From Quasirealism to Global Expressivism – and Back Again?

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Philosophy, like modern agriculture, is a little too prone to monoculture. Happily, unpopular philosophical traditions are less in danger of complete extinction than varieties of apple, say, or breeds of pig. For this difference, however, the subject is often indebted to a few far-sighted individuals who appreciate the value of presently unfashionable ideas – who stand ready to reinvigorate the gene pool, when popular approaches succumb to pests and inbreeding.

Like the Gloucestershire Old Spot (a pig) and the Herefordshire Brown Snout (an apple), Hume's Scottish Expressivism has been something of a rare breed, for much of the past fifty years, in many parts of our discipline. When the history of the subject is seen in proper perspective, I think, Simon Blackburn will stand out as one of these unfashionable but far-sighted figures, lauded for his role in preserving and improving this old champion, through decades in which the Monsantos of the subject had shifted their attention elsewhere.

Admittedly, my own perspective on this history, and Blackburn's central role in it, is hardly detached. From my avowedly partial viewpoint, however, two aspects of Blackburn's contribution seem especially important. One aspect, which receives a great deal less attention than it deserves, is his repeated emphasis that Humean expressivism is not simply a position in meta-ethics: it is an attractive view in other cases, too.[1] The second aspect, much better known, is his identification and defense of the distinctive version of the expressivist programme he calls 'quasirealism.'

My focus here lies at the intersection of these two elements of Blackburn's work, in the sense that the issue I want to discuss concerns the proper scope of his distinctive variety of expressivism. It is the question whether quasirealism has even wider application than Blackburn himself envisages – whether it, too, should be 'globalised,' so as to become, if not a monoculture in its own right, then at least a philosophical variety usefully cultivated everywhere in language (even if mixed in with other things). I will be discussing the issue as to whether Blackburn's Humean expressivism, or a variety of pragmatism recognisably descended from such an expressivism, should be regarded as a *global* view; and if not, where the boundaries are, and how they are to understood.

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[1] Blackburn's classic early paper 'Morals and Modals' (Blackburn 1987) called much-needed attention to the comparison implicit in its title, for example.

The remainder of the paper is in two main parts. In the first section, I outline some reasons for thinking that quasirealism is indeed an unstable position, in the sense that it contains within itself the seeds of a more wide-ranging expressivism – the gobal view just mentioned. I then describe a sense it which it seems to me that this global pragmatism can nevertheless accommodate some of the intuitions that seemed to recommend its less ambitious ancestors. In the second section, drawing on and responding to some recent work by Blackburn himself, I ask where this leaves us – in what sense, in particular, it amounts to a global pragmatism.

1 Quasirealism to Global Expressivism

The key thought of twentieth century expressivism was that some declarative uses of language were not really doing what philosophers had previously taken them to be doing; and that this fact had consequences for traditional philosophical debates. By appreciating that moral claims are not genuinely factual claims, the early noncognitivists told us, we avoid metaphysical puzzles about the nature of moral *facts* or *properties* – for the thought that are such things, for philosophy to concern itself with, rests on a mistake about the role of moral language.

1.1 The bifurcation thesis

This key thought was expressed in a variety of ways, but central to all of them, in the traditional form of the view, was the idea that there is a division, or 'bifurcation,' between the bits of language of which this claim is true, and those of which it is not true. This 'bifurcation thesis' itself comes in a bewildering array of forms, as Robert Kraut points out:

> The bifurcationist often undertakes the task of determining which of our well-formed declarative sentences have truth conditions and which ones, though meaningful, are simply the manifestations of attitudes or the expressions of 'stances'. He wants to know which of our predicates get at real properties in the world, and which, in contrast, merely manifest aspects of our representational apparatus—'projections borrowed from our internal sentiments'. On different occasions he articulates his task in different ways; but they all point to some variant of the *bifurcation thesis* ..., the thesis that some declarative sentences (call them the D sentences)
> —describe the world
> —ascribe real properties

—are genuinely representational

—are about 'what's really out there'

—have determinate truth conditions

—express matters of fact

—limn the true structure of reality

whereas other declarative sentences (call them the E sentences)

—express commitments or attitudes

—manifest a 'stance' (praise, condemnation, endorsement, etc.)

—are expressive rather than descriptive

—do not 'picture' the world

—lack truth conditions, but possess 'acceptance conditions' or 'assertibility conditions'

—merely enable us to 'cope' with reality

—are true (or false) by convention

—do not express 'facts of the matter'. (Kraut 1990, 158–159)

For future reference, I want to note that among these characteristics of what Kraut here calls E sentences, some are *negative* and some *positive* in character. E sentences 'lack truth conditions,' 'do not picture the world,' or 'do not express facts of the matter,' for example – all those are *negative* claims. Instead, on the *positive* side, they do something else: 'express attitudes,' 'manifest a stance,' or whatever. Noncognitivism about an area of discourse was typically a combination of a negative and a positive thesis, in this way. This observation will play an important role below.

1.2 The need for quasirealism
If the noncognitivist is right, why do our our ethical claims take the form that they do? Why are they *claims* at all, at least superficially? These rather pressing issues were not given their due attention by some of the twentieth century's earlier expressivists, apparently, and they provide the take-off point for Blackburn's quasirealism. The quasirealist's project is that of explaining how the folk come to 'talk the realist talk,' without committing ourselves – us theorists, as it were – to 'walking the metaphysical walk.'

Blackburn gives the following definition of his own project:

QUASI-REALISM: a position holding that an expressivist or projectivist account of ethics can explain and make legitimate sense of the realist-sounding discourse within which we promote and debate moral views. This is in opposition to writers who think that if projectivism is correct then our ordinary ways of thinking in terms of a moral truth, or of knowledge, or the independence of ethical facts from our subjective sentiments, must all be in error, reflecting a mistaken realist metaphysics. The quasi-realist seeks to earn our right to talk in these terms on the slender, projective basis. (Blackburn 1994, 315)

Two comments about this definition, before we move on. First, the quasirealist programme is not confined to metaethics, as Blackburn's formulation here suggests; and he himself elsewhere emphasises as much, as I noted above. Second, I think that this definition actually understates the importance of the quasirealist project to expressivism (or projectivism, as Blackburn calls it here), in seeming to allow that there could be a version of the view that allowed that 'our ordinary ways of thinking in terms of a moral truth, or of knowledge' could 'all be in error.' In fact, however, such a concession would simply be a reductio of the expressivist claim, which is intended to be an *interpretation* of our ordinary ways of thinking and talking (and which must aim to make sense of them much as they are, in other words).[2]

So the relevant opponent is someone who says that the expressivist proposal is simply implausible, because it cannot make sense of the obvious fact that sentences of the disputed class *take the form* of ordinary factual claims. Such an opponent might be either a realist or an antirealist (e.g., in the latter case, an error theorist or a fictionalist) themselves; either way, however, they maintain that the expressivist cannot make sense of the linguistic appearances, with respect to the utterances in question. The quasirealist sets out to meet this challenge, in the way that Blackburn here describes.

In the quasirealist's hands, expressivism thus becomes a more interesting doctrine, making a serious attempt to respond to what otherwise seems a rather significant difficulty. Along the way, it has distanced itself from some of its own expressivist ancestors, in a manner reflected in some issues about the terminology in which it is best described. In particular, the term 'noncognitivism' now seems inappropriate, given that quasirealism is taking seriously the fact that we do, as Blackburn puts it, 'promote and debate moral views'; and in insisting that 'our

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[2]I suspect that Blackburn has this reductio in mind, but it would be better expressed by saying that quasirealism is in 'opposition to writers who think that if projectivism [*were*] correct then our ordinary ways of thinking in terms of a moral truth, or of knowledge, ... [*would*] all be in error [which, by assumption, they are not].'

ordinary ways of thinking in terms of ... [moral] knowledge' are *not* 'in error.'

There is an interesting and largely unrecognised comparison with the views of Wilfrid Sellars, at this point. The following remarks from Sellars seem to me a rather apt summation of the viewpoint to which the quasirealist is committed. Sellars himself does not seem to have done a great deal to explain how such an outcome may be achieved – that's the quasirealist programme, in effect – but I think it is interesting that he had the goal so clearly in view, at least at this point.

> [T]he core truth of 'emotivism' is not only compatible with, but absurd without, *ungrudging* recognition of the fact, so properly stressed (if mis-assimilated to the model of describing) by 'ethical rationalists,' that ethical discourse as *ethical discourse* is a mode of rational discourse. (Sellars 1958, §82)

Sellars goes on to argue that the same is true in the modal realm:

> [T]he core truth of Hume's philosophy of causation is not only compatible with, but absurd without, *ungrudging* recognition of those features of causal discourse as a mode of rational discourse on which the 'metaphysical rationalists' laid such stress but also mis-assimilated to describing. (*ibid*)

Sellars' view seems close to Blackburn's in at least four respects. Three of these are, first, the acknowledgement that we find a 'core truth' in Hume on these matters; second, the recognition that this core truth is available in modal as well as moral cases; and third, most distinctively, the insistence that this insight be rendered compatible with the fact that moral and modal discourse presents itself in the clothing of a rational discourse. But my interest is in a fourth point of comparison: the fact that Sellars, like Blackburn, still takes for granted the bifurcation thesis – in other words, he still assumes a distinction between genuinely descriptive and genuinely nondescriptive (though perhaps quasidescriptive) uses of declarative language. Both views are still *local* expressivist views, in other words.[3] I now turn to the question as to whether a local expressivism of this kind is a stable position, by its own lights.

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[3]I set aside the issue as to whether the term 'expressivism' is appropriate in Sellars' case.

1.3 The global challenge

In various places (e.g., Price 1988, 1996, 2011a; and Macarthur & Price 2007) I have challenged the tenability of Blackburn's local quasirealism, questioning its entitlement to remain local. I have argued that it faces pressure to become a global view – a view that takes the same explanatory stance towards what Blackburn calls the 'realist-sounding discourse within which we promote and debate [our] views' for *all* kinds of views, rather than for special cases (such as moral views).

In more recent versions of this criticism (especially Macarthur & Price 2007), I have argued that this pressure takes two forms, one coming from outside quasirealism (though from a viewpoint to which Blackburn is very sympathetic – indeed, necessarily so, as I explain below); and the other coming from within quasirealism itself.

Pulling from the outside: The argument from semantic minimalism

The first argument rests on the attractions of deflationary, or minimalist, views of semantic notions such as truth and reference. For present purposes, let us take the core of such a view to be the claim that these semantic notions play no significant theoretical role in a mature theory of language and thought. (According to the deflationist, any occurrence of terms such as 'true' in the context of such theorising can itself be understood in some other way: as a 'disquotational' use of 'true', for example.)

The difficulty for a local quasirealist is that a deflationist view of these semantic notions seems to threaten the bifurcation thesis. Why? Because on the face of it, this thesis is itself drawn in semantic terms, or something very much like them. It is the distinction between declarative claims that *are* genuinely true or false, for example, and those that are not. This seems to be a distinction drawn in terms of truth – in which case truth is playing a substantial role in a piece of theory (the Bifurcationist's own piece of theory), in conflict with deflationism.

In one sense, this is a familiar point, often taken to show that deflationism about truth is an enemy of noncognitivism and expressivism. In this form, the argument goes something like this. If there is nothing more to truth than (say) the equivalence schema, then any meaningful sentence 'P' whose syntax permits it to be embedded in the form 'P is true' immediately possesses truthconditions, in the only sense now available to us: viz., 'P' is true if and only if P. And since moral claims (for example) are certainly embeddable in this way, it is immediate that moral claims are truth-conditional, or truth-evaluable, as the cognitivist maintains. In general, then, the thought is that if truth is minimal, it is easy for sentences to be truth-

evaluable – and hence implausible for a noncognitivist to maintain that a superficially truth-conditional statement is not genuinely truth-conditional.[4]

In my view, this familiar form of the argument gets things backwards. The problem for the local quasirealist is not that deflationism is hostile to expressivism. It is that it is too friendly, at least by the standards of any merely local version of expressivism. To see this, we simply need to note, as I did above, that expressivism normally makes two claims about its target discourse, one negative and one positive. The negative claim says that these terms or statements lack some semantic feature: they are non-referential, non-truth-apt, non-descriptive, non-factual, or something of the kind. The positive claim offers an alternative, non-semantic, account of the functions of the language in question – for example, that it expresses, or projects, evaluative attitudes of the speaker in question.

What is the effect on this combination of views of deflationism about the semantic vocabulary in which the negative claim is couched? If we read the deflationist as claiming, inter alia, that the semantic notions have no substantial theoretical role to play, then the consequence is that the negative claim must be abandoned. For it is a substantial theoretical claim, framed in semantic vocabulary. But abandoning this claim does not imply that, as theoreticians, we must endorse its opposite – i.e., endorse cognitivism, in its usual substantial sense. On the contrary: if semantic terms cannot be used in a thick sense, they cannot be used on either side of a (thick) dispute as to whether evaluative claims stand in semantic relations to reality.

So deflationism undermines the negative thesis, *but does not replace it with its denial*. It simply requires that we fall silent, for theoretical purposes, on the issue as to whether the disputed claims, or indeed *any* claims, have semantic properties, in some thick sense. It implies that for *no vocabulary at all* can it be theoretically informative to say that it has a semantically-characterised function – for deflationism denies us such a theoretical role for semantic notions.

Moreover, this enforced silence about the negative claim in no way requires that we abandon the positive claim – the expressivist's positive, non-semantic account of the function

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[4]There is an early version of this argument in McDowell (1981), and later versions in Boghossian (1990), Wright (1992), and Humberstone (1991). The argument is also endorsed by Jackson, Oppy and Smith (1994), who propose a response for noncognitivism, based on the argument that minimalism about truth need not imply minimalism about truth-aptness, and that it is nonminimalism about truth-aptness that matters for the noncognitivist's purposes. In my view, noncognitivism did not need saving: in the important respects, semantic minimalism already represents victory by default.

of (say) moral vocabulary. On the contrary, it requires that *whatever* theoretical account we give of moral vocabulary – or, again, any declarative vocabulary – will be couched in something other than semantic terms; and hence expressivist in character, at least in the loose sense that it offers an account of the significance of some piece of language in something other than standard representationalist terms.[5]

So the traditional argument was right that minimalism about truth and reference threatens the bifurcation thesis, but wrong to think that the point requires that expressivism should retreat. On the contrary, it suggests that expressivism (here meaning simply 'some alternative to representationalism') should occupy the entire field, and become a global view.

This is one flank of the global challenge. It is premised, of course, on deflationism, and can be rejected by anyone who rejects deflationism. But this is no comfort for Blackburn, because – setting aside occasional lapses into 'success semantics,' on which more below – he himself is a card-carrying deflationist. Moreover, this is not an optional preference, on a quasirealist's part. To see why, let us turn to the internal argument for globalisation.

Pushing from the inside: Isn't quasirealism too successful for its own good?
Quasirealism takes very seriously the need to explain the representational appearances – the various respects in which the target discourses 'behave like' genuinely representational parts of language. While this is clearly an advance on traditional noncognitivism, it exposes the quasirealist to the following challenge.

Suppose that the quasirealist succeeds in explaining, on expressivist foundations, why non-descriptive claims behave like (what he takes to be) genuinely descriptive claims. This explanation will offer some function, or 'point,' for the practice of expressing moral judgements (say) in declarative form, and ascribing truth and falsity to the resulting claims. For example, the quasirealist might appeal to the utility, for social creatures such as ourselves, of a linguistic practice that encourages us to align the affective attitudes we express in moral judgements.

However, if such an explanation of the relevant features of linguistic practice – e.g., the declarative mood, and the use of 'true' and 'false' – works for for the case of expression of affective attitudes, why should it not work, too, in what seems a much easier case: that of the expression of the behavioural dispositions we call *beliefs*. After all, isn't it plausible that it is

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[5] Note that it may not be expressivist in a narrower sense, of appealing to expression of inner psychological states.

even more useful for social creatures to have the linguistic machinery to align those sorts of psychological states?

In other words, if the quasirealist's explanations work in the hard cases, such as moral and aesthetic judgements, then it seems very likely that they'll work in the easy cases, too – e.g., for scientific judgements. In other words, 'lite' or 'quasi' semantic notions will suffice to explain not only why moral judgements are treated as truth-apt, but equally why scientific claims are treated in this way. But then the claim that the easy cases are *genuinely* descriptive – that is, have some more substantial kind of semantic property – seems problematic in one of two ways. Either it is an idle cog, not needed to explain the relevant aspects of the use of the statements in question; or, if it is associated with some characteristic of use that the merely quasi kind of truth cannot emulate, then it shows that quasirealism is a sleight of hand – it fails to deliver the goods, just where it really matters. If quasirealism is really successful by its own standards, in other words, then it inevitably escapes from the box, and becomes a view with global application.

Thus the internal flank of the global challenge rests on two thoughts: first, that quasirealism suffers from a potential embarrassment of riches, in the sense that to the extent that its own methods really do work where they are intended to work (in the hard cases), they threaten to work, too, where they are not intended to work (in the easy cases); and second, that the quasirealist cannot stem this flood of riches by erecting a higher bar around the privileged, 'genuinely descriptive,' parts of language. Such a bar would set a standard elsewhere, with respect to which the quasirealist will inevitably have failed to establish what he set out to establish, viz., that nondescriptive discourse can earn the right to talk in realist terms.

Moreover, in the light of this internal challenge, we can now see why a non-deflationary view of semantic notions is necessarily unattractive for a quasirealist. Why? Because it impales him on the horns of the new dilemma just mentioned: either his own methods render any thick component of his semantic theory an idle cog, unnecessary in accounting for the use of semantic vocabulary; or the failure of his methods to do so reveals a failure to achieve his own professed goal, of explaining how (what he takes to be) nondescriptive discourse takes realist form. So the option of appealing to a non-minimalist semantic theory, in order to meet the external version of the global challenge – the argument above that semantic deflationism entails global expressivism – is not one that a quasirealist can easily entertain.

Two responses?

I think that there are two responses that the quasirealist might make at this point. The first

would be to claim that quasirealism is saved from globalisation by the fact that when we come to the familiar vocabulary in which we talk about our environment – the 'coastal waters of science,' as Blackburn sometimes puts it – quasirealism simply runs out of steam. We don't need it, because, unlike in cases such as that of moral language, there is no dubious metaphysics to be avoided; and even if we did need it, we couldn't have it, because, as naturalists ourselves, seeking to explain aspects of human linguistic usage, we are already signed up to the familiar ontology of this realm of discourse. I'll call this the *Nothing Left To Say* response to the global challenges, and return to it below. (I'll argue, on the contrary, that there is plenty left to say.)

The second response – call it the *Something Different To Say* response – tries to back up the claim that in the case of (say) the coastal waters of science, quasirealism no longer has any contribution to make to our understanding of the discourses in question, with the argument that, in these cases, a representationalist approach does offer us illumination. In the case of science, for example, the response claims that we have the prospect of a 'success semantics' – a *reductive* account of semantic notions – so we don't need the quasirealist's alternative explanation of the *use* of semantic vocabulary.[6]

I hope it is already clear that the second response is going to have a battle on its hands, in the light of the argument for globalisation above. Appealing to success semantics in the case of scientific vocabulary is bound to look like changing horses in midstream, by a quasirealist's lights. With what justification does the quasirealist suddenly abandon his usual methodology, which is to *explain* the semantic talk, not offer a *reductive analysis* of semantic properties and relations?[7] Why not be consistent, if the territory allows it? And if the territory doesn't allow it, then – as we stressed above – quasirealism seems to have failed by its own standards, in the sense that it means that there is an aspect of (what it regards as) genuine realist linguistic practice that the quasi cases fail to emulate.

It is true that grasping the first horn of this dilemma – allowing that the quasirealist's usual deflationary, explanatory approach to semantic idioms should extend to their use in association with scientific vocabulary, too – requires us to set aside the rather appealing intuitions to which the success semantics project appeals. But this cost could be offset, apparently, if we could find some other use for these intuitions, where they didn't conflict with

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[6]See Blackburn (2005) for such a proposal.
[7]This points in the direction of a reply to the Nothing Left To Say response, too: as long as the project of explaining semantic talk is still on the table, in the coastal waters of science, then there is something to say, after all. More on this below.

deflationism. I think we can find such a use, but in order to explain it, I want to provide a sketch of what I think the landscape looks like, from a global expressivist point of view.

1.4 What would global expressivism look like?

Suppose we do let quasirealism 'go global.' What does the resulting landscape look like? The crucial thing to stress, I think, is that it combines *uniformity* at one level with *diversity* at another. At both levels, the theoretical perspective is explanatory, or pragmatic – at neither does representationalism make an appearance, in its old form.[8] The result is what we might call a two-level pragmatism.

The global level

The thought behind the internal version of the global challenge was that whatever story the quasirealist tells about the genealogy and functions of the 'factual' character of (say) moral language, the same story is likely to work for other cases, too. After all, the cases the quasirealist thinks of as genuinely descriptive are simpler, prima facie. Whatever this story is, it will provide an account that is in one sense uniform, across a range of declarative vocabularies. For example, suppose that it begins with the plausible idea that putting expressions of affective attitudes into 'assertoric' form – subjecting them to community-wide norms of truth and assertibility – provides a powerful pressure towards alignment of such attitudes across a community, with long-run benefits.[9] The thought behind the internal version of the global challenge is that this same explanation will work for expressions of other kinds of psychological states, too; including, very plausibly, behavioural dispositions of the kind we call 'beliefs.' (In the imagined extension of the programme, our entitlement to call them beliefs 'emerges at the end,' so to speak, in the same way that it does for moral 'beliefs.')

The upshot would be a *uniform* story about the defining common characteristics of declarative speech acts – a common story about what assertion is *for,* as it were. In the crude version just mentioned, this story will say that assertions enable social creatures to express, revise and align behavioural commitments of various kinds. Note that the entire story is told in nonrepresentational terms – after all, it is the same story that the quasirealist tells for those vocabularies that he insisted are nonrepresentational in the beginning.

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[8]The qualification is important: as I am about to propose, modified conceptions of representation can have a role to play, here, at both levels.

[9]For present purposes, this proposal is simply an example, and I am not defending it; any other story the quasirealist tells at this point will do as well, I think, for present purposes.

As I have noted elsewhere (Price 2011a), a good place to look for a much less crude account of assertion with the same general features – being nonrepresentational, being applicable to vocabularies with a range of expressive functions of their own, and yet, importantly, being uniform in character across this range of vocabularies – is in Brandom's (1994, 2000) account of 'the game of giving and asking for reasons.' Brandom is very explicit that the raw materials of his programme are not representational. And while he says a great deal about the different expressive functions of various vocabularies, it is clear, nevertheless, that it is the same game of giving and asking for reasons, in which vocabularies with these different expressive functions all participate. Thus, in my terminology, Brandom is offering us an account of the *uniformity of the global level*.

The local level

As Brandom's case already makes clear, however, this global uniformity is compatible with diversity at a *local* level. Brandom offers us a *diverse* story about the expressive functions of a range of different kinds of commitments, and ingredients of commitments, which are all capable of participating in the single, uniform 'assertion game.'

Switching back to Humean expressivism (and bracketing the question, tangential for present purposes, about the relation between Humean expressivism and Brandom's inferential expressivism), the point is that my globalised quasirealist is entitled to say almost everything that Blackburn himself says about the functional distinctions between different vocabularies – between moral and modal vocabularies, for example. The global quasirealist, too, is allowed to say that moral and modal concepts are associated with projections of affective and epistemic states of distinctive kinds, playing characteristic roles in our agentive lives. What he is not entitled to do is to switch to a representational idiom, to characterise the functions of some *other* vocabularies.

Thus we have a two-level picture. At the top level (Level 1, let us call it, counting from the top), we seek an account of what assertoric vocabularies *have in common* – their common functions, both in the day-to-day sense and, if possible, in a genealogical sense.[10] At the lower level (Level 2), we seek an account of what distinguishes one vocabulary from another. If at neither level do we find ourselves resorting to an ontology of semantic properties and relations, as an ingredient in our theoretical account, it seems reasonable to say that the resulting picture represents a global expressivism, or global pragmatism.

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[10]That is, we need to say both *how the practice works,* and *what it achieves for us.* Williams (2013) draws this distinction clearly.

1.5 Whither bifurcation?

At this point a self-styled global expressivist might well feel tempted to declare himself victorious over his traditional, local, expressivist cousins, and over the bifurcation thesis in general. But not so fast – a niggling bifurcationist voice insists that such a declaration would be premature. After all (says this voice), doesn't the very distinction just drawn leave open to the possibility that when we investigate the Level 2 functions of various vocabularies, we will find that some are more in the business of 'tracking the world' than others? Isn't it plausible that the bifurcation thesis will survive, indeed prosper, within this two-level framework?

This niggling voice has a point, I think; but it is important to be clear exactly *which* point, and my differences with Blackburn, such as they are, seem to turn on this matter. I think that in accommodating the niggling voice, we need to be clear that we are not resuscitating representationalism in its old form, nor retreating from the aspiration of a global pragmatism. On the contrary, we are accommodating bifurcationist intuitions *within* such a global pragmatism.

In an early discussion of these issues (Price 1994) I made this point in terms of a distinction between two notions of 'description', as I then put it – the first an inclusive notion characterised in terms of something like aptness for deflationary truth, and the second an explicitly *functional* notion:

> I shall use the term "minimal description" for any utterance which is capable of being minimally true or false. The suggestion is thus that within the class of minimal descriptions, we may find sub-classes of utterances serving a range of different linguistic functions. ... Let us now suppose that one of the functions served by some minimal descriptions is ... to signal the presence of certain conditions in the physical environment of a speaker ... . [W]e thus have a distinction between the semantic (or perhaps better, syntactic) notion of minimal description, and the functional notion of natural description (or physical signalling). (Price 1994, 67–8)

I then went on to propose that traditional expressivist (or, as I then said, 'non-factualist') claims could be charitably reconstructed within this framework:

> My suggestion is then that the non-factualists' central thesis may be thought of as the claim that in certain cases we systematically confuse minimal descriptions for

natural descriptions. Moral judgements (or whatever) are minimal descriptions, but are not natural descriptions. (1994, 68)

However, I pointed out that the difference is that traditional expressivists normally drew this distinction in *semantic* terms, whereas here it is explicitly *functional*, "the semantics on both sides of the distinction being agreed to be of the minimal sort." (1994, 68) In other words, it is explicitly a Level 2 distinction, in the terms introduced above.

I was thus already in sympathy with what I would now call a pragmatist version of the bifurcation thesis. Moreover, I was also explicit that there were also pragmatist issues to be raised at (what I now call) Level 1. As I put it then, "the most central issue to which the above considerations direct our attention seems to me to be this one: *What does assertoric discourse do for us?*" (1994, 76) I went on to suggest that traditional non-factualists

[had] tended to regard the linguistic categories of assertion, description and the like as part of the bedrock—as a firm foundation on which other work may rest. Hence they [had] failed to see the importance of subjecting these categories themselves to explanatory scrutiny. (1994, 76–7)

In recent work (Price 2011a, Price *et al* 2013) I have spelled out these ideas somewhat more explicity, and in a new vocabulary – more of this in a moment. Once again, the upshot is that the two-level picture can indeed offer some comfort to bifurcationism – can make sense of the idea that vocabularies differ to the degree to which they are in the business of 'tracking the world'. But recognising that this is so does nothing to resuscitate representationalism in its old form; nor to retreat from the aspirations of a global pragmatism. (The last point is my remaining difference with Blackburn, I think.)

In the remainder of this piece I want to describe and explain these two aspects of my present view. I shall first explain in more detail how, by drawing a distinction between two distinct notions in the neighbourhood of the orthodox view of representation (each related to it, but importantly distinct from it), we can accommodate the niggling bifurcationist voice, without retreating to traditional representationalism. Then, in Part 2 below, with the aid of some recent work by Blackburn, I shall defend the claim that we require a global pragmatism.

1.6 Two notions of representation

In the recent work just mentioned (Price 2011a, Price *et al* 2013), I propose that we distinguish

two 'nodes' in contemporary theory about representation, in philosophy and related fields. Each of these nodes is itself a cluster of notions, at least in the sense that the defining features of the node may themselves be developed in a number of different ways. But – bracketing the latter kind of diversity – my proposal is that we see the nodes themselves as distinct notions, rather than different aspects of the same single concept of representations.

What are these nodes? The first – *e-representation*,[11] as I call it – involves the environment-tracking conception of representation, associated, in biological cases, with the idea that the function of an evolved representation (or representational system) is to co-vary with some (typically[12]) *external* environmental condition. There are familiar non-biological examples, too, of course: think of examples like the position of the needle in the fuel gauge and the level of fuel in the tank, the barometer reading and air pressure, and so on. What unites such cases, biological and non-biological, is that some feature of the representing system either does or is (in some sense) 'intended to' vary in parallel with some feature of the represented system. Thus e-representation emphasises the *system–world* links: it is these links, above all, that make it the case that something counts as a representation, in this sense.

The second node – *i-representation*[13] – gives priority to *internal* connections, in some sense, between one representation and another. By this criterion, a token counts as a representation in virtue of its position, or role, in some sort of cognitive, inferential or functional architecture; in virtue of its links, within a network, to other items of the same general kind. Networks of what kinds? We may well want to distinguish several very different conceptions, at this point. According to one conception, the relevant kind of network is causal (or causal–functional) in nature. According to another, it is normative and inferential. According to a third, at least arguably distinct from the other two, it is computational. But however it goes, the notion of representation involved can be divorced from any external notion of representation, thought of as a system–world relation of some kind.

We tend to assume that these two notions of representation go together; that the prime function of representations in the internal sense is to do the job of representing in the external sense. Typically a view which gives initial priority to the latter will then want to read it as a sophisticated version of the former – such is the grip of representationalism. It takes some effort to see that the two notions might float free of one other, but it is an effort worth making,

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[11]'e' for *environmental* or *externalist*.

[12]In some case the relevant piece of the world is something within the skin, as it were, as for pain or thirst.

[13]'i' for *internalist* or *inferential*.

in my view – all the more so when the systemic-functional notion in question is a rich, normative, linguistic notion (say of Brandom's kind), rather than some sparer causal–functional notion of mental representation. The vista that opens up is the possibility that representation in the systemic sense is a much richer, more flexible and more multipurpose tool than the naive view assumes.[14]

Once the distinction between these internal and external notions of representation is on the table, in other words, it is open to us to regard the two notions as having different utilities, for various theoretical purposes. In particular, it is open to us to take the view that at least by the time we get to language, there is no useful external notion, *of a semantic kind* – in other words, no useful, general, notion of relations that words and sentences bear to the external world, that we might usefully identify with truth and reference. This is the conclusion that a semantic deflationist has already come to, from the other direction, as it were. On this view, the impression that there are such external relations will be regarded as a kind of trick of language – a misunderstanding of the nature of the disquotational platitudes. But we can think this without rejecting the internal notion: without thinking that there is no interesting sense in which mental and linguistic representation are to be characterised and identified in terms of their roles in networks of various kinds.

With this distinction in play, we can be bifurcationists in *e-representational* terms, while being global pragmatists in *i-representational* terms (i.e., no semantic word–world relations in the picture, at that level). In other words, we can say not only (at Level 1) that all declarative utterances are *i-representations* (this itself being a pragmatic or expressive notion, at least if explicated following Brandom or a generalised quasirealist); but also (at Level 2) that some but not all declarative utterances are *e-representations*.

Thus we do have a bifurcation thesis, of a kind – at least a distinction between more and less e-representational vocabularies. It is no longer a distinction drawn in *semantic* terms – those terms have vanished altogether from the picture, in any substantial sense. Nor is it a distinction between vocabularies that are more or less genuinely *assertoric*, or *contentful*, say, if these notions are cashed in i-representational terms. But it does capture something of the intuitions that originally motivated local expressivists.

With regard to the bifurcation thesis, as I noted, I regard this outcome as a pleasingly irenic resolution of some apparent differences between Blackburn's views and my own. If there is an

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[14]Once again, quasirealism provides a useful stepping-stone. The quasirealist is already committed to the idea that something can behave for all intents and purposes like a 'genuine' belief, even though it has is origins at some 'non-cognitive' level.

issue that still divides us, it is about whether, and in what sense, we should nevertheless be global expressivists, or global pragmatists. In next section I want to turn to this remaining issue, framed in terms of Blackburn's helpful recent characterisation of the pragmatist project, in both local and global variants. I want to argue that the position I have sketched, and recommend, should indeed count as a global pragmatism, in those terms.

2 Blackburn Against Globalisation

Blackburn characterises the pragmatic standpoint in Carnapian terms. As he puts it: 'The [Carnapian] external question is posed, about a piece of language or discourse of some identified kind, when we ask how to explain the fact that we have come to think and talk like that: why do we go in for possible world talk, arithmetical talk, ethical or normative talk, and so on?' (2013, 70–1)

> You will be a pragmatist about an area of discourse if you pose a Carnapian external question: how does it come about that we go in for this kind of discourse and thought? What is the explanation of this bit of our language game? And then you offer an account of what we are up to in going in for this discourse, and the account eschews any use of the referring expressions of the discourse; any appeal to anything that a Quinean would identify as the values of the bound variables if the discourse is regimented; or any semantic or ontological attempt to 'interpret' the discourse in a domain, to find referents for its terms, or truth makers for its sentences. Instead the explanation proceeds by talking in different terms of what is done by so talking. It offers a revelatory genealogy or anthropology or even a just-so story about how this mode of talking and thinking and practising might come about, given in terms of the functions it serves. ... It finds whatever plurality of functions it can lay its hands upon. (2013, 75)

In terms of this Carnapian conception of the pragmatist project, Blackburn then offers a helpful four-way distinction, to clarify the options available on a spectrum from all-out representationalism, at one extreme. to global pragmatism, at the other.

> Returning to the characterization of pragmatism given above, we should now see not a binary opposition, between pragmatism and some competitor called

representationalism, but at least a fourfold division of alternatives. We could hold out for pragmatic stories *everywhere*. The opposition would be flat-footed representationalism *somewhere*. Or, we could hold our for pragmatic stories *somewhere*, and the opposition would be flat-footed representationalism *everywhere*. (2013, 77)

Blackburn finds the last of these positions unattractive, of course:

The last of these [options] is, I suppose, the position manifested by those conservative philosophers ... who automatically react to any pragmatic story by reaching for notions of truth, truth-condition, truth-makers, and their kin, and proclaiming that these lie beyond the pragmatist's grasp. I stand shoulder to shoulder with Price and I hope many others ... in finding that attitude reprehensible. Still, all that is needed to oppose it are *local* pragmatisms, for which, of course, I am more than happy to sign up. (2013, 77)

2.1 The No Exit problem

Blackburn goes on to explain his reservations about going to the other extreme – 'pragmatic stories *everywhere*.' His first reservation turns on an objection raised by Robert Kraut:

On the other hand, I am much less certain about *global* pragmatism, the overall rout of the representationalists apparently promised by Rorty and perhaps by Robert Brandom. The reason is obvious enough. It is what Robert Kraut, investigating similar themes, calls the No Exit problem. It points out, blandly enough, that even genealogical and anthropological stories have to start somewhere. There are things that even pragmatists need to rely upon, as they produce what they regard as their better understandings of the functions of pieces of discourse. (2013, 78)

Blackburn notes that this point 'is obvious when we think of the most successful strategies of the pragmatist's kind,' and provides some examples:

A Humean genealogy of ... values ... talks of natural propensities to pain and pleasure, love and hate, and an ability to take up a common point of view with

others. It postulates a human nature in which some particle of the dove is kneaded together with the wolf and the serpent, and provides a story of our evaluative practices on that basis. A broadly Fregean genealogical story of arithmetic and then mathematics more generally would start by placing us in a world of kinds of objects with distinct identity conditions, such as tigers and eggs and warriors, and then a capacity to tally them, with there being an advantage to us in being able to rank pluralities of them by their magnitude .... And so on.

Such genealogical stories start with a common-sense background of us, and a world of physical objects, with distinct locations, changing only according to distinct regularities with a distinct speed limit. In the books in which he provides a genealogy of morals, Hume simply takes all that for granted, just as a Fregean account of arithmetic takes the tigers and eggs and warriors for granted. (2013, 78)

Exits? Who needs them?

In my view, the appropriate response to the No Exit problem is to question the claim that pragmatism needs an exit, of the kind Blackburn and Kraut have in mind. The view that the expressivist does need an exit seems to be a legacy of the cases with which the approach begins, such as that of ethics. There, it was important that the distinctive ontology of the ethical viewpoint – values, moral properties, and the like – not be in view, from the pragmatist's external standpoint. By focussing on moral *talk,* rather than moral *properties,* the expressivist simply sidesteps the metaphysical condundrums that trouble her representationalist opponents, realists and anti-realists alike. ('Those are not my issues,' she tells them.)

At least to the extent that the ethical conundrums arise from a commitment to naturalism, the case of science is different. There isn't a placement problem for scientific language, at least at first pass.[15] So there isn't any pressure to escape to a theoretical standpoint from which one doesn't need to mention such things. However, the fact that pragmatism does not play the same metaphysics-evading role does not imply that it has nothing to say. On the contrary, as we shall see in a moment, it turns out to have plenty to say – provided we keep our mind on the fact that the the pragmatist's external question is about the *talk,* not the *ontology.* True, one can imagine perspectives from which the ontology of science does seem problematic – scepticism about the external world, or about theoretical entities, for example. Here, certainly,

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[15]More on the reasons for this qualification in a moment.

pragmatic reflection on the functions of scientific language may prove no help: 'You are simply assuming what I am worried about.' The necessary therapy needs to be found somewhere else – in Quine's or Carnap's denial of the external standpoint required by such metaphysics, perhaps. But the failure of pragmatism to deliver relief from *those* worries does not undercut the truth or interest of what the pragmatist has to say about scientific language – 'That wasn't the question I was addressing,' the pragmatist will be entitled to say.

One can also imagine borderline cases, such as the language of modality. Here, we might have hoped for relief from metaphysics, and looked to Humean expressivism to provide it. Do we get such relief if the language of science is unavoidably modal, as seems plausible? It is a tricky issue,[16] but for present purposes we can short-circuit it, by noting that it cannot be of any use to Blackburn, who is a card-carrying pragmatist about these modal cases (see Blackburn 1987, for example). If the language of science is irreducibly modal, in other words, then Blackburn himself is in no position to appeal to the No Exit problem against more global opponents: he would simply be shooting himself in the foot.

2.2 Nothing left to say?

This brings me to Blackburn's second reason for rejecting global pragmatism:

> If we ask the Carnapian external question about all *that* [i.e., about 'the tigers and eggs and warriors'], then we face a choice point. It may be that we take an Aristotelian, or perhaps Wittgensteinian, line on the priority of the everyday. There is simply no place for 'first philosophy' to stand behind the *endoxa*, the given in our common-sense situation. This attitude would be that of *quietism*, or the rejection altogether of at least some external questions. If we insisted instead on posing the Carnapian external-sounding question: how come that we go in for descriptions of the world in terms of surrounding middle-sized dry goods? —then the answer is only going to be the flat-footed stutter or self-pat on the back: **it is because we are indeed surrounded by middle sized dry goods**. That answer, obviously, draws on the referential resources of the object language, and according to the account in front of us, **amounts to a victory for representationalism over pragmatism**. It is because it is no better than a stutter that I call it flat-footed representationalism. A similar fate awaits us, in many peoples' view, if we pose a Carnapian external-

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[16]See Price (2011b, Ch. 1) for some further discussion.

sounding question about at least the coastal waters of science. How come we go in
for descriptions of the world in terms of energies and currents? Because we have
learned to become sensitive to, measure, predict and control, and describe and refer
to, energies and currents. That is science's own view of how we have got where we
are, and there is none better. (Blackburn 2013, 78–9; bold emphasis added.)

I want to make three responses on this point. The first focusses on the Level 1 part of the
two-level account sketched above. At this level, it is simply not true that there is 'nothing to
say', from the pragmatist's point of view. For the pragmatist, *all* of the story told at that level
– e.g., as it might be, Brandom's inferentialist account of 'the game of giving and asking for
reasons' – applies as much here as it does anywhere. If Brandom is right, or if the generalised
quasirealist's story about the functions of representationalist 'talk' is right, this is still
something substantial to say, *and it is all said in pragmatist terms*. To think otherwise is just
to take one's eye off the ball, when it comes to explaining the language we use in talking about
everyday things – to regard that language as explanatorily 'transparent,' as it were. As
Blackburn posed it above, the Carnapian question was 'How come that we go in for
descriptions of the world in terms of surrounding middle-sized dry goods? ' But how could the
pragmatist's answer to the more general question 'How come that we go in for descriptions *at
all?* ' be any less relevant, less applicable, here, than it is in other cases?[17]

The second response turns to Level 2. Even at this level it is still not true that we are
simply being flat-footed representationalists, if we have the notion of e-representation on the
table. On the contrary, we will be drawing interesting parallels between scientific language
and much more primitive kinds of e-representations – nothing flat-footed about that! (Recall
that e-representation, unlike deflated semantic notions of representation, remains a substantial
theoretical notion, by my pragmatist's lights.)

The third response picks up on a point we noted earlier. If we agree that modal talk is
indispensable, even within the coastal waters of science; and agree, too, that an expressivist
account (in my terms, a Level 2 account) is appropriate for *that;* then again we have Level 2
pragmatist work that needs to be done everywhere (and is flat-footed representational
nowhere). Note that this need not be in tension with the previous response. The claim that
scientific language is more e-representational than (say) moral language is compatible with the

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[17]The thought that it is less relevant is surely a legacy of the traditional expressivist's
assumption that everything was already in order, well understood in representational terms, in
the cases on one side the old bifurcation.

discovery that scientific language (unlike, no doubt, more primitive forms of e-representation) is necessarily *also* party to the functions of modal language. A traditional bifurcationist expects a sharper divide, of course, but there is no reason for my pragmatist to do so.

2.3 Global pragmatism *and* bifurcation

Summing up, I conclude that at neither level is it true that the pragmatist, characterised in Blackburn's Carnapian terms, has nothing to say about the discourse of the everyday world – about the language of the coastal waters of science, for example. Pragmatists can expect to do better, everywhere, than what Blackburn calls flat-footed representationalism. Hence they can claim entitlement to a *global* view, in Blackburn's own terms. The right story is indeed the one that Blackburn feels qualms about: 'pragmatic stories *everywhere,*' as he puts it (Blackburn 2013, 77) – in fact, it involves *two* pragmatic stories everywhere, for neither level is anywhere flat-footed.

There is certainly a place for something recognisably related to the old bifurcation thesis in this global picture, provided it is understood in the pragmatic terms sketched here – that is, in terms of differences, at least of degree, in *e-representational* function. Once again, however, we should resist the temptation that Blackburn apparently still feels, to be satisfied in some cases with flat-footed representationalism.

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