Giving grounds... comes to an end; – but the end is not certain propositions striking us immediately as true, i.e. it is no a kind of seeing on our part; it is our acting which lies at the bottom of the language-game.

Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*

A basic idea of pragmatism can be formulated as the view that it is action, rather than consciousness, that is the vehicle of thought. Moreover, pragmatists link actions to inventive self-development and creative problem solving. In the modern period, we find this inchoate idea emerging both in Bacon’s conjoining of the ideas of knowledge and power and in Descartes’s somewhat ambivalent suggestion that results are the ultimate test of a theory’s truth. By the late nineteenth century these ideas inspired the development of a series of theories of inquiry and reason that began with Peirce, and continued through James to Dewey and Mead. But pragmatism has never enjoyed a singular canonical characterization. Arthur Lovejoy, in fact, outlines no fewer than 13 varieties of pragmatism. Under the influence of the later Wittgenstein, contemporary forms of pragmatism shifted into the neo-pragmatic variants we find in Quine, Sellars, Putnam, Rorty, Apel, Habermas, Brandom, and perhaps Davidson. Goodman, Kuhn, and Toulmin could probably be added to the list.

To analyze, and then critique, such multifaceted theories of action, we shall adopt two heuristic standpoints: first, that pragmatist theories about truth and meaning rest upon implicit action-theoretic assumptions; and that these often unacknowledged assumptions are in fact metaphysical in nature. Exploring these background assumptions will assist in assessing the value of pragmatic theories.
As noted in the Introduction, pragmatists tend to be anti-essentialist, deflationist, and anti-realist about truth. Realists generally hold to a correspondence theory of truth, under which true propositions correspond to some true facts about the world. These facts make propositions about them true. This principle informs several semantic counterparts:

- *congruence* theories, which hold that propositions fit to facts as part to part (the early Wittgenstein);
- *correlation* theories, which claim that if a fact is the case, it correlates as a whole to the whole of a true proposition about it (Austin),
- *causal* theories, which hold that the truth of a sentence consists in the reference of its parts to an objective reality such as to provide a causal relation between its words and the world (the early Davidson).³

Anti-realists, on the other hand, are usually deflationists of some stripe. Deflationists deny that truth is a property of propositions, even though it may have some semantic function. Strawson claims that ascriptions of truth are simply “nonassertoric performative utterances” similar to utterances like “I promise that \( p \).”⁴ Quine’s deflationism holds that the truth predicate is purely formal inasmuch as it allows us to generalize over sentences or statements via semantic ascent. By using the predicate “true,” we can say that every statement of a certain form, such as “\( p \) or not \( p \) is true” or “all that Socrates said is true” is correct without having to assert every statement of that form separately. For Brandom, the truth predicate is a pro-sentential operator that functions to allow the intersubstitution of a sentence containing “true” with its non-semantic equivalent, in some privileged range of contexts, so as to preserve assertional or inferential commitments.⁵ By means of this, a truth locution can be used to endorse or adopt one’s uptake of another’s claim. Such a redundancy theory respects the classical pragmatist’s contention that the predicate truth is not descriptive.

In Rorty we see a vigorous form of pragmatic anti-essentialism. The scope and power of the truth operator has been whittled down from Dewey’s bold plan for its role in scientific progress and problem solving to the claim that it functions only in the formation of new vocabularies for a culture. Dewey’s disregard for the subjective components involved in defining a situation as a problem situation left him with an overly objectivistic model of meaning.⁶ Quine’s ontological relativity, on the other hand, held that we have to “see” what is stimulating the speaker and forming its dispositions: objects are neutral nodes