**PRAGMATIST METAETHICS:
 AN APPROACH TO MORAL TRUTHS AND MORAL INQUIRY**
 **by

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Abstract**I offer the suggestion that a pragmatic approach to the metaethical questions of our moral truths, beliefs and principles proposes a normative systematization of ethics grounded in moral practice, development and experimentation. I argue that maintaining a pragmatic faith in the origination and formation of our moral constitutions will provide us with a realist, cognitivist and objective view of reality subject to the capacities of our human cognition and empirical evidence and not subject to metaphysical and universal methods of reasoning.

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 **Introduction**Pragmatism is a philosophical tradition that originates in the United States of the 18th century which was established by the American philosopher and scientist Charles Sanders Pierce (1839-1914). Roughly, it is the idea that our understanding of the world is indivisible from our actions and practices within it and, therefore, our philosophical conceptions become set in the base of a corresponding reality. Pierce, along with William James (1842-1910) and John Dewey (1859-1952), were the core figures of the so-called *classical*, or the first wave of pragmatism. In contemporary philosophy, pragmatism has been represented by philosophers such as W.V. Quine (1908-2000), Richard Rorty (1932-2007) and Hilary Putnam (1926-2016). Some lesser-known figures of the second wave are G.H. Mead (1863-1931), C.I. Lewis (1883-1964) and Wilfrid Sellars (1912-1989), whose theories are not examined in this dissertation. What connects the philosophical work of all these figures is not their mutual philosophical positions on issues concerning ethics, aesthetics, language etc., but their commonly shared methodological assumptions of how to reach the truths of the world. As such, for one to be classified as a pragmatist, one is only required to embrace the core conceptions of the established pragmatic tradition without committing to a certain school of epistemology or metaphysics. These core conceptions are anti-skepticism, fallibilism, the primacy of practice, rejection of dichotomies of the fact-value kind and the application of the scientific method to philosophical hypotheses. As I contend, this pluralistic character of pragmatism, namely, its non-commitment to a given set of intellectual positions, is what distinguishes pragmatic ethics from other normative theories of morality.

The main aspiration of this thesis is to apply the aforementioned conceptions in our contemporary ethical discourses and to argue that a pragmatic attitude toward the issues concerning our moral beliefs, judgments and truths can provide us with a uniquely striking approach to our ethical reality that corresponds to the standards of logic, experience, evidence and grounded knowledge. To do so, I start with a short introduction of pragmatism’s background and contribution to our philosophical thought, with a focus on its adoption of the scientific method for our ethical research. In Section I, I analyze the main positions of the classical pragmatists Pierce, James and Dewey, and I argue that Pierce’s original formulation of truth is the one that we should apply in our contemporary investigation of moral matters. In Section II, I move on to the moral positions of the neo-pragmatists Rorty, Putnam and Quine and I contend that the philosophical conceptions of the two later figures regarding truth and morality reflect and enhance the Peircean pragmatic spirit and his aspiration of moral inquiry. In Section III, I examine pragmatism’s position in the contemporary ethical debates of moral cognitivism-moral non-cognitivism, concerning our moral judgments, and moral generalism-moral particularism concerning our moral principles. In respect to the first debate, I claim that a pragmatic approach to moral truths and moral judgments entails moral cognitivism as its aims lie in the formation of objective moral theories that follow the methods of science and respond to the evidence given by our experiences. Regarding the second debate, I argue that the pragmatic moral principles do not correspond to either the principles formed by a moral generalist or a moral particularist as Pierce’s formulation of moral principles in the form of ‘regulative assumptions’ does not have the absolute and universal character of general principles nor the subjective and internal character of particular principles. I conclude that a pragmatic approach to our contemporary metaethical issues grounded on the Peircean model of moral inquiry, can provide us with an empirical and practical enrichment of our moral frameworks.

To begin with, Pierce’s original formulation of pragmatism has an epistemological background. The philosopher initially conceived of pragmatism as a means of defining and testing the currently held knowledge based on its usefulness and contribution to our research of scientific and philosophical topics, an idea subsequently extended by James to other areas of research, such as ethics (Pierce, 1878). We can think of the application of pragmatism to ethics as a form of consequentialism, divergent from utilitarianism, considering that the former emphasizes on the results of our actions while the latter on their usefulness. According to the pragmatic perspective, our judgments and evaluations are made based on the mutual practical needs and interests of human society. And so, pragmatists seem to adopt a form of relativism about our ideas, worldviews and institutions, but without being perniciously relativistic. They hold that universal moral principles and values do not exist and that they can only make sense based on their usefulness and practicality in the regulation and solution of local problems. Moreover, pragmatists lay great emphasis on the examination of our habits. Our habits reflect the totality of everyday actions that people engage in and they are subject to re-assessment and evaluation over time as they are temporary. Pragmatism, as defined in broad terms, holds that our knowledge of the world is indivisible from our actions within it and, therefore, the truthfulness of a belief or a theory is subject to its practical application and consequences. The main position of pragmatism is reflected in Pierce’s pragmatic maxim namely, a logical maxim designed for regulating our apprehension and the very basic idea that to fully apprehend our concepts we must focus on their practical implications (CP 5.438, 1905).

Consequently, the pragmatist philosopher examines our views on a variety of topics, such as moral judgments, and tests their validity based on a practical problem-solving method of acquiring objective facts, unbiased by given ideas concerning nature and reality. This method, as we will see in what follows, resembles the one practiced by scientists. More specifically, when it comes to the application of pragmatism to real moral issues, pragmatists begin with the fundamental idea that our moral progression resembles the progression of sciences that in its turn, is dependent on the success and truthfulness of a hypothesis made by a relevant inquiry. If the inquiry turns out to validate this very hypothesis, it becomes the truth that we must hold and embrace. However, future inquiries might likely come and replace our old and validated hypothesis with another one that, subsequently, will become the new truth. And so, the amount of truthfulness concerning these scientific hypotheses and theories is strictly subject to the amount of evidence available and, thus, the more evidence available, the stronger the theory and the wider its acceptance (Metcalfe, 2008, pp. 1091-1099). As such, there are many scientific theories that, in the face of more advanced and extended inquiries, might change their content about past scientifically proven facts. For instance, Darwin’s theory of the expanding Earth has been replaced by the theory of plate tectonics which debunked the Earth’s large-scale motions and rejected its growth (NASA, 2011). Analogously, pragmatists would argue that the truthfulness of our moral judgments, ethical norms and principles are subject to the evidence provided by the outcomes of moral inquiries and, thus, a moral value X might change in the face of a moral value Y that better captures the progression of a certain society.

Moreover, it could be said that three basic features distinguish pragmatic ethics from other normative theories. First is pragmatism’s interpretation of morality collectively and not individually; that is, it interprets the notion of goodness as a cooperative, objective and external phenomenon subject to a society’s common perception. Because of this, pragmatists, are not interested in investigating morality as an internal and subjective phenomenon and the way that different individuals of a community experience the ethical issues in question. Pragmatists are only interested in the general and practical consequences of those individual experiences in our constitution of norms and institutions. Second, pragmatists hold that our moral judgments, and views of rightness and wrongness, are context-dependent and attached to a certain reality. This contextual dependency implies that our moral laws and judgments are not universal and that they cannot be reduced to a single truth embraced by everyone. Instead, they derive from the course of actions and experiences of a given society and they are created to fulfill its current needs and correspond to its very certain setting. Third, because of this lack of permanency and universality of the term *good*, pragmatists hold that changes or alterations of our current moral judgments and beliefs in the course of history and time is very likely to occur and, therefore, ethics is a topic that we should keep open to revision (LaFollette, 2000, p. 400-419). This interpretation of morality might create, to some, the impression that pragmatic ethics constitutes an ethical theory of subjectivity and relativism. Despite this, it could be said that if pragmatic ethics are not capable of being objective, then sciences are not capable of being objective either if we consider that scientific facts and theories are always subject to new evidence and new experiments and use hypothetical deductive methods for reaching certain ends (Nola & Sankey, 2007, p.312-336). It is time now to examine the historical roots of the pragmatic tradition, with an emphasis on Pierce’s notions of pragmatic maxim, moral inquiry and regulative assumptions.

 **I. A RETROSPECT TO THE ROOTS OF PRAGMATISM: PIERCE, JAMES & DEWEY**

***1. Charles Sanders Pierce: Pragmatic Maxim, Moral Inquiry & Regulative Assumptions***
**1.1 Four Methods of Regulating Our Beliefs**

As we have seen, Pierce’s theory of truth is constructed based on the pragmatic maxim that constitutes the foundation of all pragmatic theories. More precisely, the pragmatic maxim is the principle that helps us to create a clear and reliable understanding of our concepts as well as the guideline of our conduct of thought toward the achievement of its purpose. It is the idea that ‘we must look to the upshots of our concepts to rightly apprehend them’ (CP 5.438, 1905). According to this position, the notion of truth is subject to the consequences of our ideas and beliefs as mirrored by our intentions and actions. If the practical application of a certain idea suggests that practicing X brings some positive implications and changes to a given society, then we can continue to practice X for as long as it corresponds to our needs, or until we find something new that better resolves our issues. As such, all pragmatists, regardless of their different approaches and definitions on issues concerning morality, begin with the proposition that to hold a belief as being true, we should first rightly apprehend an idea that is widely recognized and accepted as being such:‘A clear idea is defined as one which is so apprehended that it will be recognized wherever it is met with, and so that no other will be mistaken for it’ (CP 5.389, 1878).

After adopting the basic principle of pragmatism on how to conceive our ideas and beliefs, what comes next is the question of how to rightly regulate them. In his paper ‘The Fixation of Belief’ (1877), Pierce presents the four most common methods of establishing our beliefs, namely tenacity, authority, a priori rationalism and inquiry. Through a comparative argument, he suggests that when we consider the advantages and disadvantages of each method, we might conclude that inquiry can offer us the best solutions in comparison to the other approaches. The main reason for this, is that inquiry can offer practical and cognitive stability as it aims for the fixation of a belief that corresponds to both reason and evidence. Let us now have a closer look at Pierce’s conception of these four methods and understand what makes him favor that of inquiry.

To start with Tenacity, as Pierce notes, is a ‘simple and direct method… pursued by many men’ and the most common and straightforward method of securing one’s beliefs (CP 5.377, 1877). This is because when people in everyday life come across situations of doubt, rejection and criticism from others, attempt to secure their assumed beliefs through a constant denial of everything that contradicts them and through favoring anything that enhances them by invoking only certain sources of evidence. It is a method used intentionally by people who might overlook its weaknesses given that the favored belief has to be secured at any cost and has to overcome any kind of doubt or argument against it. As Pierce points out, the tenacious person, adopts a mindset of the following kind: ‘Why should we not attain the desired end [belief], by taking as the answer to a question anything we may fancy, and constantly reiterating it to ourselves, dwelling on all which may conduce to that belief, and learning to turn with contempt and hatred from anything that might disturb it?’ (CP 5.377, 1877). As such, tenacious methods of reasoning are primarily adopted by religious people: namely, people who are driven by the values that certain religions and systems of belief have been established. These established values and beliefs are so crucial and valuable that an irresistible defense and any support against anything that contradicts them is a sign of genuine faith and devotion. Thus, beliefs that have been acquired by such methods cannot correspond to our logic, scientific evidence and established knowledge since they do not carry the essential normativity and objectivity that we need to form truthful conclusions. Such beliefs can only correspond to the internal feelings and desires of the individuals who wish to fulfill their aspiration for a fabricated truth.

People who manage to recognize and overcome the weaknesses of the tenacious method might turn to the method of authority: namely, that which lets ‘the will of the state act, instead of that of the individual’ (CP 5.379, 1877). In our contemporary reality, institutions and authorities have the power to stamp out divergent views and opinions regarding a moral issue and to compensate for any doubts against them. For that reason, what authorities are meant to do is ‘to keep correct doctrines before the attention of the people, to reiterate them perpetually, and to teach them to the young’ (CP 5.379). They are, therefore, responsible for educating new generations regarding the rightness or wrongness of different actions and they set up the foundations of the appropriate stances and manners of behavior by forming norms, principles and laws that reflect them. However, the advantages of this method compared to that of tenacity are subject to the success of the given authority, considering that the more powerful the authority the more chances it has to ‘prevent contrary doctrines from being taught, advocated, or expressed’ as well as to achieve an evenness of moral consciousness and rightness (CP 5.379). Because of this, some less powerful or reliable authorities might likely mislead and misinform a society if they do not have the appropriate resources and advancements required to fulfill the needs of their community or if the aim is to advance their own interests. As such, the evidence provided by our authorities is not always the most trustworthy and it might not assist our formation of beliefs that are valid, truthful and compatible.

According to the Peircean outlook, the method of a priori rationalism is seen as the most intellectual and respectable one regarding its compatibility with reason and logic. Historically speaking, the method of a priori rationalism has been practised in the modern philosophy of metaphysics in which whole philosophical systems of truth are created by relying on reason itself: for example, Descartes’s a priori method of reaching infallible knowledge through innate and intellectual ideas of the sensible experience (Moriarty, 2008, pp.45-46). However, as Pierce notes, such Cartesian methods of truth promote the view that we should let the ‘action of natural preferences be unimpeded…and under their influence let men gradually develop beliefs in harmony with natural causes’ (CP 5.383, 1877). Hence, a priori rational systems have not been established because they embrace theories that reflect or correspond to the given facts of experience and reality but because ‘their fundamental propositions seemed to be agreeable to reason’ (CP 5.382). Nevertheless, from a pragmatic perspective, theories that do not rely on evidence should be discarded from our effort to secure a moral truth, given that they prioritize logic and nature over validation and experience and, thus, fail to correspond to the needs of a locally comprised reality.

 **1.2 The Method of Inquiry and the Limits of Experience**
Finally, according to the pragmatic stance, if we want to overcome the continuous doubt and uncertainty caused by all the aforementioned methods, we need to find a methodology that meets the standards of those who truly want to acquire beliefs and a system that can preserve them through time. This method is the one preferred by scientists, i.e. the scientific method or simply inquiry. For Pierce, by practicing inquiry ‘our beliefs may be determined by nothing human, but by some external permanency’, something which implies that our beliefs are regulated by external-objective factors and not by abstract theories that only correspond to so-assumed realities of how things - according to our nature and logic- should be (CP 5.384, 1877). In addition, Pierce admits that this method is based on assumptions that we must make if we want to escape the fallacies that the other methods create. To put it simply, the way that I conceive the basic idea by which the whole inquiry is constructed is as follows: There are real things out there, objective facts that are not affected by our individual views about them. These real things can affect us in ways that we can assume and predict according to our past experiences and rational thinking. This evidential predictability allows us to capture the way that things are only when perceived by someone with sufficient experience and reasoning. As such, our knowledge of the world is, and will always be, limited to the way that different facts relate to each other and limited to our given knowledge of apprehending and developing them.

Subsequently, the method of inquiry can offer a stability of beliefs and can safely guide our actions in the long run. All we must do before calling ourselves inquirers is to fully understand the strong connection between experience and inquiry and the limitations that this correlation carries. That is, we have to realize that, indeed, there is a truth out there but it is strongly attached to the context in which it was created and, consequently, is contingent upon a very certain setting. This point might create, to some, a sense of incapability and powerlessness to reach unconditional truths that can accommodate all the others. That is because, looking for something that can potentially offer a rounder and fuller interpretation of the truth, a more permanent way of understanding the facts around us, sounds more tempting and comforting. However, I argue that this not what we should be opting for. I find that it is better to accept the limitations of our rationality, perception and experience that can only offer notions of truths limited and attached to a context, time and historicity instead of confusing and misleading ourselves with ‘truths’ that sound more permanent and agree with logic but never correspond to our reality. As Pierce puts it: ‘The other methods do have their merits: a clear logical conscience does cost something – just as all that we cherish costs us dear. But we should not desire it to be otherwise’ (CP 5.387, 1877). Besides, we should also note that Pierce’s definition of experience is quite broad. He is not treating it as being limited to sensory experiences as some traditional empiricist views support but, rather, he is treating experience as something that challenges our past beliefs and viewpoints and transforms them into something else. He also notes that experience can be separated into two categories: internal and external. We could think of external experiences as those associated with smell, taste, sound, touch; meanwhile, internal experiences are the interpretation of the conceived external properties. In addition, we should also note that our beliefs are seen as strong habits that only break down when they are no longer responsive: ‘Belief…is a strong habit and, as such, forces the man to believe until some surprise breaks up the habit…due to some novel experience, whether external or internal’ (CP 5.524; 1905).

**1.3 Regulative Assumptions and the Principle of Bivalence**

When it comes to the tools of regulating our beliefs, Pierce, following Kant, supports the view that the principles of inquiry, what he calls the ‘regulative assumptions’ or ‘guiding principles’, are constructed in favor of accomplishing human aims and endeavors as they are a result of practicing human reasoning. However, Pierce does not agree with Kant’s assumption that we need transcendental ideas to regulate those principles, as he argues that they are determined by the actions and practices that the members of a society engage in, and so, any general factor (financial, cultural, social) might serve as a guiding principle: ‘Almost any fact may serve as a guiding principle’(CP 5.369; 1877). Pierce also points out that there is a certain kind of guiding principles that we must hold as necessary or pre-supposed before pursuing inquiry for matters of any kind (ethical, social, political). These kinds of principles are ‘necessarily taken for granted when asking why a certain conclusion is thought to follow from certain premises’(CP 5.369). They can, therefore, be thought of as logical or rational principles essential for guiding our thought. The remaining regulative assumptions are principles related to various objects of research and contexts and, therefore, they are not taken for granted. They are selected based on the project and the framework concerning us and whether they can contribute or not to the goals of our given inquiry. To illustrate, a medical community might turn to inquiry for a better understanding of AIDS while a Muslim society for an alternative interpretation of the Koran. Both medical and Muslim societies will need to apply the ‘rational’ principles of inquiry in order to form valid conclusions, but they will also need to consider some other principles that only correspond to their very community: e.g., non-malfeasance in the care and participation of individuals in the research of AIDS.

Besides, Pierce’s regulative principles are propositional and, so, they do not have the vague character that Kant’s transcendental ideas have. That is because their purpose is to make assumptions that license certain conclusions and not to make assumptions about entities and properties. This is how guiding principles avoid the issues of a priori rationalism and gain determinate content and character. Peirce’s view of regulative ideas, their nature, origin, etc., makes them ‘‘epistemically allowable’’ assumptions constructed to support our practices, which are determinate in content. However, regulative assumptions are not reflections of beliefs resulting from inquiry but provisional hypotheses that we accept as true in the hope for further inquiry. They are, in other words, established attitudes of right conduct and logical ways of reading the facts of reality (Christensen, 1994, pp.94-95). Fundamentally, the most essential principle included in the category of the pre-determined (rational) regulative assumptions is the principle of bivalence. It is the principle that we must adopt before our pursuit of any inquiry. This is because the aim of inquiry is to aspire to a truth that can only be obtained if we hold that propositions are either true or false and so, by assuming that every time we face an issue that makes us doubt or puts us in a dilemma, these doubts are caused by our belief that there is a certain answer to be reached on the matter at hand.

However, it could be said that in some cases this very basic principle of bivalence might not apply, as there might not be an available answer or a certain end to be reached. This last supposition, according to Pierce, implies that not all questions are (fully) appropriate for inquiry (CP 5.369, 1877). This is because we might not have enough evidence on a certain topic, or the right tools and the appropriate terminology to investigate it. It could also be that the issue concerning us cannot be fully explained yet, something resembling a paradox. Such questions are equivalent to questions of the kind ‘What are the boundaries of the Universe?’, questions that have not been answered by science. As such, the only thing that we can do for the time being is to compromise with our intuitions, instincts and common sense until we gain the experience and evidence needed to reach the desired answer. The way I would picture the Peircean model of pursuing inquiry is through the following simple steps: (1) one is searching for the truth concerning a particular question, (2) by doing so, one assumes that there is a truth/propositional answer regarding this question, and (3) if someone fails to reach a propositional answer to this question, there are two possibilities: It is either that the researcher has not reached the end of the inquiry yet, so she must continue with her investigation; or that her question is not appropriate for inquiry yet since the principle of bivalence is not applicable.

**1.4 Ethics as a Normative Science**

For the first thirty years of his career, Pierce categorized ethical questions among the ones inappropriate for inquiry. He originally held a position called ‘conservative sentimentalism’; namely, the view that we should leave reason and logic to one side and trust our human sentiments and instincts when we are considering topics of vital importance, such as ethical matters (Pierce, 1992, p.121). As Kent also points out, at this stage Pierce ‘had not yet made any attempt to bring logic and ethics together under the umbrella of the normative sciences’ (Kent, 1987, p.106). In those days, ethics was separate from philosophy as the former was a branch of the practical sciences which investigated experience in more contextual and temporary terms; something akin to art, which lacks any scientific aspects; while the latter, was a branch of the theoretical sciences, which investigated experience in broader terms and followed the steps of the scientific method. ‘Philosophy seems to consist of two parts: logic and metaphysics. I exclude ethics, for two reasons. In the first place, as the science of the end and aim of life (ethics) seems to be exclusively psychical, and therefore to be confined to a special department of experience, while philosophy studies experience in its universal characteristics. In the second place, in seeking to define the proper aim of life, ethics seems to me to rank with the arts’ (Pierce, 1992, pp. 115-6).

Despite this, in a later paper, Pierce defined ethics as a normative science along with aesthetics and logic. Ethics is now considered the study of the good as being practiced while logic is the study of the good as being thought. However, for Pierce, the study of ethics is not concerned with the classification of actions as good or bad but with the investigation of what it is to be good or bad (CP 1.191, 1903). This is because the sciences are not responsible for solving categorical issues such as the distribution of objects and, therefore, ethics cannot be portrayed as the science of rightness and wrongness given that these terms are developed and justified contingently. As he puts it: ‘We are too apt to define ethics to ourselves as the science of right and wrong. That cannot be correct, for the reason that right and wrong are ethical conceptions which it is the business of science to develop and to justify. A science cannot have for its fundamental problem the distribution of objects among categories of its own creation’ (CP 2.198, 1903). It is also sensible to assume that, at this point, Pierce’s view of ethics is not limited to practics or applied ethics. Ethics becomes the philosophical study of what things ought to be and not just a practical evaluation of what decisions we should make when dealing with moral dilemmas. If we now recall Pierce's original view of ethics, we can understand his denial of making it a serious topic of inquiry. His conception of ethical truths as conceptual and context-dependent, related to experience in narrow terms, suggests that what is true is subject to individual sentiments and judgments; something that, in its turn, makes the results of inquiry more composite and unclear.

However, his later advancement of ethics to the theoretical and normative sciences alongside logic and aesthetics suggests that our aesthetic experiences are what guide our ethical interests as the study of both ethics and aesthetics belongs to the branch of axiology - that is, the study of ideals and value judgments viz. experiences of goodness, viciousness, ugliness and beauty - while logic is what comes later to clear out these conclusions by growing our ‘ultimate aesthetic ideals’; namely, the expansion of our sensibilities and wisdom of the world. These ultimate aesthetic ideals increase our reasoning and rationality and grow our ‘concrete reasonableness’; namely, what enables us to distinguish our abstract aesthetic assumptions from our ethical evaluations (CP 1.615, 1903). For instance, Darwin’s discovery that all organisms evolve and change over time to adapt to their environments constitutes a growth in our concrete reasonableness as it enhances our grasp of reality. This aesthetic end is what ethics will examine with the following question: ‘What is it so admirable in Darwin’s description of evolution?’. The answer that ethics will give to this question will establish the guiding principle or right conduct and direction, and what kind of attitudes will promote the growth of our reasoning and rationality in the future, as well as the actions that can take us closer to or further from our ‘aesthetic ideals’. Other than this, the project of determining what values can serve as the end of concrete reasonableness is not explored further by Pierce. Thus, according to Pierce’s empiricist thesis, the figuration of the required guiding principles for every moral inquiry is made in purely naturalistic terms as it is determined only by our conducts and practices.  ***2. William James: Pluralism of Truth and Moral Sentimentalism***

**2.1 On Moral Inquiry**

William James starts off his pragmatic investigation of morality by setting up the question of: 'What is the position of he who seeks an ethical philosophy?' and answers in a way that reminds us of Pierce. More specifically, he portrays the moral philosopher as an anti-skeptic thinker, committed to the pursuit of inquiry that presupposes the existence of facts that can be objectified and truths that can be accepted as such by the wider community. James shows his objection against global skepticism by stating that: ‘so far from ethical skepticism being one possible fruit of ethical philosophizing, it can only be regarded as that residual alternative to all philosophy which, from the outset, menaces every would-be philosopher’ (James, 1979, p.141). James, therefore, seems to reject the idea that our beliefs are not subject to justification as he argues that the would-be philosopher should not start his philosophizing for the sake of generating doubts regarding moral facts but, rather, he should start by observing the existing correlations between different moral events; events that cannot be reduced to metaphysical claims regarding the nature of morality.

Regarding the progression of inquiry, James, like Pierce, takes into serious consideration the principle of bivalence as he holds that for a subject matter to become an actual topic of investigation, it is essential to make sure that the conclusions we form are propositional and subject to truthfulness or falseness independently of whether or not universal and absolute truths can potentially exist. As he notes: ‘When empiricists give up the doctrine of objective certitude, they do not thereby give up the quest or hope of truth itself. They still pin their faith on its existence, and still believe that they gain an even better position toward it by systematically continuing to roll up experience and think’ (1979, pp. 23-4). Hence, according to the Jamesian pragmatism, experience is more than central and crucial in our elevation and process of inquiry, given that the aim of inquiry is to reach a certain truth through the means of knowledge and rational thinking and, so, any method other than inquiry can only mislead or delay our original goals. As such, James’s pragmatic attitude toward the process of inquiry seems to not only be compatible with empiricist views on reality but also with a phenomenological outlook on experience as it highlights the limitation and local character of truths and the interpretational-discretional character of the experienced facts through his denial of global skepticism and absolute truths.

**2.2 ‘Personal Truths’ and A-Priori Beliefs**
Furthermore, despite our initial impression that James’s pragmatic ideas regarding the topics of morality and the methods of inquiry seem to derive from Pierce’s thoughts and work, we will subsequently realize that his project of pragmatism and his views on experience are developed in a more diverse way compared to the original. So far, James, following Pierce, takes the tools of the scientific method seriously and emphasizes the data and facts offered by experience. Moreover, his conception of experience is as collective as Pierce’s is, given that he underlines the impact of our communal views and interpretations of the future inquiries. However, when he is called to answer metaethical questions regarding the meaning of terms such as ‘good’, ‘mandatory’ or ‘responsibility’, he argues that all social ‘oughts’ can be reduced/traced to the internal and individual feelings of the people experiencing them (Talisse & Hester, 2004, p.68). According to this position, our ethical vocabularies are not taken as reflections of the objective values and general truths that all members of a society share. All our moral terms and definitions can correspond to is the genuine feelings, desires and attitudes as represented in the minds of different individuals. It is, therefore, our subjective experiences of moral facts and events that construct the general moral framework of the world, as well as our direct reprehension and understanding of such experiences.

Additionally, in a later paper called ‘The Will To Believe’ (1896), James extends the Piercean assumption that only certain types of (propositional) questions can constitute the base of an inquiry into the assumption that there are some beliefs that we can form without evidence or verification. These beliefs, which are not subject to experiential evidence, are formed by judgments that require a level of analysis that goes well beyond our limited experience of the moral issue. For that reason, he provides the naturalistic thesis that our moral judgments occur by a priori cerebral structures related to our brain that are formed before our perception of experiences related to moral values. As such, he is reducing our psychological states, attitudes and preferences to purely naturalistic terms e.g. a preference for a certain kind of music is subject to a brain structure X or a passion for football subject to a brain structure Y, etc., and he argues that: ‘They are incidental complications to our cerebral structure whose original features arose with no reference to the perception of…discords and harmonies’ (1979, p.143). The problem here is obvious. James starts off his pragmatic journey with an aim to continue and embrace the work of the establisher Pierce by espousing some of his most basic ideas, including anti-skepticism, the principle of bivalence and method of inquiry. However, in his attempt to explain our experiences of morality as well as our moral terminology, he loses focus by putting great emphasis on our ethical involvement as individuals with complicated brain structures, interests and desires. As such, he ends up neglecting the significance of the collective and communal consciousness in the investigation of moral issues and our need for maximally inclusive and homogenic societies, something which results in a misinterpretation of the pragmatic ambitions.

Indeed, we can argue that pragmatists think of experience as the most fundamental source of evidence; nevertheless, they prioritize their focus on the outcomes of our individual experiences to the totality of the society and not our personal truths and moral interests. As Heney puts it: ‘It may sound odd to praise pragmatism as a philosophy that takes experience seriously and then claim that James goes too far by taking the needs of individuals so seriously - but where he goes too far is in mischaracterizing what satisfies the needs of an individual as “personal truth”’(Heney, 2014, p.64). As such, the reason why pragmatists like Pierce prefer to concentrate on the collective factor instead of the individual is simple. It is because they want to keep inquiry motivated and make sure that they will be able to secure a final and general conclusion, even when this general conclusion does not precisely reflect the people of a society individually. Therefore, the ambitions of inquiries are not of an intellectual or psychological enterprise as they do not opt to debunk the human brain like James attempted to do. All inquirers want to do is find the kind of answers and solutions that mostly capture and satisfy the general picture of a society, and correspond to its needs and switches of focus.

***3. John Dewey: Instrumentalism and the Importance of Social Habits*****3.1 Social ‘Oughts’ and Value Judgments**John Dewey, following Pierce and James, defines experience in broad and collective terms as he also recognizes the importance of focusing on the way that the wider community experiences different moral events. In his ethical examination of the relations between the community institutions and the life of individuals, he supports the view that a pragmatically organized society has the power to strengthen individuals. That is because the application of scientific inquiry in our everyday lives creates wider and more pluralistic societies, always open to revision, new ways of living and new approaches to management and coordination (Dewey, 1978, p. 386). More specifically, Dewey’s version of pragmatism, also called instrumentalism or cultural naturalism, is constructed on a Darwinian worldview. Dewey, influenced by Darwin’s theory of natural selection, perceived knowledge as a product of human activity that is arrived at empirically and not metaphysically, and that functions as an instrument for fulfilling our human needs (Dewey, 2016, pp.1-6). Through his pragmatic theory, Dewey, like Pierce, tried to escape the metaphysical foundationalism of modern philosophy and tried to create a philosophical system free from technical and intellectual terms that, as he argues, can only decenter and mislead us from the actual aims of philosophy (Dewey, 1908, pp. 85-99).

Consequently, regarding ethics, he treats moral theories as organized systems with sets of methods that can effectively help us to define and overcome the moral challenges of everyday life and handle all the situations in which we struggle to decide what actions we should take. His ethical conceptions contradict moral theories that aim for absolute goals and treat moral principles as ultimate ends like Aristotelian ethicists do: ‘that which is always desirable in itself and never for the sake of something else’(Nicomachean Ethics, 1097a30-34). Contrary to this, Dewey prefers to turn his focus to our value judgments - judgments of right and wrong - and the ways in which we can improve and enhance them. Value judgments are the instruments that direct our conduct and replace our existing habits with new ones once it is recognized that they have become dysfunctional. These judgments, according to the philosopher, are always social and shared since they are resulting from our collective experiences of goodness and badness: ‘It’s always shared; this is the difference between it and a physiological process. It is not an ethical “ought” that conduct should be social. It is social, whether bad or good’(Dewey, 1922, HNC, MW14: 16). So, for Dewey, the best method to evaluate the functionality and quality of our moral judgments is by putting them into practice and checking their actual outcomes**.**

**3.2 Habits, Inferences and the Regulation of Principles**Dewey aimed to associate and develop his notion of habit with the Peircean model of regulative assumptions by arguing that our inferences (as ruled by our habits) are reflected in regulative principles. His basic assumption is the following: all the inferences we make result from a pattern of habits as practiced and developed by the individuals of a certain community; such inferences are related to any social subject matter, from a moral issue concerning abortion to a political issue concerning healthcare. Dewey’s view on habits, I think, makes a strong point on how our inferences constitute our present and future realities as he argues that they are not passive but energetic boundaries that do not limit but rather promote our actions toward the desired directions. They have the power to constitute our social norms and institutions and become formulations contained in guiding principles and laws once they are accepted by the community as such: ‘When it is found that there are habits involved in every inference, despite differences of subject matter, and when these habits are noted and formulated, then the formulations are guiding or leading principles’ (Dewey, 1986, pp.19-21). Moreover, if we consider the limits and context-dependency of our experience, we will realize that since these habits are developed within the parameters of a certain community, they are constructed in a way that corresponds and reflects this very experience and reality. For that reason, Dewey characterizes these principles as ‘operationally a priori with respect to further inquiry’; namely, a priori principles, in the sense of pre-establishment and not irrelevant to experience, that are essential for the continuum of the inquiry (1986, p.20). Also, he notes that these principles are subject to becoming a posteriori at one stage of the inquiry and a priori at another, given the interchangeable and technological nature of human reality; e.g., our increased habit to engage and normalize homosexual relationships leads to the promotion of homosexuality as a new ‘social ought’ and the inference that legalizing homosexual marriage is essential for maintaining a harmonious and reflective society.

So far, Dewey’s interpretation of regulative principles seems to correspond to the Peircean model. It could also be said that his conception of regulative assumptions is closer to Pierce compared to that of James, given that the Deweyan principles remain assumptions that are never finalized, and become so only based on the current evidence, while, as we saw, James supports the notion that some beliefs can constitute the base of our moral principles without being subject to justification and evidence. Other than this, the most problematic point of Dewey’s version of pragmatism and the reason why, once again, we should stick with Pierce’s version of truth, is that it fails to classify regulative principles as ‘logical’ and ‘conceptual’; that is, to make Pierce’s distinction of principles necessary for the process of all inquiries and principles locally/conceptually necessary for inquiries of specific topics referring to a specific community. Dewey, mistakenly assumed that all regulative assumptions belong to the first category, given that our principles should not be subject to particular issues and inquiries as they are ‘free from connection with any particular subject’. (1986, p. 21).

At this point, one could think that Dewey is taking a different approach to the classification of regulative assumptions or that he simply prefers to use a solid unified taxonomy of the pragmatic principles. However, if we consider Dewey’s importance of inquiry in our regulation of social habits as being captured in regulative assumptions, his rejection of local principles contradicts his views on experience. If, indeed, there are initial inquires that lead to the production of new habits, habits that build the foundations for new principles and subsequently become the base for future inquiries, then it is only sensible to assume that the local subject matters of the initial inquiries do play a significant role on the origination of such principles. In a few words, Dewey commits the same mistake as James, but in reverse. This is because Dewey rejects the existence of locally necessary truths and, therefore, principles that only reflect certain communities, while James claims that some of our necessary truths are constructed based on unjustifiable beliefs deriving from individual aims and desires.

**II. MORAL NEO-PRAGMATISM: RORTY, PUTNAM & QUINE**

***4. Richard Rorty: Moral Particularity, Utility of Truth and Pleasant Beliefs***
**4.1 The Notion of Truth and the Rejection of Moral Normativity**

In contrast to Pierce or Dewey, who used pragmatism as a method of regulating our beliefs, Rorty saw pragmatism as a therapeutic tool that can transform our theories of truth, given that pragmatists emphasize the ever-changing character and the practical utility of terms such as ‘true’, ‘false’, ‘good’ and ‘bad’ (Rorty, 1991, p.22). For Rorty, the word ‘truth’ is not metaphysical but practical as its main goal is not to make an ontological claim about the nature of a widely accepted belief but to associate that belief with our currently held views on a certain topic (1998, p.54). It could be said that Rorty’s consequentialist thesis on the necessity of a pragmatic theory in our definitions of morality derives from his theory of language, in which he talks about a freedom of vocabulary. The philosopher thinks that we should have a positive attitude to the introduction of new terminologies if we consider that their role is purely descriptive and illustrative. That is, their aims are to describe and express a view on a certain topic as being endorsed and reflected by a given community. Therefore, it is sensible to assume that every time we notice changes to our perception regarding an issue, it is necessary to test and evaluate the functionality of our current beliefs to make sure that they reflect our current or future objectives regarding where we are right now and where we want to be in the future. These descriptive vocabularies also aim to enhance and strengthen our general ambition to become better humans in the course of history and time (Rorty, 1995, pp.125-48).Rorty’s work on pragmatism is connected to the Jamesian version of truth since his conception of the pragmatic maxim is based on the fundamental idea that our concepts regarding the nature of our beliefs, decisions and ways of living do not overcome our actual practices, actions and ways of being (1995, p.71). For that reason, in his paper ‘Philosophy and Social Hope’, Rorty writes that our moral judgments and norms should not be reduced to a priori terms since their justifications are not relevant to our human nature or a certain human essence, and so we should not construct and develop our moral systems in order to fulfill the needs of abstract and rational notions as conceived by ancient or modern philosophers (Rorty, 1999, p.73). By extension, Rorty also argues that our moral inquiries should not be grounded on intellectual theories and absolute notions of the truth since there is no de facto difference between embracing a belief and embracing a justified belief. That is because our beliefs become justified based on a certain epistemological reality and not a general authenticity considering that knowledge is thought of as ‘a matter of what practices of justification are adopted by one’s peers’ (Rorty, 1979, p.99). This position suggests a lack of epistemological normativity and is reflected in a thesis that Rorty called cultural or social ‘epistemological behaviorism’, that is, the view that our judgments are not subject to justification *per se* because they become true or false based on other statements, which in turn cannot be ‘finally’ justified (Rorty, 1976, p.176)*.*

 **4.2 Moral Consequentialism: Beliefs as Useful and Pleasant**

So, the moral statements that we embrace as true are not such because they are reduced to a rational and evidential norm of truth, but they are such because they are reduced to another moral statement, which for instrumental and technical reasons we accept as being true. As he puts it, ‘There is nothing deep down inside us except what we have put there ourselves, no criterion that we have not created in the course of creating a practice, no standard of rationality that is not an appeal to such a criterion, no rigorous argumentation that is not obedience to our own conventions’ (Baynes, Bohman and McCarthy, 1987, p.60). As a result, Rorty’s particularistic and loose definition of truth is what forces him to replace the term ‘objectivity’ with ‘agreement’ or ‘arrangement’ for the sake of a fruitful inquiry (1991, pp. 36-38). However, I find that Rorty’s definition of truth influenced by James’s emphasis on the subjective experience of beliefs creates a sense of convenience and irresponsibility in our crucial classifications of goodness and badness. As James Pratt puts it, ‘The Jamesian pragmatism seeks to prove the truth of religion by its good and satisfactory consequences. Here, however, a distinction must be made, namely between the “good” harmonious, and logically confirmatory consequences of religious concepts as such, and the good and pleasant consequences which come from believing these concepts. It is one thing to say a belief is true because the logical consequences that flow from it fit in harmoniously with our otherwise grounded knowledge; and quite another to call it true because it is pleasant to believe’ (Pratt, 1909, pp.186-7). Pratt’s comment on the differences between ‘logical’ and ‘pleasant’ beliefs is very useful for making more prominent the philosophical dissimilarities not only between Pierce and Rorty but primarily between Pierce and James. What makes a belief true, according to Pierce, is the belief’s harmonious and logical compatibility with the established knowledge, while for James and Rorty, what is true depends on the degree of convenience and pleasantness of a belief as well as its contribution to our self-satisfaction.

It could be said that the epistemological methodologies of James and Rorty remind us of the method of tenacity. That is, we do not establish our beliefs based on observational facts that harmoniously fit with the standards of logic and approved knowledge but based on our preferences and desire for truthfulness and rightness. However, I state again that for the process of inquiry to be accurate, productive and fruitful, we should stick with Pierce’s thesis that our conclusions follow from logical consequences and are subject to the established knowledge. This is because the only way to reach an end that can effectively take us from one point to another is to do it in collective and objective terms.In short, Rorty’s engagement with the pragmatic tradition is quite intense and he seems to embrace many of its features. His denial of a fixed human essence and his argument that ‘it is impossible to step outside our skins—the traditions, linguistic and other, within which we do our thinking and self-criticism’ are very important starting points (Rorty, 1982, p.7). As Elijah Dann also notes, ‘Rorty's beginning point in his treatment of ethics, questioning the usefulness of extrinsic and intrinsic definitions of human nature, is a good place to start in the critique of traditional ethical theory’ (Dann, 2010, p. 81). However, Rorty loses his pragmatic spirit when he argues that our governing norms are not subject to science and objectivity but that our choices replace the notionof ‘scientific norm’ with that which is most useful for human purposes, interests and desires. And as we have seen in the case of James, there seems to be nothing pragmatic on a theory that does not take scientific inquiry and the emphasis on evidential objective facts seriously.

***5. Hilary Putnam: A Pragmatic Debunk of Moral Subjectivity*

5.1 Pragmatic Pluralism and Moral Objectivity**

In his ‘Pragmatism and Moral Objectivity’, Hilary Putnam sets up the issue of objective moral truths and beliefs. In his effort to prove their attainability, he turns to the pragmatic literature with a focus on the philosophical work of Dewey and his notion of instrumentalism. However, as he points out, ‘turning to American pragmatism does not mean turning to a metaphysical theory’ (Putnam, 1996, p.203). And so, Putnam’s engagement with the tradition of American pragmatism is not related to pragmatism’s systematization of truth as a product of scientific inquiry, but rather to the group of philosophical positions that can potentially be exercised and embraced by philosophers of different backgrounds and concerns. Thus, for Putnam, we must take on board the epistemological values and approaches to truth of Pierce, James and Dewey in our advancement of what he called ‘pragmatic enlightenment’ (Putnam, 2004, pp.89–108). In his book ‘Words and Life’, Putnam notes some of the most important values held by pragmatists. These are: i) anti-skepticism: the idea that if our beliefs need justification then our doubts need to be justified too; ii) fallibilism: the view that our established beliefs are always subject to revision since they cannot offer a de facto metaphysical permanency and not because we lack knowledge or full justification (I should note here that pragmatism’s ability to include fallibilism and anti-skepticism under the same umbrella is probably its most unique feature); iii) rejection of the fact-value distinction of what things are and what things ought to be, given that our values are subject to a context; and finally iv) practicism: the idea that our actions are more crucial than our theories in our attempt to illustrate experience (Putnam, 1994, p.152).
In ‘Pragmatism and Moral Objectivity’, Putnam starts off by admitting that the differences between mathematical and ethical theories are obvious and irreconcilable, considering that the number of accepted doctrines regarding a set theory is high while for an ethical theory it is very low and diverse. The reason for this is that sciences are concerned with facts while ethics is concerned with values, a detail that to some might suggest that pragmatism’s application of scientific inquiry in the area of ethics is out of place if we consider that values are not subject to justification. Contrary to this, as Putnam perfectly argues, pragmatism’s adoption of the Quinan ‘indispensability argument’—roughly, the dependence of truth on mathematical objects—and the focus on objective facts as the only source of inquiry does not imply that pragmatists overlook the relativist nature of ethics or that they fail to see the inconsistency of moral judgments between the members of a certain society (Putnam, 1996, p.203). All it suggests is that for the pragmatist, moral disagreements are not seen as metaphysical issues subject to one certainty, but rather they are seen as political issues that challenge our perceptions of the established value judgments and moral laws. These moral issues are thought of as political on the basis that they stay within the limits of a certain community and they only refer to the policies, institutions and acceptable ways of living in this specific context. They are, as Putnam following Dewey puts it, ‘the stimulus to the kind of criticism of institutions and values that is needed for progress towards justice and progress in enabling citizens to live in accordance with their various conceptions of the good life’ (1996, p.204).

 **5.2 Moral Principles and Reflection**

As such, I contend that Putnam’s pragmatic anticipation of morality is what should start dominating contemporary philosophy. That is because pragmatists have managed to debunk the view that our subjective interpretations of goodness and badness, our incompatible opinions on how one should be, stand as an obstacle to our well-being and cooperation. For Putnam, and consequently for the pragmatist, typical procedures and formations of values used to back up a system of basic formal laws do not exist to command or monopolize our self-choices but to protect the autonomy and wellness of all the members of a society. Therefore, our moral principles do not aim to point out rightness and wrongness, but they aim to regulate and protect our views of what is right and wrong - if we also recall Pierce’s argument that the science of ethics is not concerned with object distribution. Such principles also protect our regulative idea that what we should morally strive for is to replace and enhance the hierarchic relations and regulations of our institutions based on a ‘symmetric reciprocity’, namely a mutual ground of our observations and visions regarding the future of a community. Therefore, I claim, that prima facie ethical conceptions of the kind ‘LGBT adoption is morally wrong’ have nothing to offer in our regulation and enhancement of institutions and moral laws that defend all individual. The only thing that such conceptions can do, is to delay the effort of rearranging and readjusting our values and institutions for the shake of social stability, health and prosperity. In other words, my point here is that our moral laws are not made to categorically command a certain kind of conduct but to create conditions and umbrellas under which different kinds of conduct are safeguarded. This view suggests that the pragmatist’s scientific inquiry or philosophical study of ethics is used as the moral guideline toward the truths that according to our evidence and experience can bring the most advantages to the society.

Correspondingly, Putnam notes that our ethical notions and norms cannot be reduced to naturalistic terms as ‘we invent moral words for morally relevant features of situations, which lead to further refinements of our moral notions’ (Putnam, 1981, p.144). His conclusion that our moral norms are ‘custom-made’ reminds us of Pierce. That is because both philosophers agree on the fact that the constitution of moral principles aims to regulate a society and so, it is not possible to justify them instrumentally as they are custom-made by an agent for the agent himself. However, the question remains of how we can finalize our norms and principles if a complete instrumental justification is not available. Putnam’s answer to this question is that we should opt for reflection rather than for an instrumental justification or any other alternative transcendental type of knowledge. As he puts it, ‘Norms like the estimated utility rule were not discovered by mere trial and error, but by normative reflection on our practice. Kant was right in urging us to realize that reflection on the possibility of gaining knowledge from experience is itself a source of knowledge, even if he was wrong in considering it to be an infallible source (when properly conducted)’ (1981, p.217). Therefore, Putnam with his notion of reflection avoids a puzzle of normative knowledge that derives from a very narrow view of how we acquire knowledge and justification of actions. As such, questions of the type ‘how can we guarantee that our beliefs are true?’ are of a metaphysical nature and have no answer. The reason for this is not that we do not share and embrace facts and truths regarding experience but that our embracing of such experiences only reflects the ways in which we acquire and constitute our knowledge. Hence, for once again, we conclude that the limitations of experience and the dependence on the chain of facts do not let us speak about a truth in absolute terms.

***6. Quine: Holism, Observational Sentences and Epistemological Pragmatism***

Finally, it is worth noting that features of pragmatism can also be found in the work of W.V. Quine and, more specifically, in his ‘Two Dogmas of Empiricism’, in which he states that science can be used as a tool for regulating our experience and behavior on the basis of our past experiences. As he notes, ‘as an empiricist I continue to think of the conceptual scheme of science as a tool, ultimately for predicting our future experience in the light of past experience. Physical objects are conceptually imported into the situation as convenient intermediaries—not by definitions in terms of experience, but simply as irreducible posits comparable, epistemologically, to the god of Homer’ (Quine, 1980, p.44). This empiricist position is what Quine originally established as ‘holism’, namely the view that our whole system of beliefs should be thought of as interrelated webs of past and present facts and events that are always under continuous investigation and revision. Influenced by Dewey, Quine also pointed out that our ethical views are considered crucial components of our interpretation of this web of beliefs because, along with art, science and politics, they constitute its formation. Therefore, for Quine, our moral judgments are seen as what he called ‘observational sentences’ and they are subject to our direct observation of physical objects and not subject to the truth of other sentences, as Rorty argued. Moreover, Quine notes that an observational sentence is the only way to find out whether a piece of information is true or false and so, the justification of a sentence such as ‘the sky is blue’ is only available to those who can observe and witness the sky and unjustifiable to those who cannot observe it. As he puts it, ‘observational sentences are distinguished from others by a behavioural criterion, involving no probing of sensations. For this is characteristic of them: witnesses will agree on the spot in applying an observation term, or in assenting to an observation sentence’ (Quine, 2008, p.230).Quine’s naturalistic pragmatism, which opens up the possibility of our moral statements being thought of as provisional and observational, is based on the view that ‘there is no Archimedean point of cosmic exile from which to leverage our theory of the world’ and the idea that it is necessary to set up a group of epistemic criteria—including that of scientific norms—in order to constitute our beliefs in our justification of propositions as true or false (Leiter, 1997, p.1749). For that reason, his definition of human epistemology is associated with Neurath’s metaphor of a ship. That is, we are like sailors crossing the sea unable to interrupt our journey and stop in a dry dock to fix its damaged parts and so, we can only fix it with the tools and utensils we have available within the ship. With respect to this analogy, in his ‘Theories and Things’, Quine writes the following: ‘the naturalistic philosopher begins his reasoning within the inherited world theory as a going concern. He tentatively believes all of it, but believes also that some unidentified portions of it are wrong. He tries to improve, clarify and understand the system from within’ (Quine, 1981, p.72). At this point I find that there is a parallel between the Quinan epistemology and Pierce’s articulation of pragmatism. That is, the idea that it is impossible to step outside our shoes and change or improve the conditions of our reality and that the only thing we can do is to keep going by maintaining our established beliefs until a new non-expected belief puts them into doubt. Then, we should revise them until we have another, better, more settled belief upon which to rely. Thus, I find that Quine’s articulation of epistemology makes more prominent the pragmatic assumption that our established principles and judgments have the same amount of acceptability and endorsement by the people experiencing them despite that they are never ‘perfect’, but rather subject to revision and re-assessment throughout time. As Martin Benjamin puts it, ‘an imperfect, but serviceable ship is better than none at all’ (Benjamin, 2005, p.23).

**III. ETHICAL PRAGMATISM IN CONTEMPORARY DEBATES: A CRITICAL EVALUATION**
 **7. A Short Review**
What have we gained so far? I would start by mentioning the realization that the question ‘what is pragmatic ethics?’ has no clear answer. That is because a decision about whether a pragmatic ethical theory is possible is elusive if we consider that pragmatism is not a doctrine constructed based on a set of principles and there is no single, solid and independent formulation of a pragmatic theory upon which to rely. Pragmatists do not believe in the pursuit of a specified theory of truth, given that ‘theorizing is not prior to or independent of experience, but (rather) grows out and is part of experience’ and given that all experienced events acquire their meaning based on a context and so, the more ‘contextual experiences’, the more ethical theories to reflect them (LaFollette, 2000, p. 418). Accordingly, for the time being, it is better to define pragmatism as a method of improving our content and understanding of the already established theories and a tool for increasing our awareness of the moral, instead of defining it as a moral theory as such. If we do so, the notions of habit and deliberation will become primary in our conception and interpretation of the moral life, notions used by people every day and notions that moral philosophers tend to address with terms such as ‘kind’, ‘virtue’, ‘dilemma’, ‘decision’, ‘tendency’. Besides, considering that pragmatists build their theories based on experience and not on pre-established norms of right conduct, our principles of rightness and wrongness are attained through practicing deliberation and the likely consequences that this deliberation brings in practice as well as through our capacity to espouse certain patterns of behavior and actions in our course of experience. Subsequently, pragmatism’s articulation of beliefs, ideas, habits and constituted principles is quite radical and progressive if we consider its assumption that such notions are caused by experience and nothing is pre-given. The chain is as follows: our beliefs regarding reality are determined by our conceptions of the current experienced phenomena and our conceptions are determined by our past life experiences of how one should think and act.

Additionally, as we have seen, despite the communal embracing of pragmatic values, such as the emphasis on our habits and our interpretation of actions in the formation of moral norms, we might find that there are many philosophical variations between pragmatists themselves, such as Pierce and James. These variations are what led many contemporary scholars to build their own articulations and versions of pragmatism by focusing on one thinker, without saying that it is impossible to take into consideration the work of other pragmatists. For this dissertation, I decided to focus on the original formulation of pragmatism, namely that of Pierce. The main reason for this is that Pierce’s formulation of pragmatism (as I argue in the next section) seems to fulfill the standards of moral objectivity and moral cognitivism. Besides, his version of pragmatism provides us with ways not only to address but also to solve our ethical problems because his broad definition of experience takes very seriously the way that individuals apprehend the moral phenomena. This broad definition is very useful for the productiveness of our moral inquiries since what usually causes moral conflicts are the divergent experiences of the individuals of a community, conflicts that those moral inquiries can solve by preserving a truth that will satisfy the largest possible part of the community. However, in our effort to do so, it is necessary to assume that every proposition we make has strictly one truth value and that our statements are either true or false (principle of bivalence). Then, we will be able to construct some moral guiding principles in the form of regulative assumptions distinct from the principles that we typically find in other normative theories.**8*. Towards Moral Cognitivism and Moral Objectivity*****8.1 Moral Cognitivism VS Moral Non-Cognitivism**Our contemporary everydayness consists of us forming metaethical questions and assertions regarding moral phenomena. In our moral discourses, we may agree or disagree on the interpretation of such phenomena and this is why every one of us is trying to persuade others of the rightness of our moral conclusions, as well as to measure the truth or falsity of other people’s judgments. Independently of what type of reasoning one follows, there is a common ground in this exchange of moral facts and ideas, namely our mutual need to communicate and share our concepts of morality to find a common place at which to get along and go along. It is our wish to structure a moral reality that will in turn structure our societies and institutions. However, to do so, we should start by answering the following fundamental metaethical question: Where should we place the notion of truth in our discussion of morality? In this section I examine whether moral truths—from a pragmatic perspective—are classifiable as true or false and whether or not the doctrine of pragmatism fulfills the standard of what a realist, objective and cognitive moral theory should consist of.

To begin with, non-cognitivism—following error-theory—is the metaethical position that our moral statements, properties and facts do not exist, given that our propositions do not include truth conditions and they are not subject to truth and falsity. This rejection of truth-aptness has a linguistic or psychological background, if not both. Non-cognitivists concerned with the linguistic background of statements argue that our moral sentences are tools of speech that help us to achieve verbal communication and not predicates of our experience and reality. On the other hand, non-cognitivists concerned with the psychological background of statements argue that our moral sentences express psychological attitudes towards an issue in the form of approval or disapproval and not beliefs, facts and truths of a cognitive enterprise. As such, moral sentences here are seen as reflections of the internal desires of individuals and not externally verified beliefs. On the contrary, cognitivism is the rejection of non-cognitivism. According to cognitivists, our moral statements are expressions of beliefs that are truth-apt and can be either classified as true or false independently of one’s desires and subjective views on a moral topic. Subsequently, in order to check if pragmatism’s version of truth is compatible with moral cognitivism, we should recall the pragmatic assumption that our conceptions of reality derive from objective and empirical facts that are common to everyone. As Heney writes: ‘pragmatism’s experience of the phenomenology of moral judgment is of a cognitive enterprise, our assessment of such judgments as expressed in both private deliberation and public discourse hold moral assertions up to a norm of truth’ (Heney, 2014, p.111). Therefore, we can argue that our pragmatic experience of moral phenomena is reduced to moral judgments that express cognitive propositions whose truthfulness or falsity is subject to a moral principle. Thus, when we investigate the validity of the sentence ‘stealing is wrong’ what we investigate is not the way in which different individuals feel and think about the act of stealing, but the independent way in which the truth has been formulated and established within the limits of a certain society.

 **8.2 Pragmatic Cognitivism About Moral Beliefs and Moral Judgments**

How do we formulate and establish objective and cognitive moral truths? As I have already argued in earlier sections, pragmatists treat moral hypotheses in the same way that scientists treat scientific hypotheses. So, if we assume thatscientists in their pursuit of evidence for a hypothesis do not rest on beliefs that have been endorsed with unscientific and irrational ways and that unsystematic observations do not offer concrete solutions to the given hypothesis, then we can also assume that moral pragmatists are not seeking beliefs just for the sake of forming a conclusion, but they are seeking solutions that, besides satisfying the public opinion, can potentially correspond to our experience, evidence and established knowledge. As the neo-pragmatist Misak puts it, ‘the pragmatist does not think that our aim in moral and political deliberation is agreement for agreement’s sake or for impartiality’s sake. What matters to us is that…we reach the belief that is the best belief, and we call that kind of belief true’ (Misak, 2000, p.145). Thus, a belief such as ‘gravity is the force that holds earth together’, which corresponds to our scientific evidence and experience is no more or less objective than the moral belief that ‘slavery is an ethically impermissible act’ as this belief also corresponds to the evidence and experience of different societies and cultures. That is because, from our empirical observations, even in the most non-homogenic societies there is always an outstanding determined belief that dominates the views concerning a particular case or concept.

Therefore, our scientific judgment of gravity and our moral judgment of slavery present similar signs of truth: they are both steady, resistant to what future experiences might hold, and safeguarded by any social objections against them. That is, objections that we do not have to take into serious consideration if they do not aim at a new cognitive direction and at the suggestion of a new potential truth, or in other words—to use Misak’s quote but reversed—objections that are ‘disagreement for disagreement’s sake’. For instance, in cases such as genocide and slavery, we have seen that controversies tend to arise—controversies so vitally important that we are obligated to pragmatically respond to them through inquiry. In the case of genocide, for example, we observe that a large number of a certain ethnic group consistently experiences extermination and so we might conclude that this act aims at the extinction of a certain nationality for reasons such as cultural dominance or financial benefits. In order to prevent such events in the future, we make sure that we discover ways to obstruct such actions directly and responsively, e.g. recalling our institutions, practical policies and education. The case of genocide might sound like an extreme example, but if we consider the position of error theorists that our moral assertations are not and will never become true, then we can also assume that our moral assertation ‘genocide is wrong’ fails in the same category. We can argue that such anti-cognitivist positions imply that moral events are descriptions of our moral discourses and a naive conversation of what these events can cause and how we should respond to them (Tiles, 1998, p.640).

Hence, I support that non-cognitivist views on our moral matters—views that take our judgments to be individual psychological or linguistic states subject to individualistic experiences—have nothing to provide in our everyday course of forming valuable conclusions. That is because moral non-cognitivists provide us with moral theories that do not connect our actions and our realities in a useful and corresponding way. In contrast, I find that maintaining a cognitivist attitude to ethical issues gives us more reasons to try and reach a middle ground and overcome the challenges of pluralism because of cognitivism’s very basic idea that things are either right or wrong and that the conclusions have only one truth value. We therefore need theories that are strongly connected to reality and theories that recognize the cruciality of what I call ‘intellectual attitudes’ to the final products of society, namely theories that recognize the implications of our rational responses to the solution of moral issues. For instance, a pragmatist approach to ethical issues promotes an intellectual attitude to experience that endorses a sense of enhancement, development, freedom and revelation and thus guides people in that direction. In other words, it creates a metaethical mindset of openness that believes in the possibility of positive changes and improvements inside a society even when such changes and improvements do not appeal to some of its members. We can highlight this point by recalling John Rawl’s theory of justice as fairness, in which he argues that even in the most pluralistic societies, there are ways to find a middle ground of resource distribution and mutual advantage through the path of cooperation (Rawls, 1999, p.15).Thus, I argue here, that the only way to overcome the non-cognitivist discontinuity between applied ethics and metaethics is to adopt a pragmatic approach to both by making sure that they both meet the standards of responsiveness to evidence and experience, a responsiveness that leads to a cognitivist view of truth regarding our moral judgments and moral institutions.
**8.3 Moral Empiricism and the Peircean Scientific Spirit**

Furthermore, I find that pragmatism’s central thesis, which rejects absolute and universal ends, ends accepted unconditionally, sounds more like a cognitivist-realist position rather than a relativistic view on truth, given that it is made on the basis that every moral claim or principle that does not correspond to a shared experience cannot be true. As Ruth Anna Putnam puts it, ‘all evaluations are firmly rooted in and are correctible by experience’ and so the only way to talk about objective truths and values is through our ability to assess and evaluate their content according to their closeness to a certain framework (Putnam 1992, p. 1105). After all, if experience was so subjective it would not be possible to talk about corroborations of assessments and valuations and construct vocabularies with terms such as ‘uniformity’, ‘social’, ‘objective’ and ‘shared’. Our vocabularies are created based on the necessity to communicate and express our thoughts and concepts regarding a topic, and so it is safe to assume that, as Pappas puts it, ‘experience is the constant, persistent and trustworthy basis of evidence in any philosophical investigation which is empirical’ (Pappas 2007, p.327). Also, as Misak writes, even when we investigate narrow topics, such as ethical matters that cannot always provide us with a solid interpretation of what our decisions, judgments and hypotheses may cause, one can alternatively recall the sources of memory and imagination to create clues of ethical experience. However, even in that case, there is something objective and shared about those clues because our ways of experiencing imagination are shared and common, as we all imagine in more or less the same way. Thus, my position here is not that our moral discourse is of an abstract and undetermined character, but that our ‘moral judgments require more collateral information’ and need the collaboration of other sorts of experiences and background of knowledge in order to be settled, such as the political and cultural content in which an ethical idea was developed (Misak, 2000, pp. 82-3).

Finally, we could also argue that this cognitive enterprise of pragmatism becomes clearer if we recall Pierce’s assumption that the pursuit of sciences reflects our need to learn and engage with different kinds of knowledge, considering that the pursuit of inquiry itself originates in our desire to learn (Cantens 2006, pp. 94-5). That is because, as he argues, the most crucial possession of science is the cognitive disposition of the inquirer, namely a psychological attitude that motivates the progression of the scientific project and pushes the scientist to the end of the research, something like a power of desire or what Pierce called ‘scientific spirit’. Therefore, this scientific spirit is what distinguishes scientific knowledge from other forms of knowledge since it pursues the real truths of the world and does not stay satisfied with existing opinions on interpreting experience (Tiles, 1998, p.640). Moreover, as Tiles notes, if we consider that pragmatists use the model of scientific method as a way to answer our moral issues, it would be sensible to assume that moral theorists, like natural scientists, require scientific virtues, such us reasonableness and impartiality, to reach the true moral ends, as well as an open-minded attitude to possible inaccuracies and confutations. As such, the study of ethics is a field of knowledge that looks for objective propositions that are either correct or mistaken. And if we connect this propositional objectivism with Pierce’s idea that our cognitive dispositions are dispositions of learning, namely making assumptions that are validated based on experience, ethics is fully entitled to be called a rational science that follows the rules of reason and logic (1898, CP 1.135).

***9. The Generalism-Particularism Debate on Moral Principles***
**9.1 The Debate**

As I argued in the previous chapter, moral pragmatism thinks of our actions as being driven by cognitive objectives, something that allows us to engage in moral deliberations of truth and falsity. This cognitivist enterprise might turn us to the examination of pragmatism’s relation to the contemporary debate of the nature and utility of our moral principles taking place between moral particularists and moral generalists. Roughly speaking, moral particularism is the philosophical position that general moral principles are not playing a vital role in the formation of our moral judgments, actions and endeavors, while moral generalism is the position that our moral principles are playing a crucial role in the formation of such judgments, actions and endeavors. The formulation of this debate seems to focus on a certain direction, namely that of clarifying the necessity or not of the moral principles that concern us. However, as James Dreier notes, ‘it has not been altogether clear in the contemporary dispute over particularism just what is at stake’ and so, it might seem hard to develop these two positions without being vague and unclear if we do not know precisely what they are trying to embrace (Dreier, 2006, xxii). Besides, obscurity is also caused if we consider that the particularism-generalism debate tries to define and constitute the process of inquiry from within as it asks questions such as: Should we appeal to principles in our moral discourses? and, if so: What principles would be useful or required? while the process of inquiry is already on its way. As such, it is sensible for one to doubt the usefulness of a metaethical and theoretical debate of whether it is worth forming general principles and whether such principles are useful when our experience, evidence and past knowledge is there to answer for us. For that reason, in this chapter, I argue that the doctrine of pragmatism seems not to take the side of either generalism or particularism as its formulation of moral principles is of a practical utility and purpose and is not concerned with the ‘oughts’ and ‘shoulds’ of moral reality but only with the way it actually is.

 **9.2 Pragmatism’s Moral Principles VS Absolute Moral Principles**

To start with moral generalism, it is acknowledged that moral philosophers such as Kant and Mill formed their normative theories of truth based on absolute moral principles and pre-established values that express certain propositions of rightness and wrongness regarding the issue at hand. For example, Deontologists argue that we should always be moved by categorical commands; namely, ethical duties that apply to every person and every situation, without exception. Meanwhile, Utilitarians argue that our actions are subject to the principles of utilities that reflect the greatest level of happiness and, therefore, we should be motivated by that which maximizes the general happiness (Kant, AK: 4:421) & (Mill, 1863). Although the content of these two moral theories is not identical, they both claim that the notions of rightness and goodness always fall under a single and determined principle applied in global terms. However, we could argue that the consequences of such principles are that they do not provide solutions in cases that duty points in opposite directions, such as in a moral dilemma, or that they are very strict and absolute in order to correspond to our practical everyday realities. For instance, it is very likely that we might come across a situation in which many actions can gratify a certain principle, or a situation of conflict duties in which the duty of the principle ‘‘Never share secrets’’ contradicts that of ‘‘Always tell the truth’’. We can also experience situations in which the universal principle is too strict and impractical, such as a moral command of behavior that we might not have the energy, resources and motivation to follow: e.g. ‘‘Return favors’’.

As such, the kind of principles we find in objective normative theories of deontological or utilitarian ethics do not resemble Pierce’s articulation of moral principles in the form of regulative assumptions as analyzed in Chapter 1. The reason for this is that regulative assumptions are not as broad and universal as the categorical imperatives or principles of utility are, given that they are working hypotheses resulting from the course of inquiry itself and given that they are not tightly connected to a certain ideal or value. Moreover, regulative assumptions only propose approaches to the solutions of our ethical matters without offering a fixed content of what these solutions might be, considering that they do not function as a pick-out of a pre-given set of right actions and, thus, do not recommend anything to determine. Subsequently, guiding principles are the tools of regulating our approaches to different problems and not the tools for solving them as in the case of conflicting duties, they will not tell us, for example, to follow the duty of keeping a secret instead of the duty to be honest, but, rather, they will point out the moral structure or framework in which we will be allowed to make assessments of such a conflict of duties. As Lewis notes, regulative assumptions can be thought of as pragmatically a priori principles that are ‘freely taken, a stipulation of the mind itself, and a stipulation which might be made in some other way if it suited our bent or need’ (Lewis, 1923 p. 169). As such, they are chosen based on their suitability for our particular needs in the course of our moral life, and they function as instruments for getting into our ethical concerns and issues. So, for these instruments to function properly, we will have to adopt principles that both assume the existence of a purpose in the process of inquiry and the existence of an end to that inquiry. Principles that externally determine the moral framework from which we should develop and establish the norms that can fix and define the content of our moral truths, judgments and thought.

 **9.3 A Pragmatist’s Rejection of Moral Particularism**

On the other hand, moral particularists aim to encounter traditional normative theories of the moral generalist type and argue that either our moral principles cannot be true or valid, or that there is no way to prove the truthfulness and validity of such principles, or, even, that our moral conceptions are not dependent on moral principles (McKeever and Ridge, 2005, pp.87-88). The reason for this is because the notion of a principle consists of some kind of generality, certain strict propositions of goodness and badness and a universality of truth which implies that the established principles might not correspond to all the situations of our experience and might not be able to solve the issues of every circumstance. As such, particularists, argue that determining the valence of a moral situation as being right or wrong is ‘too complex and context sensitive’ and, hence, cannot be captured in a general principle (Little, 2000, pp. 278-280). This position is what the radical particularist Jonathan Dancy called ‘reason holism’: namely, the idea that ‘a feature that is a reason in one case may not be a reason at all, or an opposite reason, in another’ (Dancy, 2004, p.7). This implies that our reasons are seen as interchangeable terms that can work positively and in favor of an action in a case X and negatively and against an action in a case Y. Besides, his definition of the term reason does not seem to be complicated as a reason for action can be anything that ‘stands in a certain relation to action, and the relationship at issue is that of favoring’ (2004, p.29).

Furthermore, David Bakhurst in his ‘Pragmatism and Ethical Particularism’ notes that there seems to be a resemblance between ethical views obtained by some American pragmatists and some ethical views obtained by moral particularists (Bakhurst, 2007, p.123). Indeed, if we recall some pragmatic conceptions, such as James’s and Rorty’s notion of ‘personal truths’ and ‘pleasant beliefs’, it might look as if pragmatism can be read as a form of moral subjectivism and relativism. However, if we focus on the original formulation of pragmatism as a doctrine committed to the pursuit of a scientific inquiry that aims to have an objective and propositional end and stays committed to the outlook settled by Pierce and his followers, such as the composition of principles as regulative assumptions, we will be able to argue that accounts which take moral pragmatism as allied to moral particularism are mistaken. The reason for this is because particularists struggle to define the impact that the context of a community has on the consciousness of its individuals, and this is how they do not seem to form a collective and solid epistemological basis on which we can build a theory of how to deal with our moral issues. Moreover, particularists find it hard to describe the correlation between one moral judgment and another as they cannot explain how our past experiences contribute to the solution of our new problems. Likewise, particularists maintain an irrational position towards our moral everydayness considering their assumption that our moral thinking and reasoning is independent from the established principles. However, even if this assumption is true, that does not entail that our ability and efficiency to form logical moral conclusions does not derive from these established principles.

This last point can be illustrated by Hooker’s thought experiment on what would happen in a society that only consists of moral particularists. He argues that if we were to choose between a society full of moral generalists and one full of moral particularists, we would not be able to predict what the latter society would look like given that moral particularists are not responsive to general reasons and do not believe in their existence (Hooker, 2008, p.28). Hooker’s experiment allows us to highlight the cruciality of being able to predict the outcomes of our actions and the role of moral principles in our guideline toward the right way of thinking, reasoning and acting in our effort to correspond to the moral standards of our society.It shows that predictability is a crucial component of our harmonious co-existence with the other members of a community and that the only way to achieve such harmony is to base our moral realities on theories that take our collective experiences seriously. We could also argue that trying to imagine a society without shared views and beliefs on notions such as ‘reason’, ‘right’, ‘beneficence’, ‘justice’ is not possible as such societies could never exist (Hooker, 2008, p.28). Consequently, moral particularism’s interpretation of moral phenomena - to borrow Bakhurst’s characterization - consists of the ‘fatal ineptness’ of our moral realities as its emphasis is on morality as a private phenomenon of an internal origination that only reflects the subject’s conception of what is right or wrong and neglects the real-life goals of ethical theories and the importance of written and unwritten rules in our moral co-operation (Bakhurst, 2007, p.138).

**Conclusion**
To summarize, the main aspiration of this thesis was to set up a pragmatic metaethical attitude toward the formation of our moral truths, beliefs and principles in the base of Pierce’s original formulation of the pragmatic theory of truth. I suggested that the key to understand the essence of pragmatic ethics is to treat it as an anthropological approach to our moral thought and action and not as moral theory *per se*. The reason for this is that pragmatism does not propose a new metaethical theory or system of beliefs, but rather ways and methods to correct and enhance the content of such theories and beliefs. I attempted to argue that in our effort to construct normative, cognitive and objective ethical realities, it is necessary to adopt the model of scientific inquiry that can secure the formation of truths which correspond to the empirical observations of goodness and badness. So, I supported, that a scientific stance towards our moral deliberations can provide us with a profound critique of our past actions, and a rigorous analysis of how to improve our present habits and future inferences. It is only then, that we will truly be able to guideline our futures actions and conducts to the required ends in both an external and internal sense. Thus, what any given version of ethical pragmatism is supposed to do, is not provide solid solutions on a variety of different ethical matters, but to indicate that such solutions can only be achieved through the process of testing, experimenting and communicating our moral ideas than on its turn, will enable us to evaluate the superiority of one idea over another.

In my endorsement of a pragmatist stance towards the issues of metaethics, I argued that it is crucial to think of the constitution of our moral laws, principles and institutions as being contingent to our habits. That is, to recognize the cruciality of the notion of habit in the formation of our inferences that reflect our assumptions of how we should develop our guiding principles in the present and future realities. Although, the regulation of such inferences, is not created based on what habits please and satisfy the individuals in a utilitarian sense but rather, the kind of habits that harmoniously correspond to our logic, evidence and practical needs. As such, the purpose of forming inferences on how one should think and act is not aiming to the development of conclusions for the shake of coming to an agreement as Rorty supported, but it aims to conclusions that are objective, cognitive and common to everyone. They are common to everyone not in the sense that they reflect the individual intentions and goals of how one views her ideal well-being, but in the sense that everyone is conformed and reconciled with their regulation. Moreover, I argued that Pierce’s position on the external constitution of our morality highlights the nature of ethics and the real purpose of moral inquiry which at the end of the day, has a purely practical and instrumental significance. I find that when our discussions turn moral, there is no space left for ‘aesthetical judgments’, considering that our moral deliberations are of a communal and mutual character. Thus, it is a different thing to say that I prefer a sport X over a sport Y and a different thing to say that I prefer a belief P over a belief Q. I think that trying to make an ethical issue ‘aesthetic’ is puzzling and can only cause a fallacy regarding the aims of our ethical study -if we also remember Pierce’s argument here that our ‘ultimate aesthetic ideals’ are what guide ethics and logic towards their proper purpose and not the other way around.

Consequently, I support that we should form moral theories that do not only correspond to our logic and ‘satisfaction rates’, but theories that primarily correspond to the necessities of the reality. Theories that when constructed pragmatically, can enhance and enrich what I called our ‘intellectual attitudes’ towards the world by setting an elevating and redemptive approach to moral issues and by remaining open to requests of modification and revision. As I claimed, such modifications and revisions should not be treated as a threat or an obstacle to our current ways of co-operating and organizing our moral actualities. They should rather treated as challenges and liberational motives to our current perception, judgments and laws that can only advance the conditions of our co-existence. For that reason, it is better to think of our moral judgments, values and principles as provisional and instrumental solutions to our current issues, and not as de facto remedies to every moral matter. If we do so, we will realize that they do not exist for controlling or commanding our self-choices and styles of living, but they exist for protecting our autonomy, choices and ways of being. Therefore, our moral norms are not commands of right conduct in a Kantian sense. They are reflections of right conduct that protect and synchronize our views of rightness and wrongness. In this respect, my moral ambition is not concerning a normative theory that can guarantee unconditional truths and ends, but a normative theory that reflects the way that our truths, beliefs and endeavors are justified by our practices and actions. I think that favoring the notion of moral reflection to that of mora certainty will not make our moral judgments any less objective or valid as our constitution of knowledge is, and will always be, limited to the way that facts are related to one another and limited to our tools and know-hows of apprehending them.

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