limits, and capable of indefinite increase of knowledge,” where “[the] two series of cognitions—the real and the unreal—consist of those which, at a time sufficiently future, the community will always continue to reaffirm; and of those which, under the same conditions, will ever after be denied” (Peirce 1982-, 2:239). What underlies the idea of the end of inquiry is *statistical reasoning*. As Peirce explains, “judging of the statistical composition of a whole lot from a sample is judging by a method which will be right on the average in the long run” (Peirce 1931-1956, 1:93). No matter where different members of a community may begin, as long as they follow a certain method, the results of their research should eventually converge toward the same outcome. The method is formulated in Peirce’s maxim of pragmatism: “Consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object” (Peirce 1982-, 3:266). This formulation suggests that our idea of an object is ultimately our idea of the expected experiential effects of this object, and that meanings of our ideas depend on our capacity to predict practical outcomes of our experiments with the objects of those ideas.

Brandom famously claims that ‘experience’ is not one of his words. He sees the idea of experience as a needless non-inferential intermediary between facts

available in perception and linguistic reports of those facts (Brandom 2000: 205-206). Contrary to Brandom, Peirce treats experience not as a useless intermediary between the world and our discourse about it, but as an integral part of our inferentially framed constructive efforts to create a living connection between our practical ends and the way the world really is. The idea of practical bearings, as it is used in the maxim, finds its expression in a set of conditional statements about what *would* happen, given that such-and-such reasonable experimental conditions are in place. Consequently, accepting the truth of a proposition amounts to acquiring a habit of using a variety of conditionals the expression entails. On this view, the meaning of a proposition “spells out how acceptance of the proposition would affect conduct, and indicates what circumstances are relevant to evaluating an assertion of the proposition” (Hookway 1985: 240). If we are persistent enough in following the maxim as a method of reasoning and acting, our results will always be a distribution of statistical errors, which, as our experimentation goes on, always converge to an approximation.

The advantage of Peirce’s maxim, as compared to Brandom’s perspectival approach, is that, in affecting and correcting our habits, the possible future implied by the maxim introduces an element of self-control both to our thought and to our conduct. For instance, if our study of the relationship between temperature and pressure of an ideal gas, heated in a closed container, showed that the equation  $pV = nRT$  does not hold, we would have to look for what might have introduced an error. In this case, referring to our judgments’ sharing some core discursive feature, and to our perspectives being interlocked by our mutual accountability, would not suffice. We would have to make changes to the initial setting, check the equipment, reevaluate some of our basic assumptions about residual properties, repeat the experiment and, if nothing else works, introduce a new hypothesis, or even take a guess. In this example, our predictions of practically significant *experiential* outcomes, irrelevant in Brandom’s case, are not external

to our conception of an ideal gas. They are the essential constituents of this conception. Moreover, the fact that future experiments may change this, as well as any other conception we happen to form and act upon, entails that both our ideas and laws of nature these ideas are about are general objects subject to constant change and growth (Hausman 1993; Pihlström 2010: 55).

According to the statistical construal of the maxim, it is rational to act only if the single case we are preoccupied with currently is considered a member of an infinite sequence of comparable cases that display the tendency to converge to a result narrow enough to establish a new norm (Peirce 1931-1956, 1:400-409). Neither any particular instance of the “I-Thou” relationship, nor any finite number of such instances can actually confront the sequence as a whole. Neither you nor I, therefore, are being rational unless, in every decision we make, we identify ourselves with a communal “We” understood as an *infinite* community of future decision makers (Peirce 1982-, 2:239-242). The community, every member of which follows the maxim, by definition exceeds any particular set of members in its reliance on future opportunities to correct their current beliefs. The idea of such community is thus in compliance with Brandom’s stipulation that objectivity is not reducible to what any and all scorekeepers may think at any particular moment in the scorekeeping game. But it also adds something to this stipulation. What it adds is a statistically construed procedure that, even if all of us are wrong on occasion, will not allow us to hold on to our errors forever. It will ultimately convert a distribution of those errors into a reliable and experimentally provable result (Peirce 1931-1956, 2:775-777). Unlike Brandom, who claims that there cannot be any finally adequate set of perfectly determinate concepts, Peirce insists that the very way we go about our experience suggests that the idea of a final opinion is indispensable. To summarize, the indispensability of this idea is due to three facts. First, the maxim of pragmatism tells us that the meaning of any proposition consists in a set of counterfactual expecta-

tions. Second, according to the statistical construal of the maxim, every concept we use by necessity presupposes a reference to the possible future. Third, in order to secure the self-corrective character of inquiry, the reference to the possible future presupposes the regulative idea of ultimate communal “We.” Without having this idea in mind, we cannot go on with our inquiry. The final opinion, thus, “is an ideal, regulative, normative notion, providing a reason—an irreducibly normative reason—for continuing inquiry” (Pihlström 2012: 243). The notion is regulative in that it both motivates our inquiry and guarantees its result in the long run. On the level of local social practices, it cannot secure anything except approximation. The approximation, however, does help us in sorting out our disagreements about the meaning of practices we share. Back to the “felony” example, like the Brandomian appeal to the inferentially construed normativity, which is inherent in our rational capacities, Peirce’s maxim-based inquiry cannot provide an absolute guarantee for the compatibility of beliefs that constitute our respective networks of collateral commitments. What, unlike Brandom’s perspectival approach, it *can* do though is exclude the situation in which the compatibility is left to chance or cannot be achieved at all.

It might be objected that it is not clear how the scientific method, suitable for defining the properties of an ideal gas, can be applied to resolve our disagreements about the meaning of “felony” or some other term in everyday communication. After all, Peirce himself describes the method of science as only one of four methods of fixing beliefs, admitting that “the other [three] methods do have their merits” (Peirce 1982-, 3:257). But he takes it to be an important advantage of the method that, whenever it is applied, reality is no longer determined by individual will, a priori rules, or even social contract. It is determined by the fact that every human being is a truth-seeker by nature. Science, in its pragmatist understanding, is nothing other than an extension of this natural human disposition, or a more sophisticated

expression of it. What it adds to this disposition is the idea of a method that provides statistical tools to enhance our natural inclination towards making right decisions. In this respect, Peirce's maxim may be seen as an improvement on the scorekeeping game, playing which, according to Brandom, is simply synonymous to being rational. Peirce stresses the fact that our rational capacities have a history, and that, in the case of science, this history is attached to a particular set of social institutions, which have so far made the best possible use of these capacities (253-256).

Peirce do not stop at showing how the statistical reading of the maxim reconciles the fallibility of our knowledge and the regulative idea of the end of inquiry. He also shows how it yields realism. When, following the maxim, we define the meaning of a concept, we do it in terms of our capacity to predict practical experiential outcomes of our interaction with the object to which the concept applies. Taking into account possible outcomes of actions one is prepared to perform, affects one's conduct not simply causally (in the way *actual* objects and persons affect each other), but in terms of correcting one's habits—not just actions, but general modes of conduct. Peirce makes a clear distinction between *actuality*, which pertains to the universe of "I-Thou" relations, facts and things which exist here and now, and *reality*, which pertains to "would-bes" expressed in conditional expectations. Actual objects, facts, and their relations to each other are characterized by brute causal force. Objects and facts are existent in their reactive effects, which by themselves do not constitute any rational constraint. Would-bes, on the contrary, are real as far as they are characterized by a law-like behavior (Hausman 1993, esp. 167-168). A stone, when released, is bound to fall in a predictable manner because it has a general property of being so disposed. The law-like behavior of the stone is due to a set of features that define its *real* nature, and not merely its *existence* as a member of some actual causal chain (Margolis 1993: 295-300; Haack 1992: 28-29). Reality, thus, is something that consists in laws and regularities, where the laws'

being real means appropriate counterfactuals' being true. Laws do not exist as such, but they are operative in existent things as their concrete realizations (Peirce 1931-1956, 8:12). In representing law-like regularities, would-bes cannot be reduced to any finite collection of actual facts or events: "No collection of facts can constitute a law; for the law goes beyond any accomplished facts and determines how facts that *may be*, but *all* of which never can have happened, shall be characterized" (1.420). Reality in the form of a law is always present in the way actual events interact, but it cannot be exhausted by all interactions that did, or ever will, exemplify it. According to Peirce, (1) a law goes beyond any collection of facts because it represents a general rule that relates known facts to their possible future interpretations, and (2) the maxim, which guides us in establishing new laws based on those interpretations, has predictive power because this relation presupposes the idea of the end of inquiry. Consequently, no "would-be" has a normative force without (1) and (2) being true. Brandom's account pays no attention to this feature of generality. He only says that a scorekeeper is confined in her interpretations by the normative force of whatever implications her current move has relative to the current status quo of the game. Although there are norms implicit in discourse, which preclude some of our applications and licence some other, those norms provide no guidance as to where our rationality will ultimately lead us.

Throughout his writings, Brandom also pays great deal of attention to modal talk. Referring to Sellars, he calls the language of modality a "transposed" language of norms (Brandom 2008: 100). For the reason that our capacity to apply concepts presupposes the mastery of every concept's inferential relations to other concepts, inferentialist semantics requires that every time we apply a concept we must be able to sort out what would and what would not follow in case our application of the concept brought about such and such inferential consequences. In "Modality, Normativity, and Intentionality" (2001), Brandom even borrows Peirce's famous diamond example to illustrate this point. To understand what it

means for a diamond to be 'hard,' given that the diamond was crystalized in a bed of cotton wool and then burned without ever being pressed by an edge or point, the question is "not what *did* happen, but ... whether that diamond *would* resist an attempt to scratch it" (Peirce 1998: 354). As Rosen points out, "Brandom's main contention is that our best reasons for regarding the unreduced modal idiom as 'clear enough' are also good reasons for regarding the unreduced normative idiom as clear enough" (Rosen 2001: 612). However, for Brandom, this primarily means that we need a mastery of a modal *vocabulary* that could cash out inferential interdependencies between various claims. Peirce's principal concern is *experiential* expectations directed by a method that leads our self-corrective efforts towards a predestined result and, in doing so, provides external constraint on what we can think and do. Unlike Brandom, Peirce insists that there is a strong link not only between two kinds of vocabulary, but also between (1) laws exceeding any finite collection of facts, (2) laws being real, and (3) our human capacity of making predictions according to the rule which organizes our experience with reference to the regulative ideal of the end of inquiry.

#### 4. Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to compare Brandom's and Peirce's approaches to normative objectivity. Let me now summarize the comparison. In trying to reconcile his inferentialist semantics and his normative pragmatics, Brandom faces an objectivity problem: Given that discourse is constituted in its entirety by the constructive efforts of individual scorekeepers, how can we proceed from what any and all of us take to be the case to what the case is objectively? Brandom believes that his social-perspectival account of discursive norms provides whatever is necessary for some of our beliefs to be not just coherent, but objectively correct. But because Brandom's objectivity functions solely as a form of communi-

cation and does not define the character of conceptual contents *qua* contents, his normative pragmatics lacks some tools. It can only help us build our responsibilities toward each other into the overall cognitive structure of discourse, but it cannot prevent some of our beliefs from remaining ever unchanged. As Levine (2010) points out, in *Making It Explicit* Brandom accounts of "a *hygienic* notion of objectivity," which contains no traces of foundationalism or representationalism of any kind (Levine 2010: 584-586), but which does not do enough in terms of elucidating how objectivity operates in real inquiries. While the goal of the Brandomian scorekeeper is to show how to build her commitments into the already existent scorekeeping system, the Peircean inquirer is preoccupied with tracing how to falsify the already established status quo. One, after all, cannot but acknowledge that there is a difference between preparedness to defend the inferences implicit in one's assertions and preparedness to refute one's beliefs in view of new experience.

Given that Brandom's account dismisses the possibility of the end of inquiry and, at the same time, allows for some of our beliefs to be reinstated indefinitely, the idea of something that exceeds a limited communal agreement cannot be cashed out properly. In cases when nothing prevents the whole community not just from holding wrong beliefs, but from holding those beliefs indefinitely, the existence of objective norms implicit in discourse seems to make little difference. Perspectival objectivity makes us mindful of each other's reasons and lays constraint on our navigating between different perspectives. Yet the only safe conclusion one can make based on this conception is that it "*leaves room* for an admission of objective deontic statuses" (Grönert 2005: 169; emphasis added), but does not necessarily *require* objectivity of any kind. It might be said that, in referring to the long-run convergence of the community, Peirce's maxim represents at best a 'rational hope' for achieving ultimately correct beliefs, but at least it tells us something important about the role statistically interpreted

errors play in our obtaining reliable experience-based knowledge about the world. In referring to the account of meaning as the sum total of practical effects, the maxim represents the method, about which we *know* that it will be right on average in the long run. Explaining the relationship between what we mean and the modes of action that lead to the acknowledgement of what we mean by others, requires some additional criterion. I claim that Peirce provides such criterion by introducing a regulative ideal of the end of inquiry. This ideal is supported by a method that links our future expectations with our motivation to go on with our inquiry, and represents experience not as a non-inferential intermediary between facts and linguistic reports, but as an integral part of our meanings.

One of Brandom's worries is that the notion of a community, which is implied by the ideal, grants priority to the "I-We" relationship over the "I-Thou" relationship, and that in this case the individual is ultimately bound to be "overwhelmed by the collectivity" (Habermas 2000: 344). According to Brandom, what we should place above our limited selves is a self-regulating game where the mutual distribution of commitments assigns normative force to our claims, but says nothing about what is actually at stake in every particular move. Thanks to the recognitive symmetry between "I" and "Thou," every scorekeeper can navigate between different perspectives, and due to the priority of being entitled to attribute a commitment over undertaking one, every scorekeeper perceives certain norms implicit in the game as laying external constraint on what can be said and done. The worry about overwhelming collectivity is a legitimate one. According to Peirce, what we place above our limited selves is not a self-regulating game, but a *universal rule* of action that fuses reasons and reality into the method-driven human effort addressed to the future. But if the point that objectivity is something more than a mere agreement here and now is at issue, from a Peircean perspective, to make this point, we at least do not have to worry about how to proceed from individual ascriptions to objective assessments,

because science shows us the most effective way to transcend subjective beliefs in a communal inquiry.

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