The Pragmatic Gettier: Brandom on Knowledge and Belief

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ABSTRACT

Knowledge and belief fully display the pragmatic features that make of them different concepts only in third-person epistemic attributions. This is the main thesis of this paper, which has three sections. In section 1 I argue, following a pragmatic reading of Gettier, that agents on their own lights cannot tell the difference between what they know and what they believe that they know. The reason lies on the pragmatic peculiarities of normative notions, which according to Brandom's normative expressivism amount to saying that first-person epistemic claims lack the required complexity to ground a complete contrasting analysis of the concepts of knowledge and belief. Section 2 deals with the norms of assertion and elaborates in more classical terms something that follows from Brandom's treatment of assertions, i.e. that assertions are expressions of belief that must be taken as knowledge claims. Finally, in section 3, I propose to explain the link between third person ascriptions and first person avowals by borrowing one of Ramsey's hints on truth ascriptions to derive the role of the latter from that of the former. First-person epistemic claims, I suggest, are essentially the result of reactive actions, being their role dependent upon the functioning of third-person attributions.

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§1. Gettier's insight and its pragmatic[1] reading

HERE IS ONE OF THE DEFINITIONS of knowledge as justified true belief (JTB) that Gettier famously defied (Gettier 1966, p. 121):

(JTB) S knows that p iff (i) p is true, (ii) S believes that p, and (iii) S is justified in believing that p.

His argument to defend that the definition is faulty rests on the following two assumptions and two examples. The assumptions are:

(α)   "… in that sense of 'justified' in which S's being justified in believing P is a necessary condition of S's knowing that P, it is possible for a person to be justified in believing a proposition that is in fact false" (loc. cit.), and

(β)   "for any proposition P, if S is justified in believing P, and P entails Q, and S deduces Q from P and accepts Q as a result of this deduction, the S is justified in believing Q." (loc. cit.)

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[1]   From my pragmatist perspective, in which I wholeheartedly endorse Wittgenstein's slogan that meaning is use, and its Brandomian version, that semantics should answer to pragmatics, I consider the line between semantics and pragmatics fuzzy and theory–laden. If semantics answers to pragmatics, I cannot see how to draw a clear–cut distinction between force and semantic content. Differences in force should imply differences in content, and for this reason I do not make a big issue of the distinction. In most of what follows, semantics and pragmatics will refer to aspects of basically the same theoretical enterprise: that of individuating what is said in communicative action and, derivatively, of pinning down the contribution of concepts. This task requires bringing together aspects that are linguistically codified and others belonging to narrow and broad contexts. I consciously avoid talking of truth conditions since these dilute without trace in the pragmatist account I propose.

The two examples may be paraphrased like this:

1. Situation A: Smith believes, on the basis of strong and reliable evidence, that Jones will get the job Smith and Jones have applied for. Smith also knows that Jones has ten coins in his pocket. Finally, it is Smith the candidate who gets the job and, unbeknownst by himself, he also has 10 coins in his pocket. In this situation sentence (1) states something true,

    (1) The person who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket.

2. Situation B: Smith believes, on the basis of strong and reliable evidence, that Jones owns a Ford. He does not know anything about Brown's whereabouts, though. Nevertheless, Jones sold his Ford some weeks ago and Brown happens to be in Barcelona. In this situation sentence (2) states something true,

    (2) Either Jones owns a Ford or Brown is in Barcelona.

Gettier claims that "[t]hese two examples show that definition (JTB) does not state a sufficient condition for someone's knowing a given proposition" (1963, p. 123), i.e. that p being true and an agent having evidence supporting his believe that p are not enough to attribute him the knowledge that p. As M. Williams points out,

> [a] striking feature of Gettier's example is that our reluctance to grant Smith knowledge has nothing to do with having only low–grade evidence for his conclusion. Thus the suggestion that knowledge demands a high degree of justification will not solve the problem. By normal standards, Smith's evidence is more than adequate to support a claim to knowledge (Williams 2001, p. 28).

The formidably expansive effect of Gettier's argument rests on the fact that it generalizes. No matter how thoroughly a subject tests his beliefs, he cannot be sure that he knows. I call this intuition, drawn up in the following claim, the "Gettier Generalized" [GG],

> [GG] No set of conditions a subject imposes on his beliefs suffices for him to establish that he knows a given proposition.

Two kinds of strategy have been implemented in order to re–accommodate

Gettier's results in the standard picture. The first kind is what Williams calls "conservative strategies" (Williams 2001, p. 29) that consist in strengthening the notion of justification by making it objective, based on truth–tracking, scientifically traceable procedures. Goldman's reliabilism is an example (Goldman 1967, 1986). "Radical strategies" (Williams 2001, *loc. cit.*) that basically propose removing the justification ingredient from the definition constitute the second kind (Lewis 1996, 551; Williamson 2000, chapter 9; Miracchi 2015).

The consequences of Gettier's examples for epistemology are not my concern here. My concern is with the semantic and pragmatic aspects that have been so far neglected. Smith is not only justified in *believing* (1) and (2), he is also entitled, on the pragmatic account, to *assert* the propositions that (1) and (2) express since he meets the assertion conditions for (1) and (2). Smith believes (1) and (2) and he can give reasons for his beliefs. If confronted, Smith is also entitled to assert that he knows. But unfortunately, he does not.

Let us call the pragmatic analogue of [GG] the "Pragmatic Gettier" [PG],

[PG] No information a subject has access to suffices for him to distinguish the conditions that entitle him to assert that he knows from the conditions that entitle him to assert that he believes.

[PG] has two sub–clauses, [PG1] and [PG2],

[PG1] The agent who sincerely asserts that p is thereby committed to answering in the positive to the questions whether he believes that p, whether he knows that p, and whether p is true.

[PG2] The agent who is justified in believing that p (alternatively, that p is true) is thereby entitled to assert that p, to assert that he believes that p, and to assert that he knows that p[2].

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[2]   We might feel that knowledge requires stronger assertion conditions than belief, and there is a sense in which this is correct. For this reason, I have distinguished between the absolute, non–gradual sense and the psychological, gradual, sense of epistemic notions. The absolute sense is what is involved in the discussion of the norms of assertion that I will be commenting on in section 2. The psychological sense distinguishes knowledge from belief taking into consideration the degree of confidence the subject has in the content of his act, and includes some kind of certainty, either subjective or objective, in the conditions for asserting knowledge (see section 2.1 below). The different senses in which speakers use epistemic notions (absolute, psychological, and possibly others) are intimately related and distinguishing among them is sometimes rather artificial. However, the complexity of these notions is worth the effort.

In the same sense in which Smith cannot distinguish between knowledge and his true justified belief, the agent of an assertion cannot differentiate between the conditions that entitle him to assert that p, the conditions that entitle him to make explicit his belief that p, the conditions that entitle him to claim knowledge of p, and the conditions that entitle him to ascribe truth to p. The agent of an assertion cannot but assume that the content he asserts is true, even if subsequently he discovers that it is not. Otherwise, he would not meet a basic precondition of assertoric acts, as I will argue in the next section. He also needs to be prepared to produce the evidence he possesses and that allows him to assert the content. Believing in the truth of the content he asserts and being in possession of some evidence to defend it are preconditions for an act of assertion to be such. The agent entitled to assert that p is thus thereby entitled to assert that he believes and that he knows that p. Surely, an external observer might realize that the speaker does not know, as it happens in Gettier's examples, but as far as the speaker is concerned, the set of conditions he needs to meet in order to successfully assert that p, that he believes that p, and that he knows that p is one and the same. This is what Gettier's cases show. [PG] does not state the subject's omniscience as some have defended (see Chalmers and Hajek 2007), though. The agent's inability to deny what he is asserting (see section 2) does not make the content of his assertions true. What [GG] and [PG] state is the subject's systemic incapacity to detect the features, epistemic and semantic, that differentiate belief from knowledge. The subject of a speech act has access to assertability conditions, but assertability conditions are not enough. Truth requires an external perspective (see Brandom 1994, p. 201ff.; 2000, p. 196–198; Davidson 1991, p. 157, Frápolli 2012, chapter 3) without which knowledge cannot be pinned down.

Certainly there are features that differentiate belief from knowledge, but they cannot be detected from the agent's perspective. Detecting these features from the third person perspective is free from trouble, though, and this explains the contrast between [GG] and [PG], on the one hand, and the consensus that surrounds Gettier's conclusion—i.e., that we spectators know that Smith does not know—, on the other.

§ 1.1 Epistemic avowals

Only from a third–person perspective the contrast between knowledge and belief can be fully established. This is the outcome of the previous section. Even if sometimes the term has a more restricted sense, I will call first–person present–tense claims about the agent's general state of mind "avowals", and I reserve the

expression "epistemic attributions" to refer to third–person claims in which an agent ascribes a particular epistemic attitude to somebody else (or to himself at a different time). Avowals, in this wider sense, do not need to be interpreted as exclusively expressing feelings, attitudes or emotions; they can also be understood as stating intentions to act in a certain way, inferential connections from the speaker's perspective, and plans in Gibbard's sense (Gibbard 2012, pp. 169ff). Sentences (3) and (4) are examples of avowals:

(3)   I believe that the person who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket,

(4)   I know that the person who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket.

[PG] implies that avowals cannot be the elementary sentences (in Carnap's sense[3]) to derive an explanation of how epistemic concepts work, since they neglect the attributor's viewpoint, a viewpoint that is essential to discriminate between what the agents believes and what he knows. The impact of [PG] on the current meta–epistemological debate should be clear: it implies that no approach based on avowals can succeed in offering a complete account of the meaning of epistemic notions. A significant part of what is currently known as "epistemic expressivism" is thus affected by [PG]. Chrisman explains as follows the core of epistemic expressivism:

> Generically, [epistemic expressivism] is an application of the core ideas of ethical expressivism to the epistemic case. Predictably, this means that an epistemic expressivist holds that, as descriptive claims express factual beliefs, epistemic claims express a distinctive non–representational kind of mental state. Again, we can call it a pro–/con–attitude, a conative state, or an evaluative 'belief'. It doesn't have to be the same kind of non–representational state as expressivists think is expressed by ethical claims; and most epistemic expressivists think there must be both cognitive and conative elements in the state. What is important is that epistemic judgements have, at least in part, a desire–like direction of fit with the world (Chrisman 2012, p. 119).

Chrisman is well aware that epistemic expressivism is not an exact replica of classical expressivism for the epistemic case, but a much more elaborate view that

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[3]   Carnap explained the procedure to determine the meaning of a word as follows: "What now is the meaning of a word?[…] First, the syntax of the word must be fixed, i.e. the mode of its occurrence in the simplest sentence form in which it is capable of occurring; we call this sentence form its elementary sentence. […]" (Carnap 1932/1959, p. 62)

systematically includes strategies to overcome the semantic objection known as the Frege–Geach Argument (Gibbard, 2003, chap. 3, Chrisman 2012, p. 124) and the charges of subjectivism and relativism (Blackburn 1998, p. 318; Gibbard 2003, p. 277; Ahlstrom–Vij 2013, p. 342) to which meta–ethical expressivism was subject to. But as it happens with the conservative and radical proposals developed to deactivate Gettier's cases (see section 1.1 above), the sophistication of contemporary expressivism *vis–à–vis* its classical ethical versions is not enough to answer to [PG]. What [PG] highlights is the contrast between the speaker's world and what is supplied by an external viewpoint. If the only voice that is heard is that of the speaker at one time, then the analysis will be necessarily insufficient. And this will be so, no matter whether the explanation of the meaning of the agent's words rests on what he has in his mind, on what he considers that follows from his claims, on how he intends his future behaviour to be, or on any other possible sophistication of the speaker's perspective. In general, the information to which the agent has access cannot ground a complete account of the import of epistemic notions.

The third–person dependence of epistemic terms derives from the normative nature of the concepts concerned. This is a natural conjecture that would place the argument of this paper within the general discussion of normativity that stems from Wittgenstein's rule–following debate (see for instance PI, § 202). Nevertheless, I would maintain my focus on what happens with epistemic terms when Gettier's insights go pragmatic.

Let me stress the fact that the criticism that [PG] raises *against* some kind of expressivism is not an argument *for* representationalism, descriptivism, or semantic realism, though. Brandom's normative expressivism, for instance, is immune to [PG], as it is Minimal Expressivism (Frápolli and Villanueva 2012). Expressivism, its varieties, strengths and weaknesses, deserve much more space than I can devote here. I will not pursue this topic further, but I consider worth stressing that the almost universally accepted (but cfr. Olsson 2015) consequences of Gettier's argument have a semantic/pragmatic interpretation that might be relevant for the current discussion about the meaning of normative claims, be they semantic, logical, or epistemic.

§ 2. The norms of assertion

Gettier's cases bring up the topic of whether an agent knows when he is justified in believing something true. By contrast, [PG] focuses on the conditions under which an agent is entitled to assert a particular proposition p. The debate around the norms of assertion, by exposing the pre–conditions of the act and the

obligations undertaken by the agents involved in it, gives flesh to the pragmatic derivation of Gettier's argument. The norm of truth [NT], the norm of belief [NB], and the norm of knowledge [NK] are the customary candidates to be the constitutive rule of assertion (see, for instance, MacFarlane 2011 and Stalnaker 1999):

[NT]   Do not assert what is not true,

[NB]   Do not assert what you do not believe,

[NK]   Do not assert what you do not know.

If assertion presupposes (any of) the three norms, [NT], [NB] or [NK], then the explicit display of the norms, as it happens in sentences such as (3), (4) and (5),

(3)   I believe that the person who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket,

(4)   I know that the person who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket,

(5)   It is true that the person who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket,

only adds to the information given in (1),

(1)   The person who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket,

the expression of some implicit features of the acts. When the norm(s) of assertion are explicitly expressed, as in (3) and (4), the epistemic concepts concerned make public what was assumed in the assertion of their propositional arguments. This is part of what normative expressivism, i.e. expressivism related to normative notions, states. In this sense, the classical debate around the norms of assertion gives support to some kind of expressivism or non–descriptivism regarding the meaning of epistemic notions, i. e. the kind of expressivism that interprets them as making explicit something implicit in the kind of linguistic action we are involved in (Brandom 1994, chapter 3; 2000, p. 38). This aspect which is now explicit is the force of the act, i.e. the agent's set of attitudes towards the commitments and entitlements of his act, in Brandom's view. The group of authors who defend an expressivist–like approach to the semantics of epistemic verbs is wide and illustrious (Quine 1956; Field 2009; MacFarlane 2014; Urmson

1952; Wittgenstein 1969). The core of this approach is the interpretation of the role of the terms involved as giving information about different contextual aspects that may help evaluate their propositional arguments. Quine, for instance, appeals to the subject's notional world as the context of evaluation. A similar intuition, related to temporal, locative, and modal terms, is found in Kaplan (1989), Lewis (1980), and Recanati (2007), and its extension to cover epistemic modals is straightforward. Recanati (2003, p. 115, and in 2007, chapter 1), for instance, considers the overall content of an utterance as divided into two parts, the evaluable content (the lekton) and the circumstance of evaluation, which is not an ingredient of what is said.

When what is implicit in the act becomes overtly expressed, as in (3) and (4), it is ready to be part of the semantic content of the assertion, even though this is not always necessary. Even in explicit epistemic claims the contribution of epistemic terms can be understood as belonging to the circumstance of evaluation and not to the evaluable content, maintaining thus an expressive role.

The standard statement of Moore's paradox (Moore 1993; Schilpp, 1952, p. 543), "p but I do not believe it", produces its effect by explicitly defying [NB]. "Knowledge" is a source of paradoxical sentences as well: "it's raining but I don't know that it is" is as paradoxical as its belief counterpart (Huemer 2007, p. 143; Jones 1991, p. 186; Moore 1993, Wittgenstein 2008, pp. 365–366). The knowledge version of Moore's paradox defies [NK], a norm which explains the natural move of confronting an asserter by asking "how do you know?" (Unger 1975, pp. 250–265; Williamson 1996, p. 505; Williamson 2000, p. 252; Turri 2016, p. 2). Finally, as (TJB) above illustrates (see also Wittgenstein 1967, p. 408), [NK] includes [NT], which in turn gives support to the logical rules that govern the standard truth operator (see for instance Field 2017, p. 3):

[Truth–Introduction]: $\vdash p \Rightarrow \vdash T(p)$

[Truth–Elimination]: $\vdash T(p) \Rightarrow \vdash p$.

The three norms are grounded on the ordinary practices of competent speakers and on the intuitions that sustain classical logic and speech act theory. Most accounts of assertion connect it with belief, knowledge, and truth (an exception is Hawthorne, Rothschild, and Spectre, 2016). When assertion is understood as engagement in the game of giving and asking for reasons (Brandom 1994, 2000), as transference of knowledge by testimony (McDowell 1998, p. 45), as a way of modifying the context of a conversation (Stalnaker 1999, p. 78), or as to

recognize publicly something as true (Frege 1979, p. 2; Turri 2016, p. 3), there is no essential difference between the three norms mentioned. The equivalence is patent in Brandom, who explains assertions as a way of expressing beliefs which are the contents of assertions (Brandom 1994, p. 153), though, as we shall see also below, he maintains that beliefs themselves are to be accounted for in terms of linguistic practices involving commitments and entitlements. Brandom considers that understanding assertion as the "downtown" of language, as he does opposing Wittgenstein, is "to treat the sort of claim involved in asserting as an implicit knowledge claim" (op. cit., p. 200). The two insights together mean that assertions are implicit knowledge claims in which beliefs are expressed.

A consequence of the pragmatic equivalence of [NB], [NK], and [NT] with [PG] is that it makes the agent of an act of assertion unable to tell the difference between the conditions he needs to meet to say that he believes and those that authorize him to say that he knows. The pragmatic equivalence of the norms does not imply the identity of meaning of the three concepts involved though. Belief, knowledge and truth are different concepts. In its standard definition, knowledge, for instance, implies belief and truth whereas belief and truth together do not imply knowledge. In Brandom's inferential semantics, specifically, semantic content depends on the correction of material inferences. Using examples (1), (3) and (4) above, we see that from (4), but not from (3), (1) follows. Thus, the notions of knowledge and belief do not have the same content, since knowledge–assertions and believe–assertions stand in different inferential connections. That much is clear. Now, when the focus is not content, i.e. the contribution of ground–level notions to the correctness of an inference, but the conditions of acts, the three notions collapse from the first–person perspective. Brandom makes the point too:

> It is also possible, however, to distinguish expressions of mere belief from claims to knowledge in the first–person case, in which the claim is being endorsed or taken–true. In such cases, the social–perspectival distinction between attributions of knowledge and attributions of belief cannot get a grip (1994, p. 228).

Even if a speaker can distinguish between the notions of assertion, truth, belief, and knowledge, between their attribution conditions and their inferential connections, he cannot assert anything without believing (truly or falsely) that he knows it. His believing in this case does not admit degrees. It is an absolute condition that Brandom calls "commitment". Otherwise the act would be misfired as in the case of insincere promises. Now we have reached at the absolute notions of belief and knowledge which are involved in the norms of assertion.

These notions are not epistemic, they do not admit degrees, and from the first–person perspective at a single context they are indistinguishable. This is what [PG] highlights.

There is nothing paradoxical in someone believing or asserting something false. Neither is there anything anomalous in not believing something true. This is why Moore's paradox is not a contradiction (Huemer 2007, p. 142). But *asserting* a proposition and *asserting* your disbelief of it is at odds with the truism that, in acts of assertion, speakers display their beliefs, beliefs they stick to and take to be true. Grice's (1975, p. 46) super–maxim of quality, [SMQ], and the first quality maxim, [QM1], condense this view of assertion,

[SMQ]   Try to make your contribution one that is true,

[QM1]   Do not say what you believe to be false.

Grice's second quality maxim, [QM2], adds the justification factor present in the definition of knowledge,

[QM2]   Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence (Grice, *loc. cit.*).

In section 2.1 below I will argue that ordinary epistemic terms possess different, absolute and psychological[4], tones in their overall import. We might also say that they admit different uses, ones in which the aspects represented in the norms of assertion are highlighted, and others in which what is highlighted is the agent´s subjective confidence. In his answer to my question number 8, in the interview included in this issue, Brandom acknowledges that "belief" is not one of his terms, his corresponding expressions being "commitment" and "range of subjunctive robustness of an inference". Commitment is an absolute notion whereas the ranges of robustness come into degrees. This difference between gradual and non–gradual senses of "belief" is so consequential that we should seriously consider whether we are here in front of two different concepts under the ambiguous term "belief". In this paper I will talk of aspects, uses, or tones, instead

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[4]   Nothing relevant depends on the term "psychological" here. I could have used "epistemic" instead, but saying that epistemic notions have epistemic and non–epistemic tones would have sounded paradoxical. The distinction intends to stress the different aspects of epistemic notions that are focused on when we work on the philosophy of language and our interest is in the norms of assertion, and contrast them with the senses which are relevant when the debate is about justification in epistemology.

of taking a more radical option, which I do not completely reject.

The absolute, non–gradual tone of knowledge is what [NK] discloses and what supports Sellars' claim that "in characterizing an episode or a state as that of knowing, we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says" (Sellars 1956, § 36). The absolute tones of "evidence" and "justification" in [QM2] point at the notion of reason for asserting, in the sense that the agent of a genuine assertion should be in a position to defend the content of his act. Possessing better or worse reasons to defend one's assertion is something gradual, but possessing reasons is absolute. Reasons lie at the core of the assertoric language game, as Brandom and Sellars have convincingly explained (Brandom 1994, pp. 139, 158, 200).

[NB], [NK], and [NT], if the act of assertion is taken seriously, request from the speaker the same amount of entitlement and commitment. If the favoured norm of assertion is [NK], the standard definition of knowledge guarantees that belief and truth come in the pack. But even if our option is [NB], the justification and truth ingredients of the standard definition of knowledge are somehow present. Asserting is not merely uttering words; the agent of an assertoric act must have reasons to believe in the truth of his asserted contents. In a successful act of assertion, speakers take responsibility for the contents they express and for what follows from them. This aspect of assertion explains why what is said, as opposed to what is pragmatically implicated, cannot be cancelled out. Justification in the sense of reasons is thus one of the conditions under which an agent is entitled to assert. Finally, [NBT] is a mere stylistic variant of [NB],

[NBT] Do not assert what you do not believe to be true.

Truth does not add a new condition to an explicit expression of belief (Brandom 2009, p. 157). Believing that p is believing that p is true. This equivalence is the semantic core of all minimalisms about truth. Denying this equivalence leads to contradiction via [NB] and the introduction and elimination rules of the truth operator. These considerations and others of a similar kind have led several authors (Williamson 1996, 2000, p. 243; MacFarlane 2011, Turri 2016; Wittgenstein 1967, § 408) to directly identify knowledge as the norm of assertion (cfr. Gerke 2013, p. 143), since knowledge overtly includes belief, justification, and truth. There is thus no difference in highlighting the central role of any one of the mentioned norms over the others, considering the remaining two as derivative. All of them will work in order to sustain the solid insight that assertion

requires commitment (the belief part) and that rational commitment requires grounded likelihood (the entitlement part) (Brandom 2009, pp. 157ff.). A speaker who is committed to the truth of a content and entitled to assert it could not detect the missing ingredient for his act to be one of knowledge. The virtual equivalence of the three norms of assertion goes along with what [PG] states and supports the thesis of this paper, viz. that the agent that asserts something believes in the truth of his assertion and, if confronted, is bound to claim that he believes, to claim that what he believes is true, to provide reasons, and thus to claim that he knows. The confrontation might produce a loss of confidence in the fact that he knows, but then, by the norms of assertion, the conditions to assert would be lost as well.

§ 2.1. The complexity of epistemic notions: absolute and psychological aspects

The debate concerning the norms of assertion is pragmatic in a wide sense, although the boundaries between semantics and pragmatics are far from clear–cut (Frápolli 2012, chapter 3). Fortunately, nothing relevant for my present argument hinges on them. The purpose of postulating these norms of assertion is to identify the conditions under which agents are genuinely involved in asserting as opposed to, e.g., pretending or playing with words—i.e., they seek to pin down the commitments agents acquire and the entitlements required for their acts to be assertions. And these conditions are minimal. Different tones, psychological, semantic, and pragmatic, activate when epistemic notions are immersed in specific theoretical discussions. When the issue is knowledge as the norm of assertion, the salient tone of knowledge cannot be the psychological sense that identifies it with certainty as the limit of the justification process. If it were, we should renounce to speak, as the ancient sceptics recommended. Knowledge in the psychological sense would be a too strong requirement for assertion and would block communicative behaviour altogether. If one had to know in order to assert, Gettier's cases would condemn us to silence. Thus, a neat distinction between the several senses is essential in order to understand the scope of the norm of knowledge. Some arguments against [NK], such as those that appeal to situations in which the agent can be wrong (like in Gettier–like cases) and situations in which certainty is not enough (like in Brown's surgeon example; see e.g. Hannon 2015, p. 861; Gerken 2013, p. 144), by stressing the agent's fallibility, point to the psychological sense of "knowledge" and are thus misleading. The norms of assertion are compatible with the fact that humans are fallible, but only if we distinguish the different senses of "belief" and "knowledge"

involved in the different theoretical contexts.

A test that can help discriminate the absolute from the psychological senses for the case of "belief" is what Hawthorne, Rothschild, and Spectre (2016, p. 1394) call "the entitlement equality" [EE], which they reject,

[EE]   The reasons that entitle an agent to assert that p are the reasons that entitle him to believe that p.

If a particular use of "belief" meets [EE], the favoured sense is the absolute sense involved in [NB]. [EE] can be modified to include knowledge, as in [EE]*,

[EE]*   The reasons that entitle an agent to assert that p are the reasons that entitle him to believe that he knows that p.

Psychological and absolute senses of belief, knowledge, justification, and evidence are undoubtedly related. The following toy explanation might help envisage the distinction I am hinting at. The absolute reading helps define the kind of act and has a "by default" nature. Our rational behaviour requires a broad ground of non–challenged information. This non–challenged information is ready to be asserted on the basis of a *ceteris paribus* clause. If no new evidence perturbs the peaceful certainty of our ordinary beliefs, we are entitled to assert them, to assert their truth, and to assert our knowledge of them. This intuition has been developed from different perspectives and domains. It lies beneath Kuhn's characterization of normal science and paradigm, and is a common assumption of pragmatism (see for instance Wittgenstein 1969; Davidson 2001; Williamson 2000). Williamson has this sense in mind when he argues for the basic nature of knowledge (op. cit., p. 34) and claims that the by default semantic sense of knowledge is indistinguishable from the absolute sense of belief (see, for instance, op. cit., p. 27). The absolute senses of knowledge and belief are the ones involved in the explanation of the conditions for asserting within speech act theory, in which the agent can assert or refrain from asserting, but no third possibility is at hand. The admittance of degrees of belief moves us from speech act theory into the realm of practical reasoning, subjective probability, and the like. The transition from the absolute notions to the gradual notions typical of the epistemic debate is often triggered by new evidence that shakes the usually stable ground of ordinary assertion. Ramsey nicely acknowledges the two senses. In "Truth and Probability" (see for instance 1926, pp. 166ff.) he deals with

degrees of belief, whereas in "The Nature of Truth" (1991, p. 8) he puts to work the semantic sense when he discusses the application conditions of truth. To explain the connection between truth and assertion, Ramsey appeals to the "affirmative or assertive character" of attitudes as a precondition for the application of the truth talk. The affirmative or assertive character ranges from the mere tentative sense in which an agent postulates a proposition to see how far it leads us, to the strongest sense in which he sustains some of his most basic convictions. Ranges of assertive character are analogous to degrees of belief, but significantly Ramsey declares that, in order to apply truth, it is enough for an act to possess *some degree* of assertive character. The issue here is not how much confidence the agent has in the content of his assertion, but whether his act is an assertion at all. In the first case, what is at issue are the differences in commitment between conjectures, assumptions, theses, theories, etc.; in the second case what is at stake is whether the act is of the appropriate kind to apply the truth apparatus to its content. Thus, while degrees of belief and ranges of assertive character vary over a continuum of values, the property of possessing *some degree* of assertive character is *not* gradual.

Epistemic contextualism (DeRose 1992, Chrisman 2007) illuminates how contextual modifications can force agents to make the transition between the by default absolute sense to the epistemic sense of knowledge. Agents of assertoric acts contextually support the truth of what they assert. Contextual variations, e.g., higher or lower stakes, can produce context shifts that subsequently modify the assertion conditions supported by the initial context. Assertion conditions are nevertheless absolute once the context is fixed. Only when the context turns out to be unfriendly, uncommon, or non–standard (see DeRose 1992, and Yalcin 2011, pp. 313ff) does the agent have motives to shift from the absolute notion of knowledge presupposed in assertion to the relative notion of degree of belief or warrant (see Ramsey 1926, pp. 166ff.), characteristic of contexts in which the aim is testing the strength of our beliefs.

The following examples, (6) and (7), illustrate the epistemic sense and will help capture the distinction I am pointing at.

(6)   I believe that p but I do not know it,

(7)   I believe that p but I am not sure.

An agent that utters any one of them is showing his uncertainty about the content of his act and thus displaying a non–fully–committed attitude towards it. In this situation, the agent is not in a position to assert that p. Otherwise, he would be

accountable for committing something like Moore's paradox, represented by (8) and (9),

(8)   p but I do not know that p
(9)   p but I am not sure.

The alternatives cloistered in the two different senses of epistemic notions are then the following. An agent that properly asserts that p assumes that p is true. If he does not, according to Grices's quality maxims, he should refrain from asserting it. This is the absolute mode. Now, if he had reasons to doubt the truth of the possible contents of his assertion, then he shifts to the psychological mode in which assertion is suspended until the speaker is in a position to resume the required commitment. The psychological mode explains why sentences such as (6) and (7) are unobjectionable, whereas the absolute mode makes (8) and (9) paradoxical.

Belief and knowledge also have a subjective, private sense that connects their use with the speaker's feelings. Ramsey also acknowledges the subjective sense in (Ramsey 1929, p. 256) but only to separate it from his account of degrees of belief. It cannot be denied that sometimes our beliefs are accompanied by a particular sentiment related to the confidence or lack of it with which we stick to some propositions. But the sentiment is epiphenomenal. Beliefs whose strength is hardly challengeable, such as that the Earth is more than one month old, or that 2 + 2 = 4, stand without any particular emotion (Wittgenstein 1969, §§ 340, 341). And there are also cases in which the emotion goes against the characterization of the act. It is perfectly acceptable to say: "Yes, I know, but I cannot believe it!" (Williams 2001, p. 18). In these cases, we have the evidence but not (yet) the feeling. But it goes without saying that if the agent is entitled to say that he knows, then he believes in the absolute and in the psychological senses. His belief can be accompanied by feelings of confidence or not, but feelings are irrelevant for an attributor to attribute belief to him and for himself to acknowledge that he believes.

§ 2.2 Epistemic attributions

So far, epistemic avowals have been the preferred target of my analysis. Nevertheless, epistemic notions are frequently used to attribute states of mind to others. In these cases we speak of epistemic ascriptions or epistemic attributions. Attributions, in the sense I use the term here, are third–person claims in which

an assessor credits a subject with a particular epistemic status. Epistemic attributions highlight the expressive role of epistemic terms and provide the standard examples on which Brandom's normative expressivism rests. The following sentences (10) and (11) are examples of attributions:

> (10) JOAN: Smith believes that either Jones owns a Ford or Brown is in Barcelona,

> (11) JOAN: Smith knows that either Jones owns a Ford or Brown is in Barcelona.

In (10) and (11), a third party, Joan, ascribes to an agent, Smith, some propositional attitudes. As mentioned in section 1.1 above, epistemic avowals do not incorporate anything genuinely new to the assertion of the bare propositional argument of the epistemic operators (*I believe* or *I know*). This fact supports the discussion of the different norms of assertion and explains the puzzling feeling that surrounds Moore's paradox. In epistemic attributions, by contrast, the attributor might give some information about his own attitudes toward the attributed content and/or the attributee's reasons to support it. Sentences (10) and (11) transmit different information because they communicate something about the attributor's state of mind which is different in each case. Knowledge–claims convey some extra information concerning the attributor's point of view that is missing in belief–claims. Whereas in (11) Joan shows his endorsement of the propositional attitude's content and it is derivatively as if he himself had asserted it, in (10) Joan takes distances from the attributed belief, towards which he remains neutral. From a sentence such as (12),

> (12)   Some Britons believe that Brexit will be beneficial for the National Health System,

the speaker's opinion cannot be retrieved. To be sure, there are perfectly acceptable reasons not to display the attributor's viewpoint. In some contexts, e.g., in political polls, the attributor's opinion is irrelevant. Consider (13),

> (13)   Most Americans believe that Trump will make America great again,

in which the opinion of the speaker does not play any role. Belief attributions do

not include the attributor's attitude as a semantic ingredient even if they might convey distance or disagreement pragmatically. Belief attributions are thus compatible with different attitudes towards the attributed content on the part of the speaker. Even if they are sometimes used to pragmatically convey disagreement between attributor and attributee, disagreement is not essential for belief attributions. Thus, whereas a claim such as (14),

(14)   Smith knows that either Jones owns a Ford or Brown is in Barcelona and he is wrong,

reproduces the uncomfortable feeling of Moore's paradox, a claim such as (15),

(15)   Smith believes that either Jones owns a Ford or Brown is in Barcelona and he is right,

does not trigger the paradoxical uneasiness. This shows that while agreement is presupposed in knowledge attributions, disagreement is not presupposed in belief attributions.

Agreement on content is nevertheless insufficient for knowledge attributions. Attributor and attributee can agree in the content of the attributions and/or the reasons to support it. In (15), the second conjunctive clause, "he is right", provides the truth ingredient typical of agreement about content. Even so, Joan might be reluctant to attribute knowledge to Smith if he believed that Smith had reached the content by epistemic luck (see Heller 1999, Pritchard 2015, Wittgenstein 2008, p. 408), as it happens in Gettier's cases. In Brandom's normative terms, knowledge attributions require the attributor's endorsement of commitments and entitlements. "Often when a commitment is attributed to an interlocutor", Brandom says (1994, p. 177), "entitlement is attributed as well, by default". When the "default" part is challenged, knowledge cannot be attributed. It is because knowledge attributions convey a plus of information about the attributor's attitudes that knowledge and believe cannot be distinguished from the first–person perspective, in which attributor and attributee coincide. The social role of knowledge claims speaks for the preeminent status of attributions over avowals in the meta–epistemological debate (Brandom 1994, p. 201; Craig 1990, pp. 190–191; Rorty 1990, p. 24). The social role of epistemic avowals derives from the social role of attributions in a way that will be developed in the next section.

But before going to the explanation of the expressive interpretation of epistemic terms in first–person claims, I would like to make a detour and expose the tension I see in Brandom's account of epistemic notions, produced by the co–existence of his normative expressivism with his semantic inferentialism in a context of radical pragmatism. Brandom's *normative expressivism* consists in the thesis that normative notions, epistemic notions among them, express attitudes towards commitments and entitlements and serve to make explicit what is implicit in assertions, which can be avowals or attributions. The role of epistemic terms according to normative expressivism is fully displayed in attributions, which take on board the attributor's and the attributee's perspectives. Epistemic avowals may seem defective in some sense, since a complete explanation of their role can only be made by placing them in a broader (virtual or real) context in which some other voices are heard. Semantic inferentialism, on the other hand, does not need the third–person perspective. According to it, propositional contents are individuated by their inferential connections. Epistemic terms contribute to the semantic content which is determined by which material inferences are correct and which are not. Semantic inferentialism and normative expressivism seem to pull here in opposite directions, even though both approaches are suggestive and explanatory. I consider epistemic expressivism a correct and elegant way out from many intractable and scholastic debates in epistemology and meta–epistemology. At the same time, I consider semantic inferentialism a real step forward in the task of individuating propositional contents and liberating the philosophy of language from endless and empty discussions about the role of representation in the definition of meaning. But making them compatible in an articulated proposal does not seem to me a trivial task.

Brandom appeals at this point (see his answer to my question number 7) to the distinction between force and content. Expressivism would explain force and inferentialism would take care of content. Nevertheless, in a radical pragmatist approach, as Brandom's seems to be, in which semantics must answer to pragmatics, a neat distinction between force and content is hardly sustainable. A tentative explanation, which I have suggested in 2.1, would distinguish different uses/aspects, some expressive and some not. Standard normative terms, such as alethic and epistemic modals, and logical terms, all have expressive uses, uses that display attitudes and circumstances of evaluation. These uses correspond to the expression of the different commitments and entitlements related to normative aspects. But some terms, specifically epistemic terms, would admit also ground–level uses in which their general significance would be given by the correct material inferences in which they occur. The different ranges of subjunctive robustness of these inferences would account for the gradual sense of the

ground–level notion of belief, of which knowledge would be the upper limit. In these ground–level uses, epistemic terms behave exactly as the rest of terms. From semantic inferentialism, then, the specificity of normative terms cannot be retrieved. My main argument in this paper is related to normative uses, in which the distinction between the first and third–person perspectives is highly relevant.

Now, let me sum up what has been my main argument so far. There are different kinds of information that are relevant to pin down the overall import of epistemic claims. Agreement or disagreement, displayed, suggested, suspended, or silenced, about content or about reasons, require more than one subject or more than one situation. Claims whose semantic analysis is reduced to the attitudes of a single subject at a single context do not possess enough complexity to discriminate between the expressive roles of knowledge and belief. This is the pragmatic explanation of Gettier's cases. Nothing speakers have access to is enough to determine whether they know, and this is not an epistemic point, but a pragmatic one. For this reason, strengthening the epistemic standards does not solve the challenge posed by Gettier's cases, as Williams (*loc. cit.*) noted and I have registered as [GG]. For the same reason, enriching what is in the speaker's mind with inferential connections from his point of view, or plans for his subsequent behaviour does not help to distinguish the conditions for claiming knowledge from the conditions for claiming belief. Avowals fall short of supporting a complete analysis because neither the agent's mental state nor the agent's future practice mark a difference between knowledge and belief from the agent's viewpoint (see Wittgenstein 1969, §90). The meaning–related depth of epistemic notions is only displayed in third–person attributions, in which a new layer of analysis is added to the picture.

§ 3. Reactive uses of first–person claims

As I have argued in the previous sections, Gettier's cases, when read in a pragmatic key, lead us to designate epistemic attributions as the simplest sentential forms for epistemic notions. Thus, epistemic attributions take pragmatic priority over epistemic avowals. Now, let us see how the meaning of avowals can be reached from the meaning of attributions —in particular, how the two perspectives, the attributor's and the attributee's, represented in attributions can be projected into avowals. The task is to give an interpretation of the pragmatic import of avowals compatible with the point I have defended so far, i.e., that only from the attributor's viewpoint the difference between knowledge and belief can be fully disclosed, and to explain how epistemic terms can have an expressive role also in first–person avowals.

At this point, some Ramseyian insights might be helpful. Ramsey (Ramsey 1991, p. 12) suggests an explanation for the case of truth that can be fruitfully applied to knowledge and belief. Transparent truth ascriptions[5] such as (5) are semantically redundant. In fact, there is no semantic gain in uttering (5), "It is true that the person who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket", rather than (1), "The person who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket".

Ramsey's explanation connects the use of transparent truth ascriptions with the possibility that somebody denies or challenges the asserted content. The function of explicit ascriptions is thus explained by appealing to a broader context that includes other claims and other speakers (or the same speaker at different times). Transparent truth ascriptions, so understood, are steps in a larger communicative exchange, actual or virtual. The point is that transparent truth ascriptions hardly have spontaneous uses (outside philosophical texts). Nobody says (5) unless there are specific *pragmatic* reasons to include the truth operator, that in principle is semantically idle.

We might call those uses triggered by other (actual o virtual) communicative moves "reactive" uses. Because I expect you will confront what I'm saying or the consequences I draw from it, it makes sense to use an explicit truth ascription such as (5). Because I do accept what you say but question the consequences you draw from it, it makes sense to utter (16) and (17),

(16)   It is true that either Jones owns a Ford or Brown is in Barcelona, but this does not mean that Brown is in Barcelona,

(17)   It is true that Trump won the election, but Hillary had more individual votes.

Ramsey's explanation reflects an account of the meaning of truth in which truth terms make explicit something implicit in communicative actions with assertoric force (Ramsey, *loc. cit*). The assumed truth of the asserted content is a presupposition of [NB] and an ingredient of [NK], as we saw in section 2 above. For this reason, extending the explanation of reactive uses of truth to the cases of belief and knowledge is not a risky move.

Let us call the proposal concerning epistemic avowals that I am tentatively defending in this section the "reactive view of epistemic avowals", which I state as

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[5]   Transparent truth ascriptions are ascriptions in which the content of the speech act can be retrieved from the ascription's phrasing. By contrast, in blind truth ascriptions, i.e. ascriptions such as "What she said is true", the ascription content is not revealed in the ascription wording.

[RVEA],

> [RVEA] Epistemic avowals earn their living as reactive claims in a conversational context.

In a very tentative and coarse–grained approach, there are two typical situations in which first person epistemic claims are not redundant. The first one is retraction. A speaker who has changed his mind on a particular subject can meaningfully assert (18),

(18)   I used to believe that p, but now I know that not–p.

Retractions do not challenge [RVEA]. In retractions two contexts are implied (see, for instance, MacFarlane 2014, pp. 13ff). The content and/or credentials of a speaker's previous act are assessed from the speaker's present time and present state of mind. Brandom acknowledges this phenomenon in his answer to my question number 7, in the interview included in this issue, and extends it also to the future. An agent can envisage that she might discover that her credentials were not enough to sustain her assertion, and in an act of cautiousness she asserts belief instead of knowledge, taking a hint from the more basic, constitutive case.

The second type is exhibition, which comes in at least two kinds: (i) reaffirmation and (ii) critical display. By explicitly exhibiting the norm of his act in a reactive claim, a speaker might be reversing the burden of proof from him to his interlocutor, as in (19),

(19)   Yes, I do know; what reasons do you have to doubt it?

He might also display his attitude to allow the audience to examine it. The elucidative/expressive type of rationality (2000, pp. 56ff; 1994, pp. 105ff) that grounds Brandom's logical expressivism illustrates (ii): logical terms, specially conditional and negation, serve to say what without them can only be done. Brandom (2000, pp. 89ff.) extends this second function to normative notions in general, notions that allow to make explicit, and then open to critical debate, the implicit assumptions of communicative actions.

There surely are other types of reactive uses for epistemic avowals; I have just mentioned two of them. The specific variety of possible reactive uses is not

relevant for my point. What is relevant is the fact that the interpretation of epistemic avowals as reactive allows an explanation of the utility of first–person epistemic claims compatible with (i) a non–descriptivist approach to epistemic notions and (ii) the priority of the third–person perspective.

Let us now take stock and briefly state what I consider to be the pragmatic lessons of Gettier's point, Moore's paradox, and Ramsey's insight about truth. The pragmatic significance of epistemic notions needs, to be completely disclosed, retrieve information from the subject's state of mind as well as from an external observer capable of evaluating the subject's credentials. Gettier's cases expose the weakness of the subject's epistemic position as well as show the strength of the external assessor's viewpoint. From the first–person perspective we miss an essential feature of normative notions, which is what allows us to distinguish between knowing and believing that one knows, between taken something as true and the truth of something. The third–person perspective displays a semantic feature of normative notions derived from their pragmatic aspects, i.e. that their meaning is not restricted to their contribution to the semantic content but that it also includes aspects that justify their interpretation as expressive notions, aspects that Brandom has developed in his normative expressivism.

Some intuitions found in Ramsey and Brandom suggest a path from attributions to avowals that explains the pragmatic pre–eminence of the former over the latter. The epistemic relevance of Gettier's examples is universally recognized, not so much its pragmatic relevance. The aim of this paper has been to bring to the fore that the pragmatic consequences of Gettier's examples possess a similar weight and that, from a different perspective, something like [PG] has played a relevant role in the semantic, pragmatic, and meta–epistemological debates around the notion of knowledge in the past decades. An explicit acknowledgement of the impact of [PG], and a clear identification of the different senses and/or uses of epistemic notions will contribute to unknot some time–resistant difficulties in meta–epistemology related to epistemic expressivism and to clarify some essential points of the debates on the norms of assertion.

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