

# Morals, meaning and truth in Wittgenstein and Brandom

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is twofold. Firstly, it analyses the similarities that stem from Wittgenstein's (*Philosophical Investigations* (1953)) and Brandom's (*Making it Explicit* (1994)) commitment to pragmatics in the philosophy of language to account for moral utterances. That is, the study of the meaning of moral utterances is carried out resorting to the study of the acts being performed in producing or exhibiting these utterances. Both authors offer, therefore, a pragmatic solution in order to account for the meaning of our moral vocabulary and discursive practices. Secondly, it argues that both approaches lead to differing understandings of the role of "truth" and "falsity" in moral discourse. On the one hand, Wittgenstein's remarks on ethics demonstrate a dismissive attitude towards the notions of truth and falsity in moral discourse. On the other hand, Brandom seems to be committed to a weak version of moral cognitivism: he takes assertions (which express beliefs, i.e. doxastic commitments) as the fundamental linguistic activity in the game of giving and asking for reasons and provides an anaphoric theory of truth to account for "truth" and "falsity" in our discourse. Additionally, it analyses how these differences bear on the Frege-Geach problem.

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# Morals, meaning and truth in Wittgenstein and Brandom

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## §1. Introduction

**T**HIS ARTICLE AIMS TO STUDY the similarities and dissimilarities between Wittgenstein's later work (1953; 1967; 1979; 1929–1930/1980a; 1945–1947/1980b) and Brandom's work (1994; 1997; 2001; 2013) when accounting for the meaning of moral sentences, and the role of “truth” and “falsity” in moral discourse.<sup>1</sup> While both authors explicitly deal with issues concerning the philosophy of language and truth, they do not explicitly deal with the consequences of their commitments concerning these subjects within ethics and morals. Consequently, throughout this paper, I will analyse these consequences and their similarities and dissimilarities. Section 2 focuses on Wittgenstein's and Brandom's account of meaning and how it applies to moral sentences. Specifically, I will focus on their pragmatic solution in order to account for the meaning of our moral vocabulary and discursive practices. Section 3 turns to the issue concerning the role of “truth” and “falsity” in moral discourse. I will study the differences between Brandom's and Wittgenstein's accounts of “truth” and “falsity” in moral discourse and show how these differences bear on the Frege–Geach problem.

## §2. Pragmatics, meaning and moral sentences

Wittgenstein and Brandom coincide in defending a pragmatic approach to the meaning of our sentences and words. This positive account of language and meaning stems from their critique of the traditional view that prevailed in the philosophy of language: representational (i.e. following a designational paradigm; I will use “representational” in this sense) and truth–conditional semantics. These traditional views mainly explicate the meaning of words and

<sup>1</sup> Hereafter the terms morals and ethics shall be used indistinctly unless the contrary is specified. Additionally, I will use the abbreviation PI to reference Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*.

propositions in terms of references to the world and truth–conditions. That is, the notions of truth and reference are primitive when determining the meaning of propositions. Defendants of representational and truth–conditional semantics generally have a bottom–up approach, “offering first accounts of the meanings of the concepts associated with singular and general terms (in a nominalistic representational way: in terms of what they name or stand for) then of *judgments* constructed by relating those terms, and finally of proprieties of *inferences* relating those judgments” (Brandom 2001, p. 13).

Both Brandom (1994, pp. 75, 288; 2001, p. 34) and Wittgenstein (PI, §§1–59) argue that this traditional view portrays an inaccurate view of language that only focuses on our referential and fact–stating use of language. The meaning of all words cannot be explained in terms of representational content or truth–conditions. For instance, “Water! Away! Ow! Help! Fine! No! Are you inclined still to call these words ‘names of objects?’” (PI, §27). Moreover, Wittgenstein’s remarks surrounding first–person psychological sentences (such as “I am afraid”) target the philosophical urge to insist that these sentences are descriptions of specific facts in the world that are either true or false.<sup>2</sup>

Philosophers who argue against this traditional view generally emphasise that our moral sentences and vocabulary are a paradigmatic case of non–descriptivism—in addition to mathematics and logic. Consider (1)–(4):

- (1) Tormenting the cat is bad.
- (2) Lying is bad.
- (3) Intentionally harming innocent individuals is bad.
- (4) John is a good person.

To avoid considering moral and ethical sentences as meaningless, it is necessary to argue either in favour of moral realism, hence allowing moral sentences to represent reality, or argue that not all our language aims to represent reality and, therefore, provide an alternative account of the meaning of these non–descriptive sentences.

Wittgenstein and Brandom do not aim at providing a better account of representational or truth–conditional semantics. They defend instead of this a pragmatic approach to the meaning of language in order to overcome the issues outlined. Pragmatics is understood here as the study of the meaning that

<sup>2</sup> This explains why Wittgenstein abandoned the verificational account sustained in *Philosophical Remarks* (1929–1930/1980a), “the concept of verification has no *application* to ‘I’m in pain’ and similar expressions” (Malcolm 1986, p. 148).

focuses on the use of language in the specific context within which an individual speaks and makes utterances. They emphasise our use of language instead of trying to providing a universal semantic notion that would work for the totality of our language. Namely, they “adopt a top–down approach because they start from the *use* of concepts” (Brandom 2001, p. 13). Against the traditional view, they presuppose the primacy of action in language use.

The rejection of the notions of reference and truth as primitive notions in semantics also entails rejecting other central ideas present in representational and truth–conditional semantics. First, Wittgenstein (PI, §81, §131) rejects the idea that there is a logical structure that underlines the totality of our language. Second, Wittgenstein and Brandom reject the principle of compositionality and argue that the utterance of a sentence is the minimal unit of meaning. The principle of compositionality states that the meaning of complex expressions (such as sentences) is entirely determined by the meaning of its constituent expressions (such as words) and the rules that specify how to combine them (such as the rules of grammar). Conversely, Brandom (2001, p. 13, p. 80, pp. 159–160) and Wittgenstein (PI, §49), due to their commitment to a pragmatic strategy, argue that sentences are the minimal unit of meaning. Nevertheless, there are differences between Wittgenstein and Brandom’s pragmatic strategies.

## §2.1. Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*

In PI, Wittgenstein adopts a pragmatic strategy where the use of an expression in most everyday language–games may be identified with its meaning. However, Wittgenstein does not set forth any theory of meaning. On the one hand, the diversity of uses in language makes it impossible to provide a systematic and unified account of the meaning of our expressions, as there is no feature of language that can be taken as basic in order to derive all other features (PI, §23). On the other hand, Wittgenstein maintains that it is not the task of philosophy to produce explanatory theories (e.g. PI, §11, §38, §§124–133) and instead defends a therapeutic understanding of philosophy. The philosophers’ activity must be reduced to looking and seeing how things stand, clarifying knowledge and providing adequate descriptions without providing philosophical theories (PI, §109).

For Wittgenstein, language is a practice that is regulated by rules and the meaning of expressions is determined by their use in specific language–games that, in turn, are a part of forms of life. Within this description of language the question arises regarding how the meaning of our moral utterances (e.g. (1)–(4)) is determined. Wittgenstein’s understanding of language provides an

alternative to overcome the issues that stem from representational and truth-conditional semantics. Since Wittgenstein does not rely on reference and truth as semantic primitives, the existence of moral facts is not required in order to determine the meaning of our moral utterances. It is only necessary to determine their use within specific moral language-games, which in turn are a part of forms of life.<sup>3</sup> Consider (1)–(4):

- (1) Tormenting the cat is bad.
- (2) Lying is bad.
- (3) Intentionally harming innocent individuals is bad.
- (4) John is a good person.

In every case, in order to understand their use and meaning we must establish the speaker's specific use for these utterances to have a determined meaning. In order to understand their use and meaning, it is interesting to introduce a parallel with Wittgenstein's account of first-person psychological sentences, i.e. avowals. Consider (5)–(6):

- (5) I am happy.
- (6) I am in discomfort.

Superficially, both utterances may appear to be assertions or claims that represent an aspect of reality (i.e. mental states) and express propositions that have truth-conditions. However, and unlike genuine assertions and claims (e.g. "Water boils at 100 °C"), Wittgenstein argues that first-person psychological sentences cannot be checked, confirmed or disconfirmed. They do not express thoughts, descriptive content or propositions that are truth-apt. Wittgenstein is committed to a non-descriptivist and non-relationalist<sup>4</sup> understanding of first-person psychological sentences (see Bar-On & Long 2001; Bar-On 2004; Fogelin 1976; 1996). Furthermore, others interpreters such as Hacker (2005), Glock (1996) and Acero and Villanueva (2012) argue that for Wittgenstein mental states ascriptions, in general, are to be considered under this non-descriptivist light.<sup>5</sup> For instance, normative statements (e.g. PI, §190, §214,

<sup>3</sup> Throughout this section I will assume a certain account of Wittgenstein's ethics that will be explained in greater detail in section 3.2.

<sup>4</sup> Non-relationalism is the denial that mental state attributions are used to describe certain states of affairs.

<sup>5</sup> For more on this issue, see Acero and Villanueva (2012). It should be noted that "Wittgenstein does not deny the existence of mental states, and his position doesn't preclude the possibility of observing or describing them. We can train somebody to *observe* mental states, to 'put himself in a favourable position to receive certain impressions' (PI ix), and emit a certain sound when they struck him. This would still not be *describing* them" (Acero and Villanueva, 2012, p. 106).

§231) are a clear-cut case of non-relational second-person ascriptions (Acero and Villanueva 2012, p. 105). This anti-descriptivism leads to understanding mental state ascriptions and first-person psychological sentences within an expressivist explanatory mechanism (Acero and Villanueva 2012, p. 103). Moreover, this non-descriptive understanding is also extended to other sentences, such as “It’s raining” in §501 or if “I say to you, ‘I see an icy stretch just ahead’. My intention is to *warn* you —not to get you to *think* that I *think* there is an icy stretch ahead. The purpose of my utterance was not to transmit or to evoke a *thought* —but to get you to drive carefully— to get you to *act*” (Malcolm 1986, p. 139).

Parallel to avowals, moral sentences demonstrate expressive behaviour. For Wittgenstein, our ethical and moral expressions generally (i) express certain attitudes towards life and its meaning, (ii) replaces and extends natural reactions of approval and disapproval and, finally, (iii) prescribes certain conducts (Glock 2015, pp. 121–123). Namely, ethical sentences are employed to express certain primitive reactions that are evaluative responses of approval and disapproval of certain actions, conducts, and so on.<sup>6</sup> Thus (1)–(4) are uttered to express a moral evaluation with regards to a certain action or individual. It is in relation to this expressive use that we must determine the meaning of the utterances. For instance, (1)–(3) express that the specific actions mentioned (i.e. lying, tormenting cats and intentionally harming innocent individuals) are to be regarded as morally wrong. Regardless of the ethical view, the speaker might endorse, they all express the same disapproving attitude with regards to the specific actions. The reasons that might justify this disapproval may vary from case to case, but the meaning of (1)–(3) remains the same: a disapproving attitude towards specific actions.

However, the meaning of (4) leads us to a further aspect of Wittgenstein’s expressivism. Whilst it does express an attitude of approval towards John, to determine the meaning of “good person” in (4) it is necessary to resort to the specific language-game and form of life the speaker pertains to. That is to say, the meaning of (4) and the content of the notion “good person” will vary depending on what ethical view the speaker endorses. If he endorses a Christian ethical view or Nietzschean ethical view, the meaning will vary substantially. So moral sentences that appear to express individual attitudes towards the world and sentiments of approval and disapproval are also expressing the view of an

<sup>6</sup> Connecting moral and ethical expressions to natural reactions “ties ethics to the aforementioned case of first-person, present-tense psychological statements. For Wittgenstein links their status as avowals to what he regards as their origin, namely in natural reactions to pain (e.g. PI, §§244–245)” (Glock 2015, pp. 121–122).

ethical community. Wittgenstein, in consequence, endorses a communitarian variant of expressivism: “Ethical statements express or avow a certain attitude to or perspective on human behaviour, on life and its meaning.” (Glock 2015, pp. 122–123). The attitude or perspective expressed is the view of a community towards the question of how to act. The form of life and the specific language–game within which this sentence is uttered is essential in order to determine its meaning. To determine the meaning of (4) it is necessary to resort to the specific language–game and form of life the speaker pertains to.

The expressive and prescriptive use of our moral sentences encompasses that they are paradigmatic cases of non–descriptivist forms of discourse (Glock 2015, p. 121). To determine whether something is morally good or bad we do not resort to the world or any fact, as is the case of descriptive claims, rather we resort to certain criteria (e.g. related to a form of life). Moral sentences do not describe any fact, and we cannot check the world to determine whether moral sentences are true or false. We express moral evaluations; we do not describe moral facts, thus coinciding with Wittgenstein’s anti–descriptive account of other types of sentences, such as avowals or normative sentences.

## § 2.2. Brandom’s normative pragmatics and semantic inferentialism

Brandom draws various ideas from Wittgenstein’s PI in order to offer his own account of the meaning of sentences —albeit some of the ideas he attributes to Wittgenstein might rather be seen as miss–readings, as McDowell (2009) suggests. He both maintains a commitment to a pragmatic strategy and approves of Wittgenstein’s comparison of language and games. Nevertheless, there is one substantial difference in Brandom’s proposal: he argues that language does have a downtown. There is one basic kind of human chatter that is characteristic for our species and essential in order to hold all language–games together: assertions. This seems to conflict with Wittgenstein’s anti–systematic and anti–essentialist approach.

In *Making it Explicit* (1994) and *Articulating Reasons* (2001) Brandom argues in favour of a combination of normative pragmatics and semantic inferentialism. Semantic inferentialism maintains that the conceptual content of propositions, in particular of discursive commitments, is determined by its inferential relation to other propositions. Thus key to grasping semantic content is mastering the inferential role of assertions. However, Brandom (1994, pp. 592–593) argues that semantics is not intelligible apart from pragmatics. “This is the methodological (as opposed to the normative) sense of

'pragmatism' —that the point of treating sentences and other bits of vocabulary as semantically contentful is to explain their use, the practices in the context of which they play the role of expressing explicitly what is implicit in discursive deontic statuses" (Brandom 1994, p. 592). In normative pragmatics, discursive practices are conceived "as deontic scorekeeping: the significance of a speech act is how it changes what commitments and entitlements one attributes and acknowledges" (Brandom 2001, p. 81). Thus Brandom (2013, pp. 85–86) provides a pragmatic meta-vocabulary to describe what speakers do when they speak, what practices they engage in, what they count as doing and what they must do in order to thereby say what can be said using language.

To combine semantic inferentialism and normative pragmatics Brandom (1994, p. 167) proposes, resorting to Sellars (1956/1997), the *game of giving and asking for reasons*: deontic scorekeeping practices that allow us to make the inferential relations between propositions explicit. The game of giving and asking for reasons has two basic deontic states: *entitlements*, the reasons that we can request from the speaker in order to justify why he asserts what he asserts; and *commitments*, the various consequences that follow from what a speaker asserts. The basic move within this game is the assertion. The combination of commitments and entitlements constitutes the *deontic score* of a speaker. In turn, the role that these deontic states play is determined by the attitudes (*attributing*, *acknowledging* and *undertaking*) that the participants (the audience and the speaker) adopt when *scorekeeping*. The audience *attributes* deontic states to the speaker, thus setting up his deontic score. The speaker *acknowledges* deontic states when he asserts something, when he makes a move within the game. Finally, the speaker *undertakes* a deontic state when his assertion warrants the audience to attribute a deontic state to him, albeit he does not necessarily acknowledge said deontic state. The possibility of participating correctly in this game is the criteria that Brandom employs to define rationality.

Brandom accounts for meaning in a way that allows him to overcome also the issues stemming from representational and truth-conditional semantics when dealing with the meaning of moral vocabulary and sentences. Within the game of giving and asking for reasons, the semantic meaning of an assertion is determined by the inferences that one endorses with the use of said assertion: the inferences that go from the correct circumstances of use to the correct consequences of use. This is determined, in turn, by the commitments and entitlements attributed by the audience, and acknowledged and undertaken by the speaker. We count as grasping the content of an assertion insofar we know what else we are committed and entitled to by asserting, and what would commit or entitle us to do so (Brandom 2013, pp. 94–95). Consider assertions

(1)–(4):

- (1) Tormenting the cat is bad.
- (2) Lying is bad.
- (3) Intentionally harming innocent individuals is bad.
- (4) John is a good person.

In asserting one of these sentences, the speaker is participating in the game if he is willing to demonstrate when challenged that he can provide his entitlement: the reasons to back his assertion. Additionally, this assertion entails undertaking or acknowledging inferential and non-inferential (i.e. practical) commitments; moves that follow from his assertion. Finally, the combination of these commitments and entitlements details incompatibilities: moves the speaker is not entitled to carry out. A non-exhaustive list of the entitlements, commitments and incompatibilities of (1)–(4) results respectively in:

- (1e) Tormenting cats is actually bad.
- (1c) Cats are animals that should be treated ethically.
- (1i) Tormenting cats is good
  
- (2e) Lying is actually bad.
- (2c) Telling the truth is good.
- (2i) Lying is good.
  
- (3e) Intentionally harming innocent individuals is actually bad.
- (3c) Avoiding harming innocent individuals is good
- (3i) Intentionally harming individuals is good.
  
- (4e) John exists and he is actually a good person
- (4c) John is a human being who carries out good deeds and is not evil
- (4i) John is a bad and unethical person.

These inferences are all implicit in our understanding of (1)–(4). Here I have only singled out one entitlement, one commitment and one incompatibility to exemplify Brandom's proposal; more could be provided. Furthermore, entitlements, commitments and incompatibilities can be non-inferential. For instance, (1) is incompatible with a practical consequence like tormenting cats

for no good reason and conceiving of it as morally good. Thus Brandom gives us a way for determining the meaning of moral propositions resorting to his combination of semantic inferentialism and normative pragmatics within the game of giving and asking for reasons.

### § 3. Truth and morals

Brandom and Wittgenstein provide pragmatic strategies to account for the meaning of our moral vocabulary and sentences, thus overcoming the insufficiencies that stem from designational and truth–conditional semantics. The similarities notwithstanding, Brandom’s works and Wittgenstein’s works lead to divergent descriptions of the role of “truth” and “falsity” in moral discourse. While neither Brandom nor Wittgenstein focus in great detail on moral issues in the works considered here, their understanding of language and truth entails a series of consequences in morals and ethics that provide a basis for spelling out some important differences. Throughout this section, I am going to focus on their distinct descriptions of the role of “truth” and “falsity” in moral discourse and show how these differences bear on the Frege–Geach problem.

#### §3.1. The Frege–Geach Problem

The Frege–Geach problem concerns the challenge of explaining the content of normative and evaluative talk in both simple atomic sentences and complex sentences, i.e. explaining the content of an evaluative/normative expression in both embedded and unembedded situations. This problem was initially advanced against moral non–cognitivists who, despite offering a coherent account of unembedded uses of atomic moral sentences (where the main purpose of the sentence is to express or proscribe), struggled to explain embedded uses of moral sentences (such as force–cancelling contexts like the antecedents of conditionals) where they do no longer prescribe or express. This problem is exemplified when we focus on an argument where the same moral expression (e.g. “Tormenting the cat is bad”) occurs embedded and unembedded. Consider the example given by Geach (1965, p. 463):

(P1) If tormenting the cat is bad, getting your little brother to do it is bad

(P2) Tormenting the cat is bad.

*Ergo*, getting your little brother to torment the cat is bad.

This argument is logically valid; it is a clear example of *modus ponens*. However, the truth of the argument is dependent on retaining the meaning of the words throughout the premises and the conclusion. This is what Geach calls the Frege point. Frege, in *Begriffsschrift* (1879/1967), shows us that “a thought may have just the same content whether you assent to its truth or not; a proposition may occur in discourse now asserted, now unasserted, and yet be recognizably the same proposition” (Geach 1965, p. 449). Predication must be constant throughout embedded and unembedded occurrences of predication, thus avoiding the fallacy of equivocation. *Ergo*, it is necessary to determine if the meaning of (P2) is equivalent in its embedded use in (P1). Representational and truth–conditional semantics can show how the meaning is retained throughout the premises. Whilst these semantic positions might not deny that (P2) proscribes or expresses something, they will claim that further explaining is required from alternative accounts of meaning, such as expressivism or prescriptivism, to solve the Frege–Geach problem. The inability to account for the content of moral expressions in embedded contexts would be, therefore, a damaging objection.

### §3.2. Wittgenstein’s (dis)solution

Wittgenstein, in his conversation with Rush Rhees, openly discusses issues concerning truth and falsity in relation to ethics and morality. Some interpreters (see, e.g. Lovibond 1983; Loobuyck 2005; Brandhorst 2015; 2017) have concluded from these remarks, and his later works, that Wittgenstein is a moral cognitivist.<sup>7</sup> Namely, that Wittgenstein allows for moral assertions to be stated as sentences capable of truth and falsity expressing beliefs (or other cognitive mental states) —though, as we will see, he is dismissive of the notions of truth and falsity in ethics.

The cognitivist readings of PI generally focus on the notions of “language–game” and “form of life”. “Wittgenstein’s emphasis on distinct and autonomous language games, each bearing its own internal standards of correctness, contributes to the idea that ethical discourse can be appropriately objective without meeting the standards of objectivity in empirical science” (Loobuyck 2005, p. 382). Different forms of life and language–games have their autonomous paradigm of rationality. Thus ethics does not have to fulfil the standards of science in order to be truthful and objective. “Objective evaluations of many sorts are possible, given any sufficiently determinate

<sup>7</sup> Hereafter “cognitivism” and “non–cognitivism” mean *moral* cognitivism and *moral* non–cognitivism unless the contrary is specified.

standards that are constitutive of a social context in which the evaluation occurs. Values and norms do not have authority *per se* but only within a social context, within a certain language–game” (Loobuyck 2005, p. 389). In order to reaffirm Wittgenstein’s cognitivism, Loobuyck resorts to the lack of a distinction between propositional sense and illocutionary force in PI. This means “that the descriptive and evaluative/expressive components are not always as separable as non–cognitivists supposed” (Loobuyck 2005, p. 392).

Said commitment may prove fruitful in overcoming the Frege–Geach problem, insofar as it allows us to state (against moral non–cognitivism and semantic non–factualism) that there is a constant element shared by the premises and the conclusion: the proposition expressed in normal predicative (embedded and unembedded) uses of moral expressions. Notwithstanding, I am going to claim that Wittgenstein should not be understood as committed to moral cognitivism since he has a dismissive attitude towards the notions of truth and falsity in ethics. Subsequently, I will discuss how Wittgenstein’s later thought bears on the Frege–Geach problem and try to figure out if he can offer a viable solution.

Let us first briefly characterise some of Wittgenstein’s later ideas about ethics. A good starting point is the ethical dilemma analysed throughout Wittgenstein’s conversation with Rhees (1965). Consider “the problem facing a man who has come to the conclusion that he must either leave his wife or abandon his work in cancer research” (Rhees 1965, p. 22). This decision might be thought to generally entail that there are a right and a wrong choice. Nonetheless, what is stipulated as a right or a wrong choice is dependent on a particular ethical outlook. If he is a Catholic, “then he may say it is absolutely clear: he has got to stick to her come what may” (Rhees 1965, p. 23). Conversely, if he is a firm advocate for science, he may say that he must continue his work in cancer research. Both answers determine what is right and wrong within a certain outlook. “Compare saying that it must be possible to decide which of two standards of accuracy is the right one. We do not even know what a person who asks this question is after” (Rhees 1965, p. 23).

Underpinning this debate are two basic ideas present in Wittgenstein’s later understanding of ethics. First, in his conversation with Rhees and his lectures in Cambridge during 1932–1935 (1979) Wittgenstein’s concern is the temptation to detect and define the essence of ethics and ethical goodness.<sup>8</sup> He rejects the possibility of defining the essence of ethics and ethical goodness. If we attempt to define elasticity, it might be enough to investigate the particles of elastic

<sup>8</sup> Hereafter the notion ‘good’ references ethical and moral good, unless the contrary is specified.

objects, allowing us to attribute properties to these particles or their interactions that explain the phenomenon of elasticity. “The question in ethics, about the goodness of an action, and in aesthetics, about the beauty of a face, is whether the characteristics of the action, the lines and colours of the face, are like the arrangement of particles: a *symptom* of goodness, or of beauty” (Wittgenstein 1979, §32). But the issue is that good is used in a thousand ways in relation to a thousand different actions and things. Thus we can only determine the meaning of the word “good” by seeing how we use it (Wittgenstein 1979, §§32–33). The Catholic and the scientist can define “good” in very different ways and apply it to completely different actions. Attempting to determine an essence of good is implausible; we must see how it is used in specific language–games. There is no ideal in ethics; this “ideal is got from a specific game, and can only be explained in some specific connection” (Wittgenstein 1979, §34). Consequently, ethics and ethical notions have a family resemblance relation, but they cannot be defined in necessary and sufficient conditions. “There is no one system in which you can study in its purity and its essence what ethics is. We use the term ‘ethics’ for a variety of systems” (Rhees, 1965, p. 24).

Second, ethics is grounded in social patterns of action; we must see its use in specific language–games and forms of life (Wittgenstein 1979, §§31–36; Wittgenstein 1945–1947/1980b, §160; Glock 2015, p. 108). This is why Wittgenstein ties the ethical problem outlined above to specific contexts: the words “good”, “bad”, “right” and “wrong” can only be understood within their use in specific language–games. These language–games may sometimes be seen as belonging to ethical systems: normative structures that depend “on a wide range of elements, amongst others the particular circumstances surrounding the rule, the fact that the rule is embedded in a web of shared human practices, our individual ability to apply a rule and assess particular applications of it, as well as a certain level of regularity, that is, agreement in the judgements reached” (Christensen 2011, p. 806). So, moral sentences that appear to express individual attitudes towards the world and sentiments of approval and disapproval (e.g. “I consider that tormenting cats is bad”) are also expressing the view of an ethical community. *Ergo*, Wittgenstein endorses a communitarian variant of expressivism: “Ethical statements express or avow a certain attitude to or perspective on human behaviour, on life and its meaning.” (Glock 2015, pp. 122–123). The attitude or perspective expressed is the view of a community towards the question of how to act. For instance, take the moral problem outlined above, to utter that “The good action is to stay with your wife, as a good Catholic should” expresses a combination of a personal attitude and the

ethical outlook of a community towards a certain action. It is within this specific context that the use of our moral utterances must be studied to determine their meaning.

Having established Wittgenstein's understanding of ethics in his later work, let us turn to his remarks regarding "truth" and "falsity" in ethics. Whilst in section 2.1 we have seen that moral sentences are non-descriptive, this does not suffice to challenge the cognitivist reading of the *Tractatus*. The focal point of the cognitivist/non-cognitivist debate is the possibility of affirming or denying that moral sentences have truth-conditions or express beliefs. Non-descriptive and normative sentences can be assertions or claims that express beliefs or propositions that are truth-apt. Moreover, it seems that Wittgenstein argued that certain non-descriptive uses of language are assertions (i.e. they pertain to the game of asserting) and express propositions that are truth-apt (see Diamond 1996, pp. 229–236; Blackburn 2010, chapter 11; Glock 1996, pp. 50–54, pp. 107–111, pp. 129–135, pp. 231–236, pp. 320–323; 2015, pp. 118–119).

Notwithstanding, Wittgenstein's general remarks regarding "truth" and "falsity" in ethics express a general dismissive attitude towards the notions of truth and falsity –suggesting that it is inadequate to take Wittgenstein as a moral cognitivist. "Saying that something is good morally just calls attention on something" (Wittgenstein 1979, §36), for instance, the expression of a certain world-view or attitude of approval or disapproval, the prescription of a certain action or conduct, and so on. But there seems to be no concern for making claims or assertions that can be either true or false. When dealing with different ethical systems, Wittgenstein suggests that we have a tendency to believe that one particular ethical position will be true (or, at the very least, closest to the truth) (Rhees 1965, p. 24; Wittgenstein 1979, §31, §34; Wittgenstein, Rhees and Citron 2015, p. 29). However, Wittgenstein affirms that attempting to establish which one is the true or right ethical system is a meaningless task. For instance, reconsider the dilemma posed earlier regarding the man who must stay with his wife or further his cancer research. We cannot provide a definite answer to this dilemma since there is no such thing as "the right answer" or "the right ethical system", "we do not even know what a person who asks this question is after" (Rhees 1965, p. 23).

There is no ideal ethical system that is the only right one. Saying that an ethical system is "the right one" simply means that I am adopting said ethical system. "It does not mean that I have looked to see if it fits 'what is really there' & what really happens!" (Wittgenstein, Rhees and Citron 2015, p. 29), as "in ethics there isn't generally proof" (Wittgenstein, Rhees and Citron 2015, p. 28).

When we encounter competing physical theories we can determine which one is the right, we can see if it fits what is really there and what really happens. But we cannot deduce that something is morally good or bad purely from the action itself or the particles of objects (Wittgenstein 1979: §32). The way in which some of reality corresponds or conflicts with a physical theory has no counterpart in ethics (Rhees 1965, p. 24). The question and answer regarding which ethical system is the right or true one is meaningless; there are no assertions or claims concerning this ethical issue that express propositions that can be true or false. We will only find mere ethical judgments that are equivalent to “X is good” or “Y is bad” (Wittgenstein Rhees and Citron 2015, p. 29). This is why ethics does not study the essence of ethical goodness or an ideal system that could be universally endorsed (Rhees 1965, p. 24).

However, a defendant of the cognitivist interpretation of Wittgenstein may counter: “there is still the difference between truth and falsity. Any ethical judgment in whatever system may be true or false” (Rhees 1965, p. 24). While there are no assertions or claims that are true or false when attempting to determine which is the right ethical system, it seems that we can make claims or assertions that are true or false within specific ethical systems. This objection is unconvincing, however, for two reasons.

First, Wittgenstein explicitly states that “it would have no meaning to say that each was right from his own standpoint” (Rhees 1965, p. 24). The idea of a notion of truth that resorts to some kind of normative and social consensus is superfluous; it simply does not make any sense that everyone is right from his or her own standpoint (see Rhees 1965, pp. 23–24). Second, this objection seems to encompass a normative and context-dependent notion of truth for which there is no explicit evidence in Wittgenstein work. Normative frameworks (i.e. language-games and forms of life) can provide meaning to words and sentences, but they cannot be used to define and account for the notion of truth. Wittgenstein’s examples of moral discourse might suggest, therefore, that he generally denies the possibility of moral claims and assertions that express propositions with truth-conditions within specific ethical systems.

If what I suggested in the last paragraph is correct, it would seem that we cannot make any moral assertions or claims that have truth-conditions within specific ethical systems nor outside them, since they have no determined meaning there. I suggest, therefore, that Wittgenstein has a dismissive attitude towards “truth” and “falsity” in ethics and moral discourse and, by extension, is not committed to moral cognitivism. This dismissive attitude can be emphasised through the parallel outlined in section 2.1 between moral sentences and

avowals —as Glock (2015, p. 106, pp. 121–122) seems to suggest. Avowals are a key-case of sentences that are not assertions or claims that express propositions. “It makes no sense, according to this view, to check the world in order to find the state of affairs that would make a mental state ascription true or false. [...] This can be cashed out in terms of expressing mental states, rather than describing them” (Acero and Villanueva 2012, p. 108). Analogous to first-person psychological sentences, moral sentences are normally not used as assertions or claims that express propositions that are truth-apt; they are rarely used within the language game of asserting. Alternatively, moral sentences are mostly used to express world-views, attitudes of approval and disapproval, *etcetera*. Wittgenstein, in sharp contrast to his earlier work in the *Tractatus*, has realised “that many ordinary sentences do not present ‘propositions’ or ‘thoughts’ that can be ‘compared with reality’” (Malcolm 1986, p. 153).

However, despite Wittgenstein’s general dismissive attitude towards “truth” and “falsity” in ethics, I coincide with De Mesel’s (2018, pp. 1–8) general conclusion regarding the possibility of determining Wittgenstein’s stance in the cognitivist/non-cognitivist debate: there seems to be insufficient evidence to determine what specific position he is committed to.<sup>9</sup> Notwithstanding, what does Wittgenstein’s communitarian expressivism and dismissive attitude towards “truth” and “falsity” in ethics and moral discourse entail for the Frege–Geach problem? Initially, it seems that this problem is a serious challenge to Wittgenstein’s understanding of ethics and moral discourse. Due to his communitarian expressivism, he encounters the various problems outlined in 3.1. That is, he is unable to provide the commonality of the premises and the conclusion since there is no proposition expressed in normal predicative uses of moral expressions. Despite these (apparent) short-comings, Wittgenstein can offer a viable solution to the problem.

Specifically, Wittgenstein’s solution stems from his description of how meaning functions. As mentioned in section 2.1, he resorts to pragmatics to account for the meaning of sentences: meaning is determined by a use in language-games. A basic idea in Wittgenstein’s description of meaning is the rejection of compositionism. Compositionism states that the meaning of the parts of the sentence is prior to the meaning of the whole sentence. Thus first, we grasp the meaning of the parts of the sentence, and then we grasp the meaning of the whole sentence. Wittgenstein rejects the notion of

<sup>9</sup> Albeit I am still sceptical about taking De Mesel’s remarks as a definitive conclusion regarding this issue. I believe further investigation is required to settle this discussion, but this exceeds the scope of the present paper.

compositionalism and, conversely, states that words have no meaning outside a sentence, understanding that being a sentence is not necessarily being composed formally of subject and predicate, but as the minimal move in a language game (PI § 49). This view, which might be called a differently motivated variety of Frege's context principle, allows us to understand how the same expression (or word) can have very distinct meanings in different sentences, since the expression (or word) may be used in a variety of ways within the sentence it is uttered. This rejection of compositionalism is key to understanding Wittgenstein's response to the Frege–Geach problem.

Implicit in the Frege–Geach problem we generally find the following desideratum: “the meaning of a complex sentence embedding a moral claim should be a function of the meaning of its parts so as to explain the ease with which speakers can understand novel normative sentences.” (van Roojen 2017). The Frege–Geach problem, therefore, is set out with an implicit commitment to compositionalism as a basic condition. However, Wittgenstein openly denies this presupposed condition. In consequence he is not committed to the idea that the meaning of the expression “Tormenting the cat is bad” must be the same in the premises and the conclusion, or that the meaning of this expression is prior to, and a basis for, the meaning of the complex sentences within which it is embedded, such as (P1). This means that, for Wittgenstein, the inference in Geach's example does not go through. The meaning of the expression “Tormenting the cat is bad” differs throughout the premises and the conclusion, since it is used within different sentences that affect the meaning of the expression. If we formalized Geach's example after describing the meaning of each sentence within Wittgenstein's pragmatic account, we would not find a *modus ponens* with a valid inference, thus avoiding any fallacy of equivocation.

It follows from the above that Wittgenstein's solution to the Frege–Problem consists in the dissolution of the problem through singling out the philosophical confusions that underpin this dilemma.<sup>10</sup> Once we understand that the meaning of the parts of the sentence is determined by the meaning of the whole sentence (and not the other way around) we will see how the problem ceases to exist; it is dissolved once the philosophical fog is dissipated. I would like to make two further points regarding Wittgenstein's dissolution of the Frege–Geach problem. First, Wittgenstein rejects the Frege point that is tied

<sup>10</sup> Wittgenstein employed this strategy throughout both his earlier and later work to solve philosophical problems. Instead of actually providing an answer to a philosophical problem, dilemma or paradox he focuses on showing that it contains a philosophical confusion or misunderstanding that, once removed, makes the problem, dilemma or paradox disappear. His solution to a philosophical problem consists in its dissolution (see, e.g. the sceptic paradox introduced in section 2.1 in relation to rule-following).

to the Frege–Geach problem. Frege claims that a “thought may have just the same content whether you assent to its truth or not; a proposition may occur in discourse now asserted, now unasserted, and yet be recognizably the same proposition” (Geach 1965, p.449). Asserting the truth of a proposition involves, therefore, a further action besides entertaining the proposition. Specifically, asserting consists of two separate actions: entertaining and asserting. Any assertion will contain a certain proposition or thought, which is the thing that is being asserted. This seems to rest on the possibility that in our language we can find sentences such as “It is asserted that such–and–such is the case”.

Wittgenstein contends that these kinds of sentences misguide us for two different reasons. On the one hand, the expression “That such–and–such is the case” is not a move in a language–game and, on the other hand, the expression “It is asserted” is simply superfluous. This is meant to emphasise a deeper problem in the Frege point: asserting does not consist in two separate actions, i.e. entertaining and the asserting the truth of that which is being entertained (PI, §22). When a sentence is used as an assertion, we need not include any further action. The assertion is already contained in our use of language. Adding any further action or including the expression “It is asserted” would be misguided and superfluous. Moreover, it seems that for Wittgenstein it is wrong to state that a proposition has exactly the same content whether it is asserted or unasserted. The specific use of a sentence in a language–game is crucial to determine its meaning. The same expression may be used as an assertion, to express doubt, *etcetera*. However, these different uses would not share the same proposition and include a further action, such as asserting —treating the specific use of the sentence as an added component to the already given meaning. Conversely, their specific use within a language–game would contribute to and determine their meaning.

Second, Wittgenstein is not committed to global expressivism; rather, he endorses a pragmatic approach to meaning where the use of a sentence in a language–game is the key element to describe the meaning of a sentence. Thus only some uses of our language can be accounted for through expressivism (e.g. moral evaluations or avowals). But this would be inadequate for other uses of language. Wittgenstein can account for the content of both embedded and unembedded occurrences of expressions such as “Tormenting the cat is bad”, but the meaning will not be the same if the use of the whole sentence that contains the expression is not the same as the unembedded use of this expression. Definitely, Wittgenstein can account for the meaning of moral expressions both in embedded and unembedded situations, but he rejects the restrictions imposed by the Frege–Geach problem to describe the meaning of

these expressions —thus dissolving the problem.

### §3.3. Brandom's solution

Brandom's overall program of pragmatics mentioned in the title of the first section of Part I of his masterpiece might one lead to suppose that he might endorse a pragmatic theory of truth, e.g. the theory of truth of classical pragmatism under the slogan "The truth is what works".

Pragmatism in the stereotypical sense arises when one conjoins the ideas of a performative analysis of taking–true, of the relevant kind of performance as undertaking a personal commitment, and of the commitment as specifying the appropriate role of a claim in action–orienting deliberation, with the further idea that the measure of the correctness of the stance undertaken by a truth–attributor is the success of the actions it guides (Brandom 1994, p. 290).

Thus there is a phenomenalist strategy to take the practical properties of truth as the centre of theoretic focus. "The classical pragmatist line of thought accordingly holds out the possibility of understanding the use of 'true' in terms of what we are doing when we make a claim, putting forward a sentence *as true*" (Brandom 1994, p. 287).

Although Brandom subscribes to this emphasis in analysing the practical properties of truth, he believes that the pragmatist strategy is flawed since it exclusively focuses on taking–true as asserting or undertaking an assertional commitment, as evidenced by embedded uses of "... is true" (Brandom 1994, p. 299, p. 322). Further clarification is required to account for truth and taking–true. An alternative is to explain the embedded uses of "... is true" with a notion of redundancy of content, where "p is true" is equivalent to "p". Nevertheless, redundancy and disquotational theories of truth, despite supplementing the pragmatist account, cannot account for all the contexts in which the taking–true locution "... is true" occurs (Brandom 1994, pp. 300–301). An alternative is required.

Brandom (1994, 1997, 2001), resorting to Grover, Camp, and Belnap (1975) and their prosentential theory of truth, argues in favour of an anaphoric theory of truth that sees "true" and "false" as anaphoric proform–forming operators. "Proform" is modelled after "*pronoun*" which stand, e.g. for a specific person and their meanings depend on the proper name of the person in question, just as (1) "snow is white is true" depends on the meaning of (2) "snow is white". I will explain in a moment. The traditional semantic vocabulary concerning truth

is thus explained in terms of anaphora. The expressions “true” and “false” function as prosentences that can be defined by four conditions:

1. They occupy all grammatical positions that can be occupied by declarative sentences, whether freestanding or embedded.
2. They are generic, in that *any* declarative sentence can be the antecedent of some prosentence.
3. They can be used anaphorically either in the lazy way or in the quantificational way.
4. In each use, a prosentence will have an anaphoric antecedent that determines a class of admissible sentential substituends for the prosentence (in the lazy case, a singleton). This class of substituends determines the significance of the prosentence associated with it. (Brandom 1994, p. 302)

The anaphoric theory of truth is a deflationary theory of truth. That is, it questions the suitability of traditional semantic vocabulary, such as truth-conditions, to explain propositional contentfulness. This is why Brandom offers an alternative semantic account of propositional contentfulness that resorts to the notion of inference (see section 2.2). This does not negate that sentences can have truth-conditions. “Deflationists ought to acknowledge the possibility of expressing semantic content truth-conditionally, while denying the possibility of explaining semantic content in general truth conditionally” (Brandom 1997, p. 148). Understanding the expressive role of truth encompasses the impossibility of utilizing truth-conditions to account for propositional contentfulness without leading to circularity.

This deflationary understanding of truth, in turn, negates conceiving truth as a substantial property. Namely, the anaphoric theory of truth is characterised by its metaphysical parsimony. This negation of a substantial truth may appear, initially, contradictory, since it seems that we cannot account for the expressive role of “truth” when philosophers assert sentences of the sort of “Truth is one, but beliefs are many”. However, the problem stems from philosophers misconstruing ordinary talk about truth and generating grammatical misunderstandings. “On the basis of a mistaken grammatical analogy to predicates and relational expressions [...] they have hypostatized a property of truth and a relation of reference as the semantic correlates of the apparently predicative and relational expressions” (Brandom 1994, p. 323). Taking an assertion to be true is adopting a normative attitude: acknowledging a commitment. “The expressive power of 'true' ensures that where an objective property is ascribed to something, the resulting claim can correctly be said to be objectively true or false. Properly understood, however, no property of truth

(objective or otherwise) is being invoked by such a remark” (Brandom 1994, p. 324).

However, how is this anaphoric theory of truth applied? “First, one computes the class of antecedent tokenings. Then, one determines the content of anaphoric dependent, as a function of the contents of its antecedents” (Brandom 1997, p. 144). Consider (7)–(8):

- (7) “Snow is white” is true.
- (8) Snow is white.

According to Brandom’s anaphoric theory of truth, both sentences say exactly the same. The content of “... is true” is dependent on the antecedent (i.e. “Snow is white”) from which it derives its content. Thus this account, conversely to disquotational and redundancy theories of truth, can account for embedded uses of “true” and “false”. A further advantage of this account is that an anaphora is a relation between *tokenings* (Brandom 1994, p. 303). Consider the response (10) to the tokening (9):

- (9) The grass is green
- (10) That is true.

A classical account would focus on (10) and take a subpart of the sentence as a referring term (i.e. “that”), and it would determine the contents of “... is true” in relation to this referent. Conversely, the prosentential theory claims that (10) as a whole refers anaphorically to the antecedent (9). Namely, the content of (10) is construed and determined by (9). Against this classical account and the alternative offered by the prosentential theory, Brandom argues that we should see “... is true” as a prosentence-forming operator. “It applies to a term that is a sentence nominalization or that refers to or picks out tokenings. It yields a presented that has that tokening as its anaphoric antecedent” (Brandom 1994, p. 305).

Two further considerations must be introduced regarding the anaphoric analysis of truth. First, sentential modifiers play a fundamental role when analysing the expressive role of “truth” in a sentence. “If the anaphoric dependent on a claim that-*p* is of the form ‘That *was* true’, or ‘That is *not* true’, or ‘That is *possibly* true’, or ‘That is *probably* true’, then at the second stage one cannot simply disquote the antecedent” (Brandom 1997, p. 145). Second, above I have stated that “true” can be used anaphorically either in a lazy or in a

quantificational way. “In the *lazy* use, as in ‘If Mary wants to arrive on time, she should leave now’, they are replaceable by their antecedents, merely avoiding repetition. In the *quantificational* use of pronouns, as in ‘Any positive integer is such that if it is even, adding it to one yields an odd number’, such replacement clearly would change the sense” (Brandom 1994, p. 301). Both disquotational theories and anaphoric theories can deal with the lazy use. However, anaphoric theories can also deal with quantificational cases, treating them as redundant in the same way as non-quantificational cases. For instance, “‘Everything the policeman said is true’ is construed as containing a quantificational prosentence, which picks up from its anaphoric antecedent a set of admissible substituends (things the policeman said)” (Brandom 1994, p. 302).

This leads us to a final issue concerning Brandom’s theory of truth: the truth–language–world relation. One of the worries regarding deflationist theories of truth is that it appears to depend on a contrast between predicates and declarative sentences that correspond respectively to properties and facts, and predicates and declarative sentences that do not. However, this rests on a robust correspondence theory that deflationists do not need to endorse. The important distinction is “that between claiming that ‘Snow is white is true’ states a fact (which deflationists had better not deny, for the reasons Boghossian points out) and claiming that it states a special *kind* of fact, namely a semantic fact. The ‘deflating’ part of deflationism can consist in its denial of this latter claim” (Brandom 1994, pp. 328–329). For instance, if we master the vocabulary of a specific field in science (e.g. physics, chemistry or biology) we have expressive access to facts that otherwise we could not express (e.g. talk about quarks, molecules or cells). But mastering semantic vocabulary (i.e. “truth”) does not provide us with semantic facts; it merely provides a new way of talking about non-semantic facts. Namely, this theory is ontologically deflating.

Brandom, however, does not endorse semantic non-factualism; he exclusively negates semantic facts. For instance, “It is true that the grass is green” is just a semantic expression of a non-semantic fact. “True claims do correspond to facts, and understanding claims does require grasp of what the facts must be for those claims to be true” (Brandom 1994, p. 330). There is no room for a robust correspondence theory of truth, “what the facts are does not depend on what claimings we actually effect” (Brandom 1994, p. 330). Discursive practices are empirically and practically constrained and non-linguistic facts could be what they are, even if our discursive practices were different. “It is not up to us which claims are true (that is, what the facts are)” (Brandom 1994, p. 330).

Nevertheless, we must not conceive knowledge as a gap to bridge between discourse (or thought) and the world —as if facts and the world were something “out there”. This idea of bridging a gap stems from the bifurcation between facts and discourse. However, the rejection of correspondence theories of truth eliminates the need of this bifurcation, without encompassing a loss of worlds or that discursive practices would become unconstrained. Conversely, “what determinate practices a community has depends on what the facts are and on what objects they are actually practically involved with, to begin with, through perception and action. The way the world is constrains proprieties of inferential, doxastic, and practical commitment in a straightforward way from *within* those practices” (Brandom 1994, p. 332). Facts are still the contents of true claims and thoughts, but “facts are structured and interconnected by the objects they are facts about; they are articulated by the properties and relations the obtaining of which is what we state when we state a fact (claim when we make a claim)” (Brandom 1994, p. 333).

This said, within Brandom’s game of giving and asking for reasons “acknowledging a doxastic commitment is taking–true, and producing an assertional performance is putting a claim forward as true” (Brandom 1994, p. 277). Any legitimate move within the game is an assertional performance, and its propositional content is determined by the inferential role it has in socially articulated deontic scorekeeping practices. Additionally, since all assertions have propositional content, they also have truth–conditions (Brandom 1994, p. 329). The facts of the world will determine and constrain what are true claims and what are not.

In consequence, any meaningful moral sentence asserted within the game of giving and asking for reasons is an assertion, a claim that is put forward as true. They have propositional content that is determined by their inferential role in deontic scorekeeping practices (as outlined in section 2.2), and they have specific truth–conditions that are determined by the world that constrains them. Namely, moral sentences are propositions that make claims (which are put forward as true) and express beliefs (i.e. doxastic commitments) that can be true or false. Thus Brandom is committed to a weak version of moral cognitivism insofar as we can assert moral sentences that express truth–apt propositions and beliefs, such as doxastic commitments. Although it is unclear what kind of cognitivism he is endorsing, due to his lack of work on this subject. For instance, due to the constraint of the world, moral facts (and properties) would be necessary to make moral assertions true, something that they don’t do. Notwithstanding, moral realism is not required to endorse cognitivism. In some instances moral descriptivism (that our moral discourse describes some

aspect of reality), moral realism (that there are moral facts) and moral cognitivism (that there are moral propositions that are truth-apt) are illegitimately intertwined. However, they are three different doctrines which do not necessarily encompass one another. For example, moral error theorists are committed to moral anti-realism but argue in favour of the existence of moral propositions that have truth-conditions, since all these propositions are false.

Brandom's commitment to a weak version of moral cognitivism entails two substantial differences with regards to Wittgenstein's account of the role of "truth" and "falsity" in ethics and moral discourse. First, against Wittgenstein, Brandom does not have a dismissive attitude towards the notions of truth and falsity in ethics. Brandom does not claim that it is nonsense to state that a certain ethical judgment is true or false. Conversely, his anaphoric theory of truth provides an analysis of assertions such as "It is true that lying is wrong" or "It is true that tormenting cats is bad" that does not reduce them to mere nonsense. Moreover, Brandom is not opposed to the possibility of moral assertions, thus distancing himself from Wittgenstein's understanding of moral sentences outlined in sections 2.1 and 3.2.

Second, Brandom's approach to the Frege-Geach problem differs from Wittgenstein's (dis)solution. His commitment to semantic inferentialism (instead of semantic expressivism) and a weak version of moral cognitivism (instead of moral non-cognitivism) entails that he does not inherit the problems associated to expressivism and non-cognitivism —problems which are singled out by the Frege-Geach problem. For Brandom moral sentences are employed as assertions that put forward claims as true in both embedded and unembedded uses, they are not required to mean different things in embedded and unembedded uses. Predication is constant throughout embedded and unembedded occurrences, avoiding the fallacy of equivocation and the Frege-Geach problem.<sup>11</sup>

## §4. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has analysed and shown the similarities and dissimilarities between Wittgenstein's later work and Brandom's work with regards to the meaning of moral sentences and the role "truth" and "falsity" in our moral discourse. First, I have shown how they both employ similar strategies to account for the meaning of moral sentences. They focus on pragmatics, the

<sup>11</sup> It should be noted, however, that Brandom might also employ his rejection of compositionism to negate one of the basic commitments implicit in the Frege-Geach problem.

use of moral sentences, in order to determine their meaning. Second, I have argued that despite their similarities when dealing with the meaning of moral sentences, they have divergent descriptions of the role of “truth” and “falsity” in moral discourse. On the one hand, Wittgenstein’s general remarks on ethics demonstrate a dismissive attitude towards the notions of truth and falsity in moral discourse, which, in turn, suggests a rejection of moral cognitivism. Despite this dismissive attitude and his expressivist account of moral sentences, Wittgenstein is able to overcome the Frege–Geach problem by means of dissolving the problem due to his rejection of both compositionality and the Frege point. On the other hand, Brandom endorses a weak version of moral cognitivism: he takes assertions (which express doxastic commitments) as the fundamental linguistic activity in the game of giving and asking for reasons and provides an anaphoric theory of truth to account for “truth” and “falsity” in our discourse. This allows him to avoid the problems singled out by the Frege–Geach problem.

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#### NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR

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