

5/22/2015

## Global Anti-Representationalism?

### I

Huw Price is one of the boldest and most original voices of pragmatism in the generation after Richard Rorty and Hilary Putnam. Two particularly interesting ideas he has been developing recently are subject naturalism and global expressivism.<sup>1</sup>

The term by contrast to which “subject naturalism” is defined is “object naturalism,” which is the kind usually associated with the term ‘naturalism.’ It aspires to a particular kind of semantic account of some vocabulary or discursive practice. More particularly, it offers a representational account. That is, it says what objects and properties that vocabulary talks about, what range of facts it states or expresses. That representational semantic strategy accounts for the ‘object’ side of object naturalism. The ‘naturalism’ side is a matter of the semantic metavocabulary that is employed, in part to specify the ontology: what kinds of things the vocabulary in question represents. It is to be a naturalistic vocabulary. That is a genus that comprises a variety of species, including at least the vocabulary of fundamental physics, vocabularies of the special natural sciences, or, least demandingly, ground-level empirical descriptive vocabulary, including both observational and theoretical vocabulary.<sup>2</sup>

By contrast, subject naturalism is the project of using a vocabulary that is naturalistic in one of these senses, not as a *semantic* metavocabulary, but as what in *Between Saying and Doing* I call a “*pragmatic* metavocabulary.” That is, it is to be used to describe what the discursive practitioners who deploy the vocabulary in question *do*, the practices they engage in, or the abilities they exercise, in virtue of which they count as using that vocabulary. The idea is to formulate in the favored vocabulary necessary and sufficient conditions for doing what one needs to be doing in order thereby to be saying what can be said using the vocabulary, rather than (as with a semantic metavocabulary) for saying in different terms what they can say in that vocabulary. This is telling the sort of story familiar to us from the many instances of the genre we find in Wittgenstein’s *Investigations*. Instead of worrying about what the vocabulary says about how things are with whatever it is it talks about, how it is describing or representing the world as being—a model that might or might not fit with the use of the vocabulary in question—

---

<sup>1</sup> I am thinking especially of “Naturalism without representationalism” in David Macarthur and Mario de Caro (eds), *Naturalism in Question* (Harvard University Press, 2004), 71—88, and (with David Macarthur) “Pragmatism, quasi-realism and the global challenge” In Cheryl Misak, ed., *The New Pragmatists* (OUP, 2007), 91—120. The other essays in his *Naturalism Without Mirrors* [Oxford University Press, 2009] can also be consulted with profit in this connection.

<sup>2</sup> Note that one ought not just to assume that only vocabulary that is descriptive in a sense that contrasts with prescriptive, or, more broadly, normative (not the only way of thinking about description) can have observational uses.

we describe how the use of the vocabulary is taught and learned. If there is nothing mysterious about that, and if we can say in our favored terms just what one needs to do in order to use the vocabulary correctly, Price argues, then the vocabulary should count as naturalistically acceptable, regardless of whether we have anything to say about what it represents.

As a somewhat fanciful example, consider someone who is puzzled about what is represented by indexical and demonstrative vocabulary. Are there indexical and demonstrative *facts*, over and above those expressible in nonindexical terms? If not, why aren't indexical terms freely interchangeable with nonindexical ones (as the phenomenon of the essential indexical, pointed out by Perry and Lewis shows they are not)? If so, what are these peculiar items? (One might imagine here some naturalistic analog of the theologians who worry that a deity who is not spatiotemporally located could not think the sort of indexical and demonstrative thoughts we express using 'here', 'now', and 'this'.) The fact that we can formulate rules sufficient to specify the correct use of indexicals (at least for ordinary, spatiotemporally located speakers)—including the uses that are demonstrably not interchangeable with the use of any nonindexical terms—entirely in nonindexical terms<sup>3</sup> should be enough to dispel any concern that there is something spooky or mysterious going on. Some thought like this seems to be behind Wittgenstein's stories about the use of terms such as 'pain' and 'rule'. If the practices themselves are all in order from a naturalistic point of view, any difficulties we might have in specifying the kind of things those engaged in the practices are talking about, how they are representing the world as being, ought to be laid at the feet of a Procrustean semantic paradigm that insists that the only model for understanding meaningfulness is a representational one.

The term by contrast to which "global expressivism" is defined is "local expressivism" about some particular vocabulary. One of the central examples here is the expressivism about terms of moral evaluation that has been developed by Allan Gibbard and Simon Blackburn. The thought is that the best way to understand this sort of vocabulary is to think about what one is doing in using it, what subjective attitudes one is expressing, rather than how one is supposedly representing or describing the objective world as being. On this line, the essential thing about normative vocabulary is its use to express an attitude of commendation, approval, or practical commitment. For understanding this particular kind of vocabulary, that expressive role is central, rather than any descriptive or representational role that it might also be thought to play. An essential part of what recommends an expressivist approach to some vocabulary consists in the *contrast* it emphasizes between the functioning of that vocabulary and the functioning of ordinary empirical descriptive vocabulary. But Price wants us to consider radicalizing the expressivist approach, so as to adopt it in understanding the use of *all* vocabularies. A *global* expressivism would be a way of implementing the move from object naturalism to subject naturalism.

What global expressivism and subject naturalism have in common is the rejection of *representationalism*, by which I understand a commitment to having the concept of representation play a fundamental explanatory or expressive role in semantic theory. That is the aspect of these views I want to focus on here. Let me begin by making some further distinctions. One thing at issue between object naturalism and subject naturalism is whether one is concerned

---

<sup>3</sup> As I argue in the Appendix to Chapter Two of *Between Saying and Doing* [Oxford University Press, 2008], hereafter '*BSD*'.

with what one is *saying* or thinking, and or with what one is *doing* in saying or thinking it. As I want to use the terms, this is the distinction between *semantics* and *pragmatics*: the study of the *contents* of utterances and other episodes and the study of the *acts* being performed in producing or exhibiting them. In addition to engaging in a semantic project, what Price calls “object naturalism” is committed to a particular form of semantics: *representational* semantics. It aspires to an account of content in terms of what is being represented, talked or thought *about*. The semantic project need not take that form. One might, for instance, take inference or information rather than reference or representation as the central concept in one’s semantic theory. Finally, object naturalism is committed to formulating its representational semantic theory in a vocabulary restricted to *naturalistic* terms, in one of the various senses in which a vocabulary might qualify as ‘naturalistic.’ So as I understand it, “object naturalism” is a project characterized by three in principle independent commitments: to a naturalistic representational semantics.

In understanding subject naturalism to be concerned in the first instance with pragmatics rather than semantics, I do mean to emphasize that subject naturalism and object naturalism are not necessarily incompatible enterprises. One might pursue both projects: using a naturalistic vocabulary to specify what the users of a certain vocabulary are doing when they deploy that vocabulary, and using a naturalistic vocabulary (perhaps the same one) to say what it is they are talking *about*, how they are representing or describing the world as being, when they deploy that vocabulary. Of course, these need not be construed as simply independent enterprises. What I have called “methodological pragmatism” is the view that the point of introducing a notion of semantic content or meaning (and hence the source of the criteria of adequacy of the resulting theory) is to explain or at least codify central proprieties of their *use*. What motivates Price to make his first distinction is the observation that naturalistic scruples will have been respected—the commitments that motivate restricting ourselves to naturalistic vocabularies when explaining intentional phenomena will not have been violated—if we offer naturalistic accounts of the pragmatics of some discourse, even in the absence of a representational semantics couched in the same vocabulary. That is exactly what local expressivist accounts of the significance of moral normative vocabulary aspire to offer.

I want to put the issue of naturalism to one side, and just consider some of the relations between representational semantics and broadly expressivist pragmatics. As a matter of fact, I am skeptical about the prospects for a naturalistic pragmatic metavocabulary sufficient to say what one needs to do in order to be able to say even all the things we can say by deploying naturalistic vocabularies themselves. For the principle object of the study of pragmatics is *proprieties* of use: how it would be *correct* to use various kinds of vocabulary. Understanding pragmatics that way does not by itself rule out the possibility of a naturalistic pragmatic metavocabulary. For one might be able to offer a pragmatic metavocabulary for the deontic normative metavocabulary in which those proprieties of use are specified. The most promising approach I know of for

specifying such proprieties in a naturalistic metavocabulary is Ruth Millikan's selectional teleosemantics.<sup>4</sup> But this is not the line of thought I want to pursue here.

What Price sees as promising about the possibility of being a local expressivist about some kinds of vocabulary is that it shows that we need not accept global semantic representationalism: the view that for any legitimate vocabulary, it must be possible to offer a representationalist semantics for it—on pain of its not turning out to be legitimate after all. A successful local expressivism about some vocabulary would show that, while it might be *possible* to offer a representational semantics for that vocabulary, it is not *necessary* to do so in order to show it to be legitimate. For there are other legitimate things one can do with language, other expressive functions besides representing or describing that it can perform. This is a theme that was near and dear to Wilfrid Sellars's heart. In a 1959 essay he takes as his principal target what he calls is the "tendency to assimilate all discourse to describing," which he takes to be primarily "responsible for the prevalence in the empiricist tradition of 'nothing-but-ism' in its various forms (emotivism, philosophical behaviorism, phenomenism)...."<sup>5</sup>

[O]nce the tautology 'The world is described by descriptive concepts' is freed from the idea that the business of all non-logical concepts is to describe, the way is clear to an *ungrudging* recognition that many expressions which empiricists have relegated to second-class citizenship in discourse are not *inferior*, just *different*.<sup>6</sup>

Sellars is here rejecting a *global descriptivism*. Now, not all discursive representations are descriptions: demonstratives and indexicals are not, for instance. But Sellars's discussion makes it clear that this sort of difference is irrelevant to his point. He would have been just as happy to say that not all declarative sentences should be understood as representing states of affairs. In particular, he takes modal claims to have the expressive function of making explicit rules of inference, which he takes to entail that they are not to be put in a box with descriptive claims that purport to say how things are. Sellars should be understood here as rejecting a *global semantic representationalism*, on the basis of a local expressivism about alethic modal vocabulary. I will have more to say about this sort of local expressivism further along.

---

<sup>4</sup> The issues in the vicinity of naturalistic pragmatic and semantic metavocabularies are intimately related to the distinction between the aspirations for *reductions from below* and *reductions from above* (in Dennett's useful phrase). In Chapter One of *MIE* I aspire to, if not a *reduction* from above of normative vocabulary in terms of *socially* articulated attitudes and practices, at least an *explication* of it from above. For I want to understand the normative statuses that *confer* conceptual content as themselves *instituted* by socially articulated practical normative attitudes. McDowell and others have complained that this is a kind of residual naturalism. I would reply that it is precisely a naturalism of second nature, and that I am just talking about the fine structure or mechanism that implements what McDowell wants to be entitled to say.

<sup>5</sup> "Counterfactuals, Dispositions, and the Causal Modalities," Pp. 225-308 of *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, Vol. II, ed. by H. Feigl, M. Scriven, and G. Maxwell, (University of Minnesota Press; Minneapolis, MN: 1957). Henceforth CDCM. Section 103.

<sup>6</sup> CDCM, Section 79.

Without going into details of the case of modal vocabulary at this point, I want to make two observations about the conclusions Price and Sellars draw from the different local expressivisms they consider. First, it is at any rate not obvious that playing some expressive role that is not itself descriptive or representational rules out *also* being susceptible to a representational semantic treatment. (After all, it is having something to say about how expressivist analyses need not rule out discerning also a descriptive content—and so being able to respond to the Frege-Geach embedding objection—is what distinguishes contemporary moral expressivism from its earlier incarnations.) Further collateral premises of some sort will be required to secure that inference. Second, supposing such auxiliary methodological hypotheses to have been supplied, the result of any particular local expressivism will be at best an argument against global semantic representationalism, not an argument for global semantic anti-representationalism: the conclusion Price seems to be aiming at, that the content of *no* vocabularies, not even ground-level empirical descriptive vocabulary, should be understood semantically in representational terms. Anti global-representationalism is weaker than global anti-representationalism. The latter will require, as Price is fully aware, *global* expressivism, together with whatever collateral commitments are needed to secure the inference from the applicability of a non-representational expressivist pragmatics to the unavailability of a representational semantics.

## II

In at least taking seriously global semantic anti-representationalism, Price joins that other great neopragmatist, Richard Rorty. Thirty years ago, in his *magnum opus*, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*<sup>7</sup>, Rorty offered a stunning diagnosis of the ills of contemporary philosophy as the culmination of working through ideas around which the whole of modern philosophy since Descartes had been built. The therapy he proposed is even more radical: reject those ideas root and branch, and figure out how to do what we need to do with the sparer, more naturalized, more historicized neopragmatist vocabulary generated by a picture of vocabulary-use as a part of the natural history of a certain kind of creature, as at once a coping strategy and an instrument of self-formation and transformation. The two master-ideas of Enlightenment philosophy that Rorty blamed for setting us on an ineluctable path to the bottomless abyss we now confront are representation and experience. He saw these concepts as by now so thoroughly contaminated and infected with disastrous collateral commitments as to be forever entangled with them. He despaired of the project of producing sanitized, hygienic successors. The only safe way to treat these leper's rags is to burn them.

I have by and large followed my teacher in rejecting the notion of experience as too burdened by noxious baggage—in particular, by the Myth of the Given—to be worth trying to recruit for serious explanatory and expressive work in philosophy. 'Experience' is not one of my words—literally: it does not occur in *Making It Explicit*, which contains many words. However I broke with Rorty in trying to show why it is necessary and how it is possible to recover a notion of representation that is freed of the burdens and consequences he saw as inevitably encumbering it. In effect, where he thought that prudence requires building a fence that keeps the public out

---

<sup>7</sup> Princeton University Press, 1979.

of sight of the edge of the abyss, I claimed that one much nearer would suffice to avoid catastrophe. John McDowell, in his magisterial *Mind and World*, while acknowledging the dangers Rorty pointed to, endorses the rehabilitation of *both* of Rorty's suspect Enlightenment master-concepts. His principle explicit concern is precisely with the notion of experience that I join Rorty in eschewing. In general, he thinks no barrier need be erected, no radical pragmatist measures taken. He shows us how to hop sure-footedly along the very edge of the precipice, with the confidence and insouciance of a mountain goat. And indeed, I do not think he succumbs to the Siren-like temptations of the deep. He does not, in fact, fall into the Myth of the Given. But I still want to say: "Kids, don't try this at home. This man is a skilled professional. If you try it, it will end in tears."

Now in this sketch I have also followed Rorty's rhetorical example and used rather melodramatic terms: 'abyss', 'leper', 'catastrophe', and so on. But what, exactly is the problem that leads Rorty not only to reject global semantic representationalism, but to recommend global anti-representationalism? It is perhaps less easy than it ought to be to glean a crisp answer to this question from the text of *PMN*. The somewhat equivocal response to this powerful book is, I think, partly to be explained by the fact that its readers could generally tell quite well what Rorty was claiming and recommending, but had a harder time discerning exactly why he did so. And if you are urging that we must burn down the old town and strike out for the frontier, you'd better be able to be very clear about the danger or threat that calls for such a drastic response.

I think Rorty's diagnosis of the ills of semantic representationalism falls under two general headings: a characterization of life-threatening symptoms, and an etiology of them. He is much more explicit about the first part than he is about the second. The proximal difficulty is that thinking of our broadly cognitive and intentional relations with our environment principally in terms of our *representing* things as being thus-and-so (thinking of the mind as a "mirror of nature") requires, he thinks, commitment to various kinds of epistemically *privileged* representations. Prime among these, in their twentieth century analytic form, are what is *given* in sensory experience, and transparent *meanings*. What is wrong with the genus of which these are both species is that the privilege in question is essentially magical in nature. Representations of these sorts are understood as having a *natural* or *intrinsic* epistemic privilege, so that their mere occurrence entails that we know or understand something. They are self-intimating representing: having them counts as knowing something. But there is no way to cash out this sort of intrinsic authority in terms of the practices of using expressions or interacting with each other or our world. Rorty sees the middle years of the century as having unleashed a rising tide of *social pragmatism* about *normativity*: the view that *all* matters of authority and responsibility, entitlement and commitment, are ultimately matters of social practice. The later Wittgenstein adopts this standpoint to make fun of the idea of us as having automatic, intrinsic, infallible access to what we experience and what we mean. More pointedly, in "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind," Sellars mounts a broadly pragmatist critique of the idea of things known simply by being in some sensory state, and in "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," Quine does the same for the idea of things known simply by our grasp of our own meanings. (Rorty took it as persuasive evidence of how hard it is fully to disentangle ourselves from this particular tar-baby that Sellars seemed

to hold onto a version of the analyticity Quine had discredited, and Quine remained committed to the sensory given.<sup>8</sup> Carnap, of course, embraced both forms of givenness.)

So Rorty's first claim is that we should realize we have been driven to a philosophical impasse when we find ourselves committed to representations characterized by a sort of intrinsic epistemic privilege that is magical in virtue of its supposed intelligibility independently of the role the representations in question play in our actual reason-giving practices. His therapeutic recommendation is that the pragmatist critique that revealed the idea of this kind of epistemic privilege as incoherent be radicalized and extended. But we can ask: Why should the recommended surgery extend to the excision of the whole notion of representation? That is, why should our theoretical response take the form of global anti-representationalism? Why not just give up the idea of representations characterized by this objectionable sort of epistemic privilege? Rorty's answer is that representational semantics has epistemological consequences. Unless some representations are intrinsically intelligible—grasped just by being there—understanding our cognitive and intentional relations to the world in representational terms puts an epistemological intermediary (a set of representations) between thinkers and what they think about. In this way, it excavates a gulf between mind and world. Semantic representationalism accordingly makes us patsies for epistemological skepticism, which then calls out for foundations in privileged representations. The sensory given and transparent meanings are foundationalist regress-stoppers on the side of premises, and of inferences, respectively. That is why Sellars and Quine between them should be understood as mounting a comprehensive pragmatist refutation of epistemological foundationalism. Rorty concludes that if we begin, as Descartes and Kant, for instance, taught us to do, with a semantic understanding of knowledge and meaning in terms of representation, we will end with the unpalatable alternatives of epistemological skepticism or an untenable epistemological foundationalism. That is why he sees a form of pragmatist global anti-representationalism as the preferred way out of the impasse.

My impression is that many philosophers who are principally concerned with semantic notions of meaning and content are unmoved by this line of thought because they are inclined to some such response as this: "I am not at all worried by the supposed 'threat' of epistemological skepticism. I am perfectly prepared to take for granted the common-sense and scientific picture of us as natural organisms adapting to and in constant causal commerce with a natural environment, which renders moot the extravagant suspicions of demon-deceiver or brain-in-a-vat skepticism. Concern with how one might in principle respond to such traditional, ultimately cartesian epistemological worries does not and should not exert any constraint on my choice of semantic explanatory primitives." There is certainly something to this response. But it is not clear that broadly epistemological issues can be neatly severed from more narrowly semantic ones. I suspect, for instance that the return of (objectionable) sensory givenness in two-

---

<sup>8</sup> I think this picture is unfair to Sellars—though not to Quine. This story has been told with particular force and clarity by Michael Williams, in his *Groundless Belief* [Yale University Press, 1977, Princeton University Press, 1997].

dimensional semantics is not a contingent feature of some ways of working out that idea, but essential to the program itself. And McDowell argues persuasively in *Mind and World* that subscribing to the Myth of the Given is an intelligible, though ultimately unsustainable, response to the entirely legitimate (not just in the context of epistemology, but even in the context of semantics) demand that the world we are talking and thinking about be intelligible as exercising not only *causal*, but also *rational* constraint on our talking and thinking. Apart from that, he thinks, the very idea of empirically contentful judgments is bound to go missing.

I think the deep reason for the inextricable intertwining of broadly epistemological with narrowly semantic concerns is an animating insight about which in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* Rorty is not as explicit as he is about the bearing of the options of skepticism or foundationalism on semantic representationalism, but which I think is present nonetheless. The forces that push representationalists towards semantic and epistemological foundationalism in the form of commitment to sensory, logical, or semantic givenness (i.e. analyticity) ultimately stem from concern with the question of what it is to *understand* representations as such, what it is to grasp representational content, what one must *do* to count thereby as taking or treating something in practice *as* a representation, as pointing beyond itself in this distinctive intentional way. Only the possibility of a suitable answer to that question can keep representations from having the significance of a veil interposed between representers and a represented world. (Rebecca West asked rhetorically why one would want a *copy* of the world: “Isn’t one of the damn things enough?”) The idea of epistemically privileged representations (“givens”) represents one, flawed, answer to that question. Semantic representationalism will only be as viable as the alternative answers it can make available.<sup>9</sup>

It seems to me that one of the cardinal advantages of semantic inferentialism over representationalism is precisely the availability of such an answer. Grasping a conceptual content is a kind of practical know-how: mastery of an inferential role. That is being able to discriminate good from bad material (that is, content-dependent) inferences in which it plays an essential role either in the premises or in the conclusions. Typically such mastery will be both partial and fallible. But one counts as grasping a concept insofar as one knows what else one would be committed or entitled to by applying it, and what would commit or entitle one to do so.<sup>10</sup> There appears to be no equally straightforward and natural answer to the question of what grasp of representational purport consists in—of what one must in practice be able to do in order to count as taking and treating something *as* a representing, as answering for its correctness (in a distinctive sense) *to* how it is with what, in virtue of playing that distinctive normative role as authoritative, is intelligible as being represented by that representing. I am not claiming that no

---

<sup>9</sup> I think this is essentially the argument of the first half of the Introduction to Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, but that is a story for another occasion. I have discussed what I take to be Kant’s and Hegel’s answers to this question in Chapters One and Three of *Reason in Philosophy: Animating Ideas* [Harvard University Press, 2009].

<sup>10</sup> It is only in the presence of substantial optional collateral methodological commitments that such an approach is obliged to go on to pick out, among material inferences, a distinguished proper subset that plays some privileged role in the individuation of contents, or in assessments of grasp of them—for instance, inferences whose material goodness is underwritten by conceptual content *rather than* contingent facts about how the world is. Assessments of agreement and disagreement (hence of communication), whether within the practice or by a theorist looking on, are underwritten by assessments of whether two interlocutors have bound themselves by the same norms (so applied the same concept), even though they have different partial, fallible takes on what those norms require and permit.

such answer can be constructed<sup>11</sup>—only that the representational model does not come with one similarly ready to hand.

The basic thought behind raising the question is that meaning and understanding are coordinate concepts, in the sense that neither can be properly understood or explicated except as part of a story that includes the other. Meanings are what one in the first instance understands, and talk of meaning in isolation from talk of what it is to grasp or understand that meaning is idle. Michael Dummett, Donald Davidson, and Crispin Wright are philosophers of language who have made this principle the centerpiece of their thought about meaning. If it is accepted, then semantics is inextricably bound up with broadly epistemic issues—where the broad sense of ‘epistemic’ refers not just to knowledge (a matter of knowing that), but also to understanding (a matter of knowing how). Of course, this view is not universally accepted. Jerry Fodor, in particular, considers the commingling of issues that are epistemic in this sense with properly semantic concerns to be the Great Bad of contemporary philosophy of mind and language. I don’t want to argue the point here, just to register the dispute and to claim that Rorty’s rejection of representationalism (indeed, his endorsement of global anti-representationalism) is rooted in his endorsement of what we might call the “entanglement thesis”. My own view is that it is a thesis about the relation between semantics and pragmatics—between theories about meaning or content and theories about what one needs to *do* in order to count as applying concepts with that meaning or deploying vocabulary that expresses that content. Insofar as that is the right way to understand it, it is entailed by methodological pragmatism: the view that meaning should be thought of as a theoretical concept, and meanings as postulated to explain proprieties of use, that is, of the activities of those who express them.

### III

Does endorsing methodological pragmatism or its consequence, the entanglement thesis relating the concepts of meaning and understanding,<sup>12</sup> require one also to endorse global anti-representationalism—that is, the denial that representation can play a fundamental explanatory,

---

<sup>11</sup> So for instance for the simplest grades of representation, mapping and tracking (relations I understand in terms of the possibility of *us*, the theorists, being able to make inferences from map-facts to terrain-facts), being able to navigate among represented by consulting representing is certainly a responsive, and probably a correct answer to the question. For practical intentional systems (those intelligible as having goals) goal-satisfaction with respect to represented achieved by consulting representings plays a similar role. Millikan offers a sophisticated response relying on her central notion of proper function within a reproductive family.

<sup>12</sup> I think of the entanglement thesis as a reciprocal sense-dependence claim (in the sense I define in Chapter Six of *Tales of the Mighty Dead* [Harvard University Press, 2002], henceforth ‘*TMD*’). As such, it stands in apparent tension with the claim that it is entailed by methodological pragmatism, which asserts an *asymmetric* relation between pragmatics and semantics. The bridge principle or auxiliary hypothesis I have in mind as relating them is the claim that once a set of theoretical concepts have been incorporated into a vocabulary, by being related inferentially to each other and to some observational vocabulary conceived of as antecedently available, the concepts expressed even by observational terms (those that have noninferential, reporting uses) can be articulated in part by their inferential relations to the newly introduced theoretical vocabulary.

or even expressive, role in an acceptable semantic metavocabulary?<sup>13</sup> This is a complicated question. In the closing portions of this paper I describe one perhaps unexpected dimension along which the issue ramifies. But first I want to point to two views in the vicinity, two forms that semantic representationalism often takes, that on this basis I think we *should* reject.

The first is *semantic atomism*: the idea that the semantic contents of at least some episodes, states, and expressions can be made sense of one by one, each independently of all the others. The master-idea animating Sellars's rejection of the sensory given is a *semantic* one, which then turns out to have (anti-foundationalist) *epistemological* consequences. The idea of sensory givenness is the idea of there being episodes that qualify as knowings (in a sense that includes their being available as suitable premises in inferences whose conclusions also count as knowings, in part in virtue of those inferences) that are *noninferential*, not only in the (unobjectionable) sense that the process that results in the occurrence of those episodes is not an inferential process (but a matter of exercising, *inter alia*, a reliable differential responsive disposition), but also in the (objectionable) sense that its possession of the content it has is independent of any inferential relations to *other* contentful episodes. When Sellars talks about the ideology of givenness requiring that the occurrence of some contentful episodes not depend on any prior "learning", the learning he means is mastery of *other* concepts. (After all, it would be no problem for anyone on either side of the debate about givenness to allow that one might need some sort of training regimen to master the reliable differential responsive dispositions involved.) That is, the point is grounded in a denial of semantic atomism. My discussions of this point usually involve parrots<sup>14</sup>—I won't trample again on that well-worn ground. Suffice it to say here that semantic atomism is hard to maintain for anyone committed to the entanglement thesis. Meaning is holistic because understanding is.

If that line of thought is right, then *atomistic* representationalism should be rejected. But there is no necessity for semantic representationalism to take an atomistic form (though its more empiricist versions have tended to do so). When Descartes, impressed by Galileo's geometrical treatment of time by lines and acceleration by areas, wanted to replace traditional resemblance theories of the relation between appearance and reality by an account in terms of a more abstract notion of representation, his model was the relations he had discovered between discursive algebraic equations and geometric figures. " $x^2+y^2=1$ " and " $x+y=1$ " do not *resemble* the circle and line that they represent. They represent those figures in virtue of the facts relating the whole *system* of equations to the whole *system* of extended figures, in virtue of which, for instance, one can compute the number of points of intersection between the figures by simultaneously solving the corresponding equations. This original understanding of representation in terms of global isomorphism is an essentially holistic one.

The second pernicious form of semantic representationalism is semantic *nominalism*. This is the view that takes as its semantic paradigm the designation relation between a name and

---

<sup>13</sup> Later I will distinguish between explanatory and expressive versions of representationalism, and so of anti-representationalism.

<sup>14</sup> Taken as an organizing trope to particularly good effect by Jeremy Wanderer, in the opening chapter of his recent book *Robert Brandom* [Acumen Press, McGill University Press, 2008].

its bearer (what it is a name *of*), or between sign (signifier) and signified, and assimilates *all* varieties of the representing/represented relation to that model. (Contemporary semiotics takes this shape, as does much structuralist and post-structuralist thought, downstream from de Saussure. Derrida was at various points sufficiently within its grip that his alternative to de Saussure's signifier/signified model was to take it that signifiers designate...other signifiers.) What this approach misses is the Kant-Frege lesson that *sentences* are special. They are prior in the order of *pragmatic* explanation, because it is using some expressions as declarative sentences, making *judgments* or *claims*, that is what makes something a discursive practice or ability in the first place. It is items in this category that a knower can take responsibility for (Kant), attach pragmatically assertoric force to (Frege), or use to make a move in a language game (Wittgenstein). As Frege taught us, our understanding of predicates should derive from our understanding not only of singular terms, but also of sentences. So using the designational model for predicates and using it for sentences are intimately related moves. Methodological pragmatists are obliged to take the category of sentences as *semantically* fundamental, precisely because of their *pragmatic* priority.

A popular idea is that what sentences represent in the sense of designate is a special kind of thing: states of affairs. The thought is that what *true* sentences designate is *facts*, and some states of affairs are merely *possible* facts, designated by false sentences. This model inevitably leads to metaphysical extravagance. For there are lots of different kinds of sentences, because there are many different ways of using sentences (things one can do with them). Pretty soon one must worry about logical facts and states of affairs (including negative and conditional ones), modal facts and states of affairs, probabilistic ones, normative ones, semantic and intentional ones, and so on, and corresponding kinds of properties to articulate each of them. One of the motivations for various local expressivisms is precisely to avoid such extravagance. Indeed, Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* adopts what can be thought of as a local anti-representationalism about logical vocabulary, precisely to avoid having to postulate the kind of logical properties and relations (such as negation and conditionality) that his picture theory of representation forbids. But his tinkertoy approach, treating states of affairs as arrangements of objects, offers no account of modal or normative facts, only a token, unworkable approach to probabilistic ones, and treats semantic and intentional facts as in principle inexpressible. In doing so he opens the gate to a path he did not himself take: to treating these other kinds of vocabulary also in a non-representational, locally expressivist fashion. For he showed that even if one's semantics is at base representationalist, it need not take the form of semantic nominalism. (Jerry Fodor's "divide and conquer" semantic methodology acknowledges the same lesson.)

Representationalism invites, but does not entail semantic nominalism. But one of the basic criteria of adequacy for any representationalist account must be its treatment of *sentences* and what they express. This demand sometimes surfaces in the form of the issue of characterizing the distinctive "unity of the proposition." This is another criterion of adequacy (along with offering an account of understanding co-ordinate with that of meaning, and rejecting semantic atomism) that inferentialist approaches automatically satisfy. For to be propositionally

contentful, according to this approach, just is to be suitable to play the role both of premise and of conclusion in inferences, which articulate the content of the proposition.

In sum, these arguments do not rule out making essential use of representational vocabulary in semantics, so long as the account meets at least three conditions. First, an account must be offered of the uptake or grasp of representations as such--what one has to *do* to count thereby as taking or treating them *as* representings of some represented things. That is a normative status: according to things a distinctive kind of *authority* over the correctness of one's claims, thereby making oneself *responsible* to them. For that is what it is to take it that one is talking or thinking *about* them. Second, the account must be consistent with the pragmatic priority of sentential contents. Third, it must acknowledge the way the semantic content of some expressions, states, or episodes is essentially related to that of others, to which one might or might not be committed. Semantic representationalism invites and encourages the denial of these insights, but it does not *entail* them. In fact, I do not think Rorty would have claimed an entailment. He was happy enough with a sort of guilt by association. He thought that representational semantics had been so intertwined with bad epistemological projects that it was irretrievably tainted. Indeed, he recommended jettisoning not only *representational* semantics, but semantics in general, as a handmaiden to bad epistemology.

#### IV

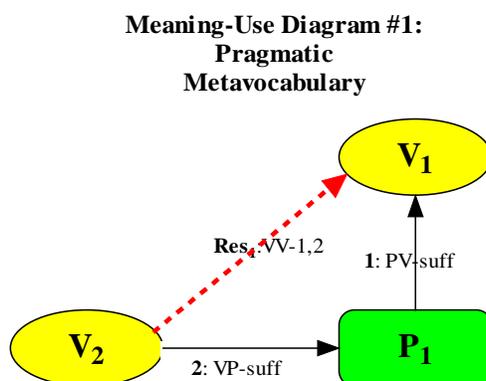
There is another direction from which it is possible to address the nature, and therefore the viability of the project of semantic representationalism. Price has pointed out the possible bearing of expressivist pragmatic theories of what one is *doing* in applying the concepts expressed by some vocabularies on the feasibility and utility of representationalist accounts of their semantic contents. I endorse a sophisticated expressivism with regard logical, modal, and normative vocabulary. This is quite a different line of thought than that motivating contemporary expressivist treatments of moral normative vocabulary, for instance in Gibbard and Blackburn. I call my version a 'sophisticated' expressivism to mark the fact that the expressive role taken to be shared by both classical and modal logical vocabulary and normative vocabulary is one possible role picked out from a structured space of possibilities. That space is structured by the basic meaning-use relations I identify in *Between Saying and Doing*. The most important of these are one set of practices or abilities being sufficient to *deploy* a particular vocabulary (PV-sufficiency), a vocabulary being sufficient to *specify* a particular set of practices-or-abilities (VP-sufficiency), and one set of practices-or-abilities being sufficient (for instance by either algorithmic or pedagogical elaboration) for *implementing* another set of practices-or-abilities (PP-sufficiency).<sup>15</sup> Various expressive roles are then determined by the specific pragmatically mediated semantic relations they stand in to practices and other vocabularies. The simplest such complex meaning-use relation is being a *pragmatic metavocabulary*: the relation a

---

<sup>15</sup> *BSD* Chapter One.

vocabulary V' stands in to another vocabulary V when V' is VP-sufficient to specify practices-or-abilities that are PV-sufficient to deploy the vocabulary V.

That is not the expressive role that I take logical vocabulary to play—the genus the logical species shares with the modal and normative species of vocabulary. Complex meaning-use relations can be botanized by their meaning-use diagrams. The diagram for being a pragmatic metavocabulary is a simple composition<sup>16</sup>:



The meaning-use relation of which I take logical vocabulary to be paradigmatic is that of being elaborated from and explicating of some feature of practices-or-abilities that are PV-necessary to deploy any autonomous discursive practice—for short, being LX for every ADP. This means that there is some set of practices-or-abilities necessarily exhibited by any autonomous discursive practice—any language-game one can play though one plays no other<sup>17</sup>—that can be elaborated into a set of practices sufficient to introduce vocabulary that is expressively powerful enough to specify the original practices. So, in having mastered a natural language, one already knows how to do everything one needs to know how to do, in principle, to deploy a vocabulary that is expressively powerful enough to specify the basic set of abilities on the basis of which the new vocabulary was introduced.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> The conventions of this diagram are:

- Vocabularies are shown as ovals, practices-or-abilities as (rounded) rectangles.
- Basic meaning-use relations are indicated by solid arrows, numbered and labeled as to kind of relation.
- Resultant meaning-use relations are indicated by dotted arrows, numbered, and labeled as to kind and the basic MURs from which they result.

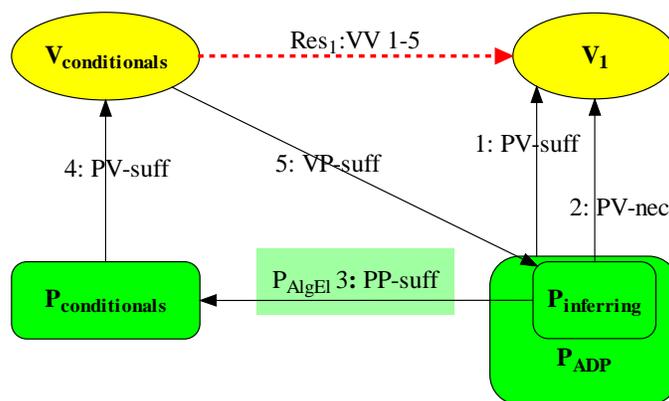
The idea is that a resultant MUR is the relation that obtains when all of the basic MURs listed on its label obtain.

<sup>17</sup> As I use the term, to be a *language-game*, a *Sprachspiel*, to be a verbal, and not just a vocal practice, some performances must be accorded the pragmatic significance of *claimings*, utterances with *assertional* significance, which accordingly count as the use of declarative sentences expressing propositional content. Wittgenstein’s *Sprachspiele* are not autonomous discursive practices in this sense.

<sup>18</sup> It may be worth mentioning in passing that I am not offering an account of logical vocabulary (inter alia) that is *metalinguistic* in any ordinary sense. For, first, it does not involve *mentioning* the nonlogical expressions it is applied to, but *using* them in a distinctive way. Of course, as McDowell points out in “Quotation and Saying That,”

The meaning-use diagram for that complex meaning-use relation is this more intricate one:

### Elaborated-Explicating (LX) Conditionals



I cannot say enough here to make these diagrams, and the relations they present graphically, truly intelligible, never mind to say what reasons there are to think that modal and normative vocabulary play structurally identical expressive roles. I offer these arcane images only to give some flavor of the structure that permits the botanization of an infinite, recursively generated class of expressive roles, with a hitherto undreamt-of precision. That is the structure within which my local expressivism about a variety of vocabularies is located.<sup>19</sup>

The sort of expressivism about logical, modal, and normative vocabulary that consists in understanding them as LX for every ADP is essentially, and not just accidentally, a *local* expressivism. Not all vocabularies can play *this* particular expressive role. Autonomous discursive practices *must* contain vocabularies playing *other* expressive roles—for instance, observational vocabulary that reports features of the nonlinguistic bits of the world (ones that are not themselves the deployment of vocabularies). So *this* sort of expressivism is not a candidate for extension to a *global* expressivism.

---

[in *Mind, Knowledge and Reality*, Harvard University Press, 2001] mentioning an expression *is* a way of using it. That the sort of use involved in my account is quite different from the use that amounts to mention is clear from how indexicals, demonstratives, and foreign-language expressions behave in, say, conditionals. Again (and closely related), the logical vocabulary is not restricted to a metalanguage distinct from the object language, but is *added to* the object language. One would get closer by looking at indirect discourse, which shares these features. The closest thought in the vicinity would be that “If *p* then *q*,” means something like “That-*q* follows from that-*p*.” But any such model would require a *lot* of commentary.

<sup>19</sup> I construe this view about the expressive role characteristic of logical, modal, and normative vocabulary as developing, extending, and generalizing the approach Wittgenstein takes to narrowly logical vocabulary in the *Tractatus*. For there he saw that one need not follow Russell’s logical atomism in acknowledging a distinct realm of *logical* facts, over and above the nonlogical ones. One can instead construe logical vocabulary as playing an expressive role that is quite distinct from the representational one played by logically atomic vocabulary.

However, one of the vocabularies I am a local expressivist about is representational vocabulary itself. By this I do *not* mean deflationism about traditional semantic vocabulary: ‘true’, ‘refers’, ‘denotes’, and like cognates. I do in fact endorse a distinctive kind of deflationism about such locutions, understanding them as anaphoric proform-forming operators.<sup>20</sup> In spite of specific differences, generically, this view belongs in a box with Paul Horwich’s. I mean something possibly more fundamental. For I am also a certain kind of deflationist about the representational dimension of intentionality itself. In the last chapter of *Between Saying and Doing*, I offer an account of intentionality as a “pragmatically mediated semantic relation.” I do not there discuss representational vocabulary. But the account of its expressive role that I offer elsewhere<sup>21</sup> is an expressive, deflationary one. (Sebastian Knell is very good on this point in his book.<sup>22</sup>) In fact, though the case would have to be made out—as I do not do in *BSD* and will not do here—the expressive role assigned to paradigmatic representational locutions (the ‘of’ of “what I am thinking of”...etc..) is *also* to be LX of some features essential to ADPs.

The vocabulary I am interested in is the natural language vocabulary that expresses the idea that besides what we say or think, there is also what we are talking or thinking *about*. I take this distinction to be the phenomenon that motivates various semantic theorists to introduce technical notions of representation, and initially picks out their topic. They want to elaborate, in a controlled way, the representational dimension of discourse that shows up pretheoretically in our talk about what we are talking *about*. What distinguishes the ‘of’ and ‘about’ that express intentional directedness (the representational dimension of thought and talk) from the ‘of’ of “the pen of my aunt” and the ‘about’ of “the book weighs about five pounds”? I think it is their use in *de re* ascriptions of propositional attitude. That is, the home language-game of this vocabulary is ascriptions such as “John believes *of* the green tie that it is blue,” and “When Mark says ‘ordinary language’ he is talking (thinking) *about* the language of classical mechanics.” So, for instance, if we want to know whether some alien language has locutions for making explicit the representational directedness of their thought and talk, and which locutions those are, the place to start is by looking for expressions that have the pragmatic significance and conceptual content of *de re* ascriptions of propositional attitudes. The expressions that mark off the *de re* from the *de dicto* portions of such ascriptions (in lightly regimented English, what goes inside the scope of the ‘of’ from what goes inside the scope of the ‘that’) is then the explicitly representational vocabulary.

<sup>20</sup> See *Making It Explicit* [Harvard University Press, 1994] henceforth ‘*MIE*’, Chapter Five, and “Expressive vs. Explanatory Deflationism about Truth” in *What Is Truth?* Richard Schantz (ed.), Hawthorne de Gruyter, Berlin & N.Y 2002, pp. 103-119. Reprinted in *Deflationary Truth*, Bradley P. Armour-Garb and JC Beall (eds.), Open Court, Chicago, 2005, pp. 237-257.

<sup>21</sup> In Chapter Eight of *MIE*, Chapter Five of *AR*, Chapter Three of *TMD*, and in “Hermeneutic Practices and Theories of Meaning” (*SATS - Nordic Journal of Philosophy*, Vol 5 No 1, 2004, pp. 5-26).

<sup>22</sup> *Propositionaler Gehalt und Diskursive Kontoführung: Eine Untersuchung zur Begründung der Sprachabhängigkeit Intentionaler Zustände bei Brandom* (Quellen Und Studien Zur Philosophie) Walter de Gruyter, 2004.

To understand the representational dimension of discourse, then, we need to understand what is made explicit by *de re* ascriptions of propositional attitude.<sup>23</sup> The way to do that, I have argued, is to look at what one is *doing* in asserting a *de re* ascription. And here I have argued that from the pragmatic, deontic scorekeeping point of view, one is doing *two* things in making any ascription of a propositional attitude. One is in the central case *attributing* a commitment, typically to someone else. That one is doing that by explicitly *saying that* the individual has that attitude is what distinguishes *ascription* of the attitude from the simple attribution of the attitude, which may otherwise be practically implicit in what one does. But because in ascribing one is *saying* something, in the sense of asserting it, one is also *undertaking* or *acknowledging* a commitment. Each bit of vocabulary deployed in the ascription must accordingly do double duty pragmatically. It contributes to the specification both of the claim responsibility for which is being attributed and of the claim responsibility for which is being undertaken. The question can then arise whether the choice of some way of expressing the claim being attributed is itself something for which responsibility is being attributed, along with the ascribed claim, or undertaken, along with the ascribing claim. Segregating some expressions within the scope of a *de re* operator, such as ‘of’ or ‘about’, is a way of making explicit that responsibility for using *those* expressions to specify the content of the claim ascribed is being undertaken, along with the ascribing claim, rather than attributed, along with the ascribed claim. Thus if I say “Kant came to believe of his loyal and long-suffering servant Lampl that he was conspiring against Kant,” I make it clear that the specification of Lampl as “loyal and long-suffering” is one that *I* am taking responsibility for, *not* one I am attributing to Kant as part of the attitude I am ascribing to him. The semantic device that performs the pragmatic function that is the converse of that performed by the representational vocabulary that segregates the scope of the *de re* portion of an ascription is scare quotes. So, picking up the remark of another, I might say something like “That ‘inspiring national leader’ is nothing but a self-interested kleptocrat.” Here I *attribute* responsibility for using that expression, while undertaking responsibility for the claim being made.

The pragmatic expressive function that determines the semantic content of representational vocabulary is marking the crucial distinction of social perspective between commitments (assertional and identificational=substitution-inferential) that are *attributed* and those that are *acknowledged* or undertaken. That is a very different job from describing how the world is. This vocabulary helps us keep our social books straight on who is committed to what—something we must be able to do in order to be able to deploy empirical descriptive vocabulary, but nonetheless something quite distinct from what we do with such vocabulary. A central observation of Kant’s is that what we might call the framework of empirical description—the commitments,

---

<sup>23</sup> Although it is not obvious, the anaphoric account of the expressive (substitution-inferential) role distinctive of the classical semantic vocabulary of ‘true’ and ‘refers’ takes its place within the framework provided by *de re* ascriptions of propositional attitudes, via the insight that what I have called (in *MIE*) “ascription-structural anaphora”—paradigmatically, the ‘it’ in “John believes *of* the green tie that it is blue,”—is the *intrasentential* correlate and codification of *interpersonal* anaphoric inheritance of (substitution-inferential) content. That is why we can say “Senator McCarthy believed of the first sentence of the Communist Manifesto that *it was true*.” I discuss this issue in greater detail in Chapter Eight of *MIE*.

practices, abilities, and procedures that form the necessary practical background within the horizon of which alone it is possible to engage in the cognitive theoretical activity of describing how things empirically are—essentially involves elements expressible in words that are *not* descriptions, that do *not* perform the function of describing (in the *narrow* sense) how things are. These include, on the objective side, what is made explicit as statements of *laws*, using alethic modal concepts to relate the concepts applied in descriptions. On my account, the representational vocabulary we use in natural language to make explicit the intentional directedness of our speech and thought performs a similar framework-explicating function, but on the subjective side of the ones undertaking and attributing commitments concerning how things are.

So my form of local expressivism is peculiar (though not unique) in that it includes the vocabulary we use to make explicit the representational semantic dimension of discourse—exactly the semantic vocabulary by contrast to which the pragmatic expressivist vocabulary is usually introduced. My account has the consequence, however, that that representational dimension turns out to be ubiquitous. *Every* vocabulary can be used in expressing commitments that can be both attributed and acknowledged. Every vocabulary can figure in *de re* ascriptions, and so be talked about in representational vocabulary. (In fact, the vocabulary of *de re* ascriptions can itself be used to ascribe such ascriptions *de re*.) So representational vocabulary makes explicit an essential and ubiquitous dimension of conceptual content. This is a kind of global semantic representationalism, underwritten by a *local* expressivism about representational vocabulary itself. This is not an option Price seems so far to have considered.

But what I am advocating is a *soft* global semantic representationalism. For it is an account of the *expressive* role of representational vocabulary that shows the same expressive function that makes it ubiquitously available to express a crucial dimension of conceptual contentfulness also *disqualifies* it from playing a fundamental *explanatory* role in an account of the semantics of at least some discursive practices. For the expressive role characteristic of representational vocabulary (like that of logical, modal, and normative vocabulary) can itself be fully specified in a social, normative, inferential pragmatic metavocabulary that does *not* itself employ representational vocabulary. In the context of a commitment to methodological pragmatism—that claim that the point of theoretically postulating semantic properties associated with discursive expressions, episodes, and states is to explain or at least explicate features of their use—this means that the invocation of semantic primitives (unexplained explainers) such as representation, in *this* case, the case of representational vocabulary itself, is unnecessary. That is why the view is *explanatorily* deflationary about representational vocabulary, though not at all *expressively* deflationary about it. (Paul Horwich agrees with me about the first part of this claim, but I am not sure that he agrees about the second. Davidson, in “Reality without Reference”<sup>24</sup> can also be considered as enrolled in this cause, in giving (I would claim) a basically inferential account of truth conditions, and then denying that they can be *generated* by referential/representational primitives—which, on the other hand, are computed from the truth conditions, and accordingly, do not function as primitive or explanatory-foundational.)

---

<sup>24</sup> In his *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* [Oxford University Press, 2001].

The question remains: just how deflationary is it to provide this sort of pragmatic metavocabulary? It opens up a space for a view that *is* deflationary: this sort of account in terms of pragmatic metavocabulary is all there is to say about the vocabulary in question. No further semantic questions should be asked or could be answered. Price might be tempted by such a view. But it also seems compatible with acknowledging that at least in some cases, an orthodox representational semantic metavocabulary might *also* be available.<sup>25</sup> That is, we can ask: Does this sort of deflationary *explanatory* anti-representationalism about what representational vocabulary expresses entail a global explanatory anti-representationalism? I do not see that it does. For it might well be that although representational vocabulary need not be used in specifying the use of representational vocabulary itself (because its expressive role can be fully specified in a non-representational, social-normative-inferential pragmatic metavocabulary)<sup>26</sup> nonetheless in order to specify the proprieties governing the use of ordinary empirical descriptive vocabulary, its distinctive expressive role requires specification with the help of a representational semantic metavocabulary. I have talked so far only about *discursive* representational vocabulary. But this is not the only candidate for a representational semantic metavocabulary. In addition there are at least three others: those that express *mapping* relations (static), those that express *tracking* processes (dynamic), and those that express the *practical* intentional directedness of goal-seeking systems.<sup>27</sup> I think the expressive role characteristic of each of these kinds of representational vocabulary can also be made fully explicit in an *inferential*, itself non-representational pragmatic metavocabulary. Understanding (practically taking or treating) something *as* a representation in the mapping sense is exercising the ability to make inferences from map-facts to mapped-facts. Tracking is updating a map in that sense so as to keep the map-inferences good as the mapped facts change. Taking or treating something as a practical intentional system is understanding its behavior in terms of sample pieces of practical reasoning. Here, too, the possibility of an adequate non-representational pragmatic metavocabulary for these varieties of representational vocabulary would not seem to rule out their playing fundamental roles in a

---

<sup>25</sup> Compare: It is one thing to understand what it is to introduce a range of singular terms and the objects they refer to by *abstraction*—that is, by means of an equivalence relation on some antecedent vocabulary, picking out objects that count as (more) *concrete* relative to this procedure. It is something else (it requires more argument to be entitled) to understand the objects to which one thereby gains semantic access as *abstract objects*. For presumably the latter are objects to which we can *only* gain semantic access by a process of abstraction. It is at least not obvious that Frege, for instance, believed in abstract objects in this sense.

<sup>26</sup> The relation being asserted cannot straightforwardly be put by saying that discursive representational vocabulary and the social-inferential vocabulary that serves as a pragmatic metavocabulary for it turn out to be reciprocally reference-dependent, but *not* reciprocally sense-dependent. I think that latter claim is also true (and the expository strategy of Part II of *MIE* depends on it. But the pragmatic metavocabulary relation involves special features that are not part of the generic reference-dependence-without-sense-dependence story. I discuss these concepts in Chapter Six of *TMD*.

<sup>27</sup> As I explain in Chapter Six of *BSD*, the fundamental pragmatist commitment is to explaining *discursive* intentionality in terms of *practical* intentionality. Thus in *MIE*, the claim is that discursive scorekeeping can be understood as a particular structure of practical intentionality, the sort exhibited already by non-linguistic creatures—a structure that then in turn can be used to understand discursive intentionality. So there is an interaction between fundamental pragmatism and the entanglement thesis. For the notion of understanding that the latter appeals to as co-ordinate with the notion of meaning is a *practical* one: a kind of knowing *how*, an ability to *do* something. The denial of semantic atomism then follows from an appreciation of the systematicity of the answers to the question about the kind of practical understanding that grasp of representing as a representing consists in.

semantic metavocabulary for some other vocabulary—quite possibly, empirical descriptive vocabulary. Though I cannot pursue the point here, the semantic-epistemic entanglement thesis will give us important clues about relations between semantic metavocabularies and their pragmatic metavocabularies.

## V

What are we to conclude? Rorty and Price agree that the evils representationalism is prey to require, or at least make advisable, global anti-representationalism. The sort of expressivist, deflationary, pragmatic account of what one is *doing* in *using* representational vocabulary that I am advocating suggests that this response is an overreaction. I have tried in this essay to assemble some analytic materials that might help us towards a more nuanced conclusion. Once one has freed oneself from the idea (and the auxiliary hypotheses that enforce the association) that semantic representationalism need take a nominalist or atomist form, must fail to appreciate what is special about sentences, or has to enforce a disconnection between semantic issues of meaning and epistemic ones pertaining to understanding, representational vocabulary can be understood as performing an important, indeed essential, expressive role in making explicit a discursive representational dimension of semantic content that necessarily helps articulate every autonomous discursive practice.

Further, we can rigorously distinguish the quite different expressive roles played by different kinds of vocabulary. (*BSD* shows how). So no argument that depends on the impossibility of offering one kind of semantics for some vocabularies, and others for others, is going to be plausible or sustainable. When we do that, we discover that it is possible to specify the expressive roles characteristic of various important kinds of vocabulary—among them logical, modal, and normative vocabularies—entirely in a social, normative, inferential, *non*-representational pragmatic metavocabulary. In the context of a commitment to methodological pragmatism, then, there is no *need* to postulate, as part of semantic theory, representational explanatory primitives in order to explain the use of such vocabulary (since methodological pragmatism says that that is why we postulate semantic theoretical features such as meanings). And the vocabularies of which that is true include, I claim, discursive representational vocabulary. So we do *not* need to *use* the concept of representation in order to understand what we are *doing* when we use the concept of (discursive) representation.

I have also claimed that it does *not* follow (even in the context of collateral commitments to methodological pragmatism and to semantic-epistemic entanglement<sup>28</sup>) that the use of

---

<sup>28</sup> I have tried to be clear about the collateral methodological commitments within which I am assessing consequences. They include methodological pragmatism and semantic-epistemic entanglement (with the holism about meanings that results, in the context of relatively weak auxiliary hypotheses). One response might be: “No doubt one can derive all sorts of extravagant consequences, if one is allowed to make use of substantially *false* collateral premises. But why should we care?” But I think this would be too quick. Meaning (like representation) is a *theoretical* notion. And that means that what we *mean* by ‘meaning’ is determined in no small part by the

ordinary empirical descriptive vocabulary, which plays quite a *different* expressive role from that of logical, modal, normative, or representational vocabularies, is not best explained by appeal to a semantics that is couched in representational terms. Price makes much of the fact that any *local* expressivism is committed to drawing a *line* between the discourses or vocabularies that should be treated *representationally* and those that should be treated *expressively*, in their semantics. He is, I think, inclined to skepticism about the possibility of drawing such a line in a principled way. I do not think that *this* argument will work. On my account, logical, modal, and normative vocabulary plays the distinctive expressive role of being LX for every ADP. That is not true of ground-level empirical descriptive terms. Perhaps they are best understood to be representing features of the objective world, by responsive, mapping, and tracking, indeed, even in the practical-acting sense.

Even if that is so, we still have to worry about what it means that the use of the representational vocabulary appealed to in our semantics can itself be rendered *non-representationally*. For I think we do not know how the possibility of offering a certain kind of pragmatic metavocabulary for a vocabulary relates to the kind of semantic metavocabulary it is amenable to. In this case, the question is, what does the possibility of offering a social-normative-inferential pragmatic metavocabulary specifying the expressive role of representational vocabulary say about the possibility of *also* offering an explanatorily representationalist semantics for it, or for other vocabularies? (The question-mark in my title is meant to indicate that I do not claim to know the answer to this question.)

1. I conclude that we have just not yet sufficiently explored (and so do not now know enough about) the relations between pragmatic metavocabularies and semantic metavocabularies, for vocabularies playing very different expressive roles to be able to answer to this question. In the wake of the Frege-Geach embedding argument against classical metaethical expressivism, Blackburn, Gibbard, and Railton pioneered a new level of sophistication in thinking about the relations between non-descriptive expressive roles and descriptive content. Price has placed their enterprise in a much larger, more global theoretical setting, raising issues about the relations between the pragmatic metavocabularies in which we specify what we are *doing* when we use any kind of vocabulary and the semantic metavocabularies in which we specify what we are *saying* or *meaning* when we use them. My principle aim here has been to clarify the state of play that I understand as resulting from that recontextualization, to indicate how some of my own work on expressive roles and pragmatic metavocabularies might contribute to greater analytic clarity on these issues, and finally to say something about the challenges for further research that confront us as we try to discern and navigate the next level of fine structure in the relations between expression and representation, and between pragmatics and semantics generally.

END

---

collateral commitments available to conjoin with it as auxiliary hypotheses in reasoning about it. They help determine what sense of ‘meaning’ we are exploring.