

Handout for Week 13

Passages from Brandom: "Global Anti-Representationalism?" (2015):

From "Global Anti-Representationalism?"

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. [GAR 19]

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. [GAR 19]

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. [GAR 19]

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. [GAR 20]

Passages from Huw Price: “Global Expressivism by the Method of Differences” (2019)

I propose to ‘pentangulate’ on GE by saying how it differs from five other positions in the contemporary philosophical landscape. These five views are:

- (i) the so-called ‘Canberra Plan’;
- (ii) Moorean non-naturalism and platonism;
- (iii) ‘relaxed realism’ and quietism;
- (iv) local expressivism; and
- (v) response-dependent realism.

Imagine that GE sits in the interior of a pentagon, and that I am describing five possible exit routes from this central and (in my view) privileged location. (Some other familiar positions, including fictionalism, error theories, and idealism, will also be mentioned, but won’t merit an exit all of their own, in my map of the territory.) [GEMD 1]

The Canberra Plan (CP) begins with *location* or *placement* problems: Where do normativity, meaning, mentality, and other puzzling domains ‘fit’ in the kind of world described by science? [GEMD 2]

Finally, it is important to note that GE may retain naturalism in a different sense – what I have called *subject naturalism*, as opposed to the *object naturalism* of CP. [GEMD 5]

it is clear that in declining to embrace (object) naturalism, GE has something in common with various forms of non-naturalist realism and platonism, such as a Moorean view about morality (Moore, 1903), or platonism about meaning, mathematical objects, or abstract entities.... the non-naturalism of GE is expressed...in meta-linguistic rather than metaphysical mode... GE embraces a non-representationalist functional account of what we do with such terms and concepts. Orthodox non-naturalists and platonists are typically orthodox, among other things, in their representationalism. [GEMD 5-6]

Non-naturalist irrealists agree with their realist cousins that moral terms are usefully characterised representationally: they are the kind of terms that ‘claim to’ refer to properties in the world. Where they differ from realists is in maintaining that such terms systematically fail to achieve such reference, for there are no such properties. Either our moral claims are flatly in error, or, at best, have the status of useful fictions. [GEMD 6]

[Re: Dworkin, Parfit, Scanlon, Campbell, Hale & Wright, McDowell:]

Metaphysical quietism, yes; explanatory quietism, no. GE agrees with these views about the attractions of *metaphysical* quietism – of a deflationary approach to metaphysical issues. Where it disagrees, if at all, is in insisting on the interest and respectability of another project – the functional and genealogical project. Concerning McDowell, for example, my own strategy¹⁹ has

been to present him with a dilemma. Either he has to be more quietist than even he wants to be, in being unable to explain the sense in which (in his words), '[v]alues are not brutally there—not there independently of our sensibility—any more than colours are'.²⁰ Or he has to endorse what is in effect an expressivist genealogy – a 'sideways' explanation of how our value and colour judgements come to depend on aspects of our sensibility (different aspects, in each case). [GEMD 8]

Local expressivism (LE) agrees with GE *locally* in response to the previous folk, in stressing the importance of pragmatist genealogy (for normative discourse, say). But it disagrees in wanting to maintain a *bifurcation* between cases in which this pragmatist stance is appropriate and cases in which it is not. [GEMD 8]

The solution I have recommended, in the light of these considerations, is to be clear that we have two different notions (or clusters of notions) in play. There isn't a univocal notion that works both in the environment-tracking cases and as an account of the notion of truth in play in language at large. But once we recognise this, and keep these notions distinct, everything goes smoothly. I have put the distinction in terms of two notions of representation: an environment-tracking notion I call *e-representation* and a broader, linguistically-grounded notion I call *i-representation*. As I have noted, this distinction does much the same job as Sellars' distinction between two notions of truth, notions that 'belong in different boxes', as Sellars puts it. So long as we recognise that the narrower notion (my e-representation) should itself be regarded as a pragmatic notion, a bifurcation cast in these terms doesn't in any way undermine the global character of GE. Environment-tracking is one pragmatic function among many others, in effect. [GEMD 12]

response-dependent realism (RDR). Leading early versions of this view included those of Mark Johnston and Crispin Wright. RDR can be seen as a proposal for defending the 'factual', 'cognitive' or 'realist' character of various discourses, by putting pragmatic factors – e.g., desires, in the moral case – into the content...

By the standards of contemporary expressivism, however, it is hard not to see RDR as a solution to a non-existent problem....

the right place for pragmatic factors was in use conditions, not truth or content conditions.

[GEMD 13-14]

Brandom ("Pittsburgh Pragmatism"):

Starting with an account of what one is *doing* in making a claim, [pragmatism] seeks to elaborate from it an account of what is said, the content or proposition—something that can be thought of in terms of truth conditions—to which one commits oneself by making a speech act.

Unhindered by the piecemeal starting points of Blackburn's Humean expressivism, and

committed to a general inferentialism about meaning, Brandom simply takes for granted that this kind of pragmatism should be global in nature. There is no bifurcation. Content is everywhere downstream of usage. So Brandom counts as a global expressivist, in my terminology. [GEMD 16]

The illuminating enquiry is the one [Ramsey] calls ‘psychological analysis’ – an investigation into how we come to think and talk in causal terms, conducted in a manner that we do not presuppose that the helpful answer will lead us back to the objects. (In other words, we do not presuppose that the answer will be ‘We talk this way because we are keeping track of the causal facts’, or anything of that kind.)

I have dubbed this stance ‘Cambridge Pragmatism’, noting that it can be found in places in the work of many later Cambridge figures – and not just the obvious ones such as Blackburn and Wittgenstein. Other examples include Mellor on tensed language, Anscombe on the first-person, Craig on knowledge, von Wright on causation, and Bernard Williams, arguably, on truth itself. Most of these figures count in my terms as local pragmatists, or local expressivists. As for Ramsey himself, Cheryl Misak argues that under the influence of Peirce, Ramsey was already a global Cambridge Pragmatist. While I have expressed some reservations⁴⁰ about this claim, I think it is clear that Ramsey was moving in that direction. As Richard Holton and I have argued, he would have been pushed there by factors related to what we now call the rule-following considerations. In the terminology of the present paper, then, Ramsey is at least a *proto*-Global Expressivist. [GEMD 17]

Passages from Price: “From Quasi-Realism to Global Expressivism—and Back Again?” (2015)

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.’ [QGE 1]

The bifurcationist often undertakes the task of determining which of our wellformed 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) [QGE 2]

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. [QGE 6]

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...

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 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*. [QGE 8]

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. The result is what we might call a two-level pragmatism. [QGE 10]

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. [QGE 10]

Thus, in my terminology, Brandom is offering us an account of the *uniformity of the global 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.' [QGE 12]

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. At the lower level (Level 2), we seek an account of what distinguishes one vocabulary from another. [QGE 12]

e-representation, – 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...

i-representation – 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. [QGE 15]

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). [QGE 16]

Blackburn:

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 out for pragmatic stories *somewhere*, and the opposition would be flat-footed representationalism *everywhere*. (2013, 77) [QGE 17-18]

the pragmatist's external question is about the *talk*, not the *ontology* [QGE 19]

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 generalized 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. [QGE 21]

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. [QGE 22]