

# Idling and Sidling Towards Philosophical Peace<sup>\*</sup>

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## Abstract

John McDowell characterises himself as a Wittgensteinian quietist, seeing the role of philosophical theory as therapeutic – to ‘give philosophy peace’, as he puts it, taking over one of Wittgenstein’s metaphors. He criticises some other writers (e.g., Brandom) who profess sympathy with this aspect of Wittgenstein’s view for not taking it seriously enough – for thinking that there is some further role for substantive philosophy, once Wittgenstein has deflated traditional concerns. In this paper I present McDowell with a dilemma: either he’s more quietist than he wants to be, reduced to silence about some matters that he (rightly) thinks to be worthy of philosophical attention; or he’s closer than he believes to these positions from which he seeks to distance himself (e.g., as I argue, those of Sellars and Blackburn, as well as Brandom).

## 1 Giving philosophy peace

John McDowell is one of the most perceptive writers in contemporary philosophy, a master of the art of tackling large philosophical landscapes in careful, compact essays. He has an ear for philosophical idioms, and certain phrases, his own and other people’s, turn up again and again in his work. Often they are labels for what McDowell sees as the characteristic traps and dead-ends of modern philosophy: ‘bare naturalism’, ‘rampant platonism’, ‘the Myth of the Given’, and ‘frictionless spinning in the void’, for example. These, and more familiar terms such ‘reductionism’, ‘idealism’ and ‘anti-realism’, label the philosophical options that McDowell seeks to avoid. In their place, he proposes a ‘re-enchanted’ naturalism – a ‘naturalized platonism’, as he also calls it. This is recommendation is made in the spirit of Wittgensteinian quietism – a way of ‘giving philosophy peace’, as McDowell often puts it, taking over one of Wittgenstein’s own metaphors, and the therapeutic conception of the role of philosophy that it represents.

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My interest here is in the location of McDowell's recipe for philosophical tranquility with respect to certain other positions in contemporary philosophy. I shall present McDowell with a dilemma, arguing that his preferred course lies in a direction in which there seems to be two options, neither of which seems entirely a happy choice, from his point of view – though one is clearly better than the other, by my lights and I think also by McDowell's. But if I am right about the map, then the upshot is that a reasonable extrapolation of McDowell's course takes him much closer than he professes to want to go to certain other philosophical positions: he is more like them, or they are more like him, than he thinks. This is not necessarily bad news, of course. By my lights, the fault, to the extent that there is one, lies not in McDowell's view itself, but in his view of its relation to other positions. But it does require that we amend his map, to record his proximity to positions from which he claims to distance himself.

### 1.1 Good metaphysics or no metaphysics?

McDowell often attributes the failings he finds in contemporary philosophy to defective metaphysics of one sort or another. For example:

[N]othing but *bad metaphysics* suggests that the standards in ethics must somehow be constructed out of facts of disenchanting nature. (1996, 187, emphasis mine)

[I]t is one thing to recognize that the impersonal stance of scientific investigation is a methodological necessity for the achievement of a valuable mode of understanding reality; it is quite another thing to take the dawning grasp of this, in the modern era, for a metaphysical insight into the notion of objectivity as such ... The detranscendentalized analogue of Kant's picture that empiricist realism amounts to is not the educated common sense picture it represents itself as being; it is *shallow metaphysics*. (1996, 182, emphasis mine)

This picture tries to cast the realm of law in a naturalized version of the role Kant gives to the supersensible. But this is not how to correct what is unsatisfactory in Kant's thinking about the supersensible: keeping its basic shape, and merely naturalizing what lies beyond the conceptual. ... This kind of naturalism tends to represent itself as educated common sense, but it is really only *primitive metaphysics*. (1994, 82, emphasis mine)

On the face of it, these criticisms are not of metaphysics itself, but of metaphysics qualified by some critical adjective – 'bad', 'shallow', and 'primitive', in these cases. So natural questions, then, are (i) whether McDowell's proposed philosophical pacifier amounts to a better, deeper, less primitive metaphysics, or whether it renounces metaphysics altogether; and (ii) if the latter, whether

what is recommended is some other (non-metaphysical) mode of philosophical enquiry, or none at all – a kind of blanket quietism?

Concerning (i), the answer seems to be that McDowell wants to renounce metaphysics, at least as such a philosophical activity is often understood. In support of this claim we might cite at least three pieces of evidence. The first is McDowell's repeated rejection of a 'sideways' perspective for philosophy, as in this passage, for example:

We find ourselves always already engaging with the world in conceptual activity within ... a dynamic system. Any understanding of this condition ... must be from within the system. It cannot be a matter of picturing the system's adjustments to the world from sideways on: that is, with the system circumscribed within a boundary, and the world outside it. That is exactly the shape our picture must not take. (1994, 34)

It is easy to hear in remarks like this an echo of Carnap's grounds for rejecting traditional metaphysics in 'Empiricism, Semantics and Ontology' (Carnap, 1950): viz., that metaphysics presupposes a stance 'external' to our linguistic frameworks, that is simply unavailable to us.<sup>1</sup> The second piece of evidence is a characterisation McDowell offers of his own view, saying 'my stance ... is better described as "anti-anti-realism" than as "realism"' (1998a, *viii*). I shall return to this remark later (noting that it, too, has affinities with Carnap), but for the moment its relevance is that metaphysics does typically take a stand, one way or the other, on issues of realism and anti-realism. And the third, of course, is McDowell's endorsement of a Wittgensteinian quietism. The meaning of the term 'metaphysics' is not set in stone, perhaps, but it would be a considerable departure from established usage to take it to be compatible with any of these views, let alone all three.

This third piece of evidence also helps us with question (ii): Given that McDowell rejects metaphysics, does he favour some mode of philosophical enquiry, or rather an end to philosophical enquiry altogether (except as therapy, at any rate)? The latter answer is suggested by his declared aim of 'giving philosophy peace,' and by his explicit (and, I take it, sympathetic) rejection of an interpretation of Wittgenstein as someone whose quietism is not entirely genuine, or at least not entirely stable – someone who *really* shows us the need for some other mode of philosophical enquiry. Here is McDowell on this interpretation of Wittgenstein:

The label ['quietism'] is all right if all it conveys is the aim of quieting the felt need for substantive philosophy. But it has acquired currency in readings in which Wittgenstein is complimented (a bit backhandedly) for uncovering a requirement, in connection with

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<sup>1</sup>Nothing here or below will hang on the claim that this is a close parallel, however.

such topics as acting on an understanding, for substantive philosophy, which, however, in deference to a supposed antecedent commitment to quietism, he does not himself give. In a variant version of this tendency, Crispin Wright credits Wittgenstein with an “official” quietism—leaving room for the suggestion that, inconsistently with his “official” stance, Wittgenstein actually at least adumbrates the supposedly needed substantive philosophy. Robert Brandom thinks Wittgenstein’s reflections on rule following reveal the need for “an account ... of what it is for norms to be implicit in practices,” though Wittgenstein himself, “the principled theoretical quietist,” neglects to provide such a thing. Brandom undertakes to fill this supposed lacuna, with Wittgenstein’s reflections supposedly motivating an enormous project in positive philosophy that quietism somehow debars him from undertaking himself. I think this kind of take on Wittgenstein’s quietism is point-missing ....

Brandom introduces his positive account of “the normative dimension of linguistic practice” (a particular case of the normative dimension of practices in which norms are implicit) with the undertaking that it will render that normative dimension “less mysterious.” But he does not say what he thinks would be still mysterious about the normative dimension if it were not for the positive philosophy he offers. ... Wittgenstein’s quietism is not a refusal to engage in substantive philosophy in the face of what everyone has to accept as genuine problems. It is an activity of diagnosing, so as to explain away, some appearances that we are confronted with genuine problems. The supposed problems disappear, leaving no need for theory construction to make things “less mysterious.” (McDowell, 2009a, 370–71)

As I interpret this passage, McDowell is setting himself firmly against the idea that there is an alternative substantive project for philosophy, such as the project Brandom sees himself as engaged in, when we set aside metaphysical issues (e.g., in this case, about the nature of normativity). There is perhaps a more concessive reading, which would see McDowell as objecting merely to idea that Brandom’s substantive project could reasonably be motivated (once therapy is complete) by a sense of ‘mystery’. But I think it would be uncharitable to interpret McDowell as making a point to which there would be such obvious rejoinder: ‘mystery’ is not a proprietary term, and Brandom would be perfectly entitled to say that although the substantial theoretical questions he takes himself to be addressing are not those that motivate metaphysics, they are nevertheless a source of genuine puzzlement, until properly answered. Maxwell’s question – “What’s the go o’ that?” – provides mystery enough, for someone puzzled by

particular phenomena (i.e., in Brandom's case, the use of normative language).<sup>2</sup>

## 1.2 My project: boxing-in McDowell

My strategy in what follows is going to be to explore the options in the vicinity of this kind of quietist move a little further, and to try to pin McDowell between the two arms of a trap. On one side will be the viewpoint of some philosophers McDowell regards as opponents, for these purposes – philosophers such as Brandom, who think that there are genuine problems in these cases, problems that survive Wittgensteinian therapy, even if not quite the problems that traditional metaphysics sets out to address. On the other side will be an imaginary opponent who, in being even less inclined to philosophical theory than McDowell is, misses distinctions that McDowell himself wants to draw. I want to propose that in recoiling from the latter arm, McDowell must allow himself to be embraced by the former.

As I shall explain, one of the characteristics of the first arm of the trap is that it does recommend a stance on our linguistic practices that is in a certain sense 'sideways' – not sideways in the sense that metaphysics is, but sideways nonetheless. One of the characteristics of the second arm is that it is more 'idle' than McDowell himself can allow. Thus I want to try to constrain McDowell's path from two sides – one 'sidling', the other 'idling', as I shall put it – to try to reach a point at which it must jump one way or other. I think that the choice itself is to some extent an awkward one for McDowell, in that neither option sits entirely comfortably with various of his commitments. Nevertheless, I think it is clear which option he should take, namely, the option I call 'sidling' – acceptance of a 'sideways' though *non-metaphysical* philosophical stance.<sup>3</sup> The disadvantages of the other choice stem from an excess of quietism (and a kind of philosophical muteness entailed by that quietism) – though, strangely enough, this can easily manifest itself as what looks at first sight like an uncomfortable *metaphysical* commitment.

I want to come at the nature of the 'sidling' option via Wilfrid Sellars. The would-be fellow traveller I want to offer McDowell on that side is not exactly Sellars, I think, but to the extent that he differs, he is Sellars modified in a manner with which one would expect McDowell to be sympathetic.

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<sup>2</sup>I think it would also be uncharitable to interpret McDowell as merely making a claim about the particular notions mentioned here, such as normativity and rule-following, suggesting that he might be happy to concede that Wittgenstein's quietism leaves a need for substantive philosophy in other cases. On the contrary, it is clear that McDowell intends these as examples of a general thesis.

<sup>3</sup>To be clear, the reason I think that this option sits uncomfortably with McDowell's commitments is not that it involves a 'sideways' perspective as such – if that were the only issue, it would be open to McDowell to say that this is simply not the sense of 'sideways' he had in mind. It is that it does recognise a substantive role for philosophy, once metaphysics has been set aside.

## 2 Sidling on one hand

### 2.1 Sellars's conceptual pluralism

Let's begin with some passages in which Sellars talks about his affinities and differences with traditional empiricism, with respect to the status of moral and modal vocabularies:

Now, once it is granted ... that empiricism in moral philosophy is compatible with the recognition that 'ought' has as distinguished a role in discourse as descriptive and logical terms, in particular that we reason rather than 'reason' concerning *ought*, and once 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*. (Sellars, 1958, §79)

We have learned the hard way that the 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.

It is my purpose to argue that the 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. (1958, §82)

These passages suggest both some similarities and some apparent differences between Sellars's view and McDowell's. The similarities are that Sellars and McDowell are both pluralists, non-reductionists, and non-'second-rate-ists' (e.g., about ethical discourse). And they certainly agree that 'ethical discourse is a mode of rational discourse,' as Sellars puts it.

The apparent differences are that, unlike McDowell, Sellars thinks firstly that there is nevertheless something *right* about the empiricist claim that ethical (and modal) vocabulary is not in the business of 'describing reality'; and secondly that there is a fruitful perspective 'from sideways-on,' examining the distinctive 'function' or logical role of these vocabularies. Sellars presumably agrees with the empiricists, that this perspective provides an *alternative* to metaphysics, as a route to philosophical illumination about the matters in question. In other words, it proceeds not by examination of the distinctive character of ethical or modal *facts*, or *states of affairs*, but by an investigation of the distinctive role of ethical and causal *language*. (Sellars agrees with empiricists that this role is not to be understood in representational terms, as a matter of keeping track of, or describing, some characteristically ethical or modal aspects of reality.)

### 2.1.1 Deflating describing?

Concerning the first difference, a tempting move one might make against Sellars – tempting for me, and I think for McDowell, too – would be to try to ‘deflate’ the notion of *describing*, in order to undermine Sellars’s claim that ethical (and modal) vocabulary is not in the business of ‘describing reality’. Indeed, this move might be seen as analogous to a charge that McDowell himself was one of the first to press against non-cognitivism, to the effect that it was undermined by minimalism about truth. The argument was that deflationary truth is too ‘thin’ to sustain the distinction between descriptive and non-descriptive discourse (at least where the non-cognitivist wants to place it, within the class of indicative utterances).<sup>4</sup> And a similar thought – that the semantic notions that figure in contemporary philosophy are too thin to sustain metaphysics, in effect – can be found in comments that McDowell makes about Sellars himself:

Sometimes [Sellars] suggests that the very idea of word–world relations as they figure in Tarskian semantics is “Augustinian,” in the sense that fits the opening sections of Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*. But this is simply wrong. It is perfectly congenial to Tarskian semantics to say that the notions of such word–world relations as denotation and satisfaction are intelligible only in terms of how they contribute to capturing the possibilities for “making moves in the language-game” by uttering whole sentences in which the relevant words occur. These relations between words and elements in the extralinguistic order *should not be conceived as independently available building blocks* out of which we could construct an account of how language enables us to express thoughts at all. (2009b, 58, emphasis mine)

Interestingly, however, this seems to be an objection to which Sellars himself came to be sympathetic. He, too, soon had doubts about the distinction between descriptive and non-descriptive uses of language. In his contribution to the Carnap volume of the *The Library of Living Philosophers* (written in 1956), he notes the problem, and proposes a tentative solution:<sup>5</sup>

[T]he concept of a descriptive term is ... by no means intuitively clear. It is easier to specify kinds of terms which are *not* descriptive than to single out what it is that descriptive terms have in common. Thus, I think it would be generally agreed that the class of non-descriptive terms includes, besides logical terms in a suitably

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<sup>4</sup>See McDowell (1981). More recent versions of the argument may be found in Boghossian (1990), Wright (1992), and Humberstone (1991).

<sup>5</sup>I am very much indebted here to Lionel Shapiro, who pointed me in the direction of many of the passages from Sellars that I discuss below. Much the material in this subsection and the next is adapted from a discussion in (Price et al, 2013), Chapter 8.

narrow sense, *prescriptive* terms, and the logical and causal modalities. ...

It might be thought that, in the last analysis, a descriptive term is one that is used, in its typical sentences, to describe. But what is to describe? Must one be describing an object if one says something about it that is either true or false? Scarcely, for modals and even prescriptive statements (e.g. "Jones ought to make amends") can be correctly said to be either true or false. Perhaps to describe an object is to specify some of its qualities and/or relations. Unfortunately, the terms "quality" and "relation" raise parallel difficulties. Is it absurd to speak of goodness as a *prescriptive quality*? Indeed, one use of the terms "property" and "relation" is such that it is correct to say of any meaningful expression which has the grammatical characteristics of a predicate that it means a quality or relation. And in this usage it is correct to say the "good" means a quality. On the other hand, there is a usage which ties the term "quality" and "relation" to *describing* as opposed to *prescribing*.

We are back with the question, What is it to describe? In my opinion, the key to the answer is the realization that describing is internally related to *explaining*, in that sense of "explanation" which comes to full flower in scientific explanation – in short, causal explanation. A descriptive term is one which, in its basic use, properly replaces one of the variables in the dialogue schema

What brought it about that  $x$  is  $\phi$ ? The fact that  $y$  is  $\psi$ .

where what is requested is a causal explanation. I say "in its basic use" to exclude the use of a term in mentalistic and semantical contexts. For since it is proper to ask "What brought it about that Jones believes he ought to go downtown?" and "What brought it about that the German word "gut" means good?" even prescriptive terms would be descriptive, on the above account, were we to admit these contexts. (Sellars 1963a, 450–51)

A little later, however – in correspondence with Roderick Chisholm from 1957 – Sellars expresses doubts about this proposal. He and Chisholm are discussing the significance of meaning ascriptions, and Sellars proposes that they, too, are not descriptive: 'My solution is that "...' means - - -" is the core of the unique mode of discourse which is as distinct from the *description* and *explanation* of empirical fact, as is the language of *prescription* and *justification*.' (Sellars and Chisholm 1958, 527) Quoting this passage, Chisholm replies:

I am more skeptical than you are about the content of such "solutions" as the one you propose ... I am inclined to feel that the technical philosophical term "descriptive" is one which is very much



over used, and I am not sure I can attach much meaning to it. Indeed I would be inclined to say that if the locution “Such and such a sentence is not descriptive” means anything at all, it means that the sentence in question (like “Do not cross the street” and “Would that the roses were blooming”) is neither true nor false. But the sentence “‘Hund’ means dog in German’ is a sentence which is true. (Sellars and Chisholm 1958, 529)

To this, Sellars responds:

The most important thing that needs to be said is that I not only admit, I have never questioned that “‘Hund’ means *dog* in German’ is true in what, for our purposes, is exactly the same sense as ‘Berlin is part of Warsaw’ would be if the facts of geography were somewhat different.

“‘Hund’ means dog in German’ is true  $\equiv$  ‘Hund’ means dog in German

just as

‘Berlin is part of Warsaw’ is true  $\equiv$  Berlin is part of Warsaw.

There is just no issue between us on this point. When I have said that semantical statements *convey* descriptive information but do not *assert* it, I have not meant to imply that semantical statements *only* convey and do not assert. They make semantical assertions. Nor is “convey”, as I have used it, a synonym for “evince” or “express” as emotivists have used this term. I have certainly not wished to assimilate semantical statements to ejaculations or symptoms.

It might be worth noting at this point that, as I see it, it is just as proper to say of statements of the form “Jones ought to do *A*” that they are *true*, as it is to say this of mathematical, geographical or semantical statements. This, of course, does not preclude me from calling attention to important differences in the ‘logics’ of these statements.

I quite agree, then, that it is no more a solution of our problem simply to say that semantical statements are “unique,” than it would be a solution of the corresponding problems in ethics simply to say that prescriptive statements are “unique.” What is needed is a painstaking exploration of statements belonging to various (*prima facie*) families, with a view to discovering *specific* similarities and differences in the ways in which they behave. Only *after* this has been done can the claim that a certain family of statements is, in a certain respect, unique, be anything more than a promissory note.

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I also agree that the term “descriptive” is of little help. Once the “journeyman” task (to use Ayer’s expression) is well under way, it may be possible to give a precise meaning to this technical term. (Presumably this technical use would show some measure of continuity with our ordinary use of “describe”.) I made an attempt along this line in my Carnap paper, though I am not very proud of it. On the other hand, as philosophers use the term today, it means little that is definite apart from the logician’s contrast of “descriptive expression” with “logical expression” (on this use “ought” would be a descriptive term!) and the moral philosopher’s contrast of “descriptive” with “prescriptive”. According to both these uses, “S means p” would be a descriptive statement. (Sellars and Chisholm 1958, 531)

By the mid-1960s, however, Sellars seems to have thought that he was making some progress on the matter. As a direct result, he adds an additional chapter to his six John Locke Lectures, to make up the published volume, *Science and Metaphysics* (Sellars 1968). In the Introduction to that volume he describes the role of this chapter as follows:

[This new] chapter is ...the heart of the enterprise. In it I attempt to spell out the specific differences of matter-of-factual truth. Levels of ‘factual’ discourse are distinguished and shown to presuppose a basic level in which conceptual items such as items *in rerum natura* ‘represent’ or ‘picture’ (in a sense carefully to be distinguished from the semantical concepts of reference and [predication]) the way things are. (1968, ix)

Later, at the beginning of the chapter in question, he characterises the project like this:

My concern in this chapter will be with what might initially be called ‘factual truth’. This phrase is intended to cover both the truth of propositions at the perceptual and introspective level, and the truth of those propositions which, though ‘empirical’ in the broad sense that their authority ultimately rests on perceptual experience, involve the complex techniques of concept formation and confirmation characteristic of theoretical science.

Since the term ‘fact’ is properly used as a synonym for ‘truth’ even in its most generic sense, so that we can speak of mathematical and even ethical facts, ‘factual’, in the more specific sense indicated above, should be thought of as short for ‘matter-of-factual’, and as equivalent to Leibnitz’ technical term ‘*verité de fait*’. (1968, 116)

Since, as Sellars puts it here, ‘the term “fact” is properly used as a synonym for “truth” even in its most generic sense’, it should come as no surprise that this distinction between ‘generic’ and ‘more specific’ notions of fact goes hand

in hand with a corresponding distinction at the level of *truth*. As James O’Shea puts the point, ‘truth for Sellars involves both a normative dimension and an underlying naturalistic or causal dimension’ (O’Shea 2007, 144). O’Shea goes on to note that the normative notion is also a *general* notion, in the sense that it has global scope in assertoric language: ‘In the normative and most general sense, Sellars contends that the truth of all kinds of propositions, whether they are empirical, mathematical, or moral claims, consists in their being what he calls *correctly semantically assertible*.’ (O’Shea 2007, 144) This is Sellars’s own account of this general notion:

[F]or a proposition to be true is for it to be assertible, where this means not *capable* of being asserted (which it must be to be a proposition at all) but *correctly* assertible; assertible, that is, in accordance with the relevant semantical rules, and on the basis of such additional, though unspecified, information as these rules may require ... , ‘True’, then, means *semantically* assertible (‘S-assertible’) and the varieties of truth correspond to the relevant varieties of semantical rule. (1968, 101)

However, as O’Shea puts it, ‘Sellars also argues that [in addition to this generic notion] there is a further “correspondence” dimension to truth in the specific case of what he calls *basic matter-of-factual truths*.’ (O’Shea 2007, 144) This correspondence dimension involves

a carefully qualified descendent of Wittgenstein’s ‘picture theory’ in the *Tractatus*: basic matter-of-factual propositions in some sense form *pictures*, or ‘cognitive maps,’ or ‘representations’ of how objects or events in the world are related and characterized.’ (O’Shea 2007, 144)

I shall not attempt here to give a gloss of Sellars’s complex account of this ‘picturing’ relation.<sup>6</sup> What I want to stress is that Sellars sees it as *quite distinct* from the generic notion of truth. In *Science and Metaphysics*, Sellars puts it like this: ‘Picturing is a complex matter-of-factual relation and, as such, belongs in quite a different box from the concepts of denotation and truth.’ (1968, 136) Why ‘quite a different box’? Because, as Sellars often stresses, his view is that the generic notion of truth does not stand for such a relation. He explains this point in terms related to now-familiar deflationary approaches to truth, that focus on the role of the so-called equivalence principle:

[W]e see that what we have here is the principle of inference:

That snow is white is true entails and is entailed by that  
snow is white

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<sup>6</sup>For that, I recommend the works of O’Shea (2007) and deVries (2005) on which I am relying in this section.

which governs such inferences as

That snow is white is true.  
So, Snow is white.

But if the word ‘true’ gets its sense from this type of inference, we must say that, instead of standing for a relation or relational property of statements (or, for that matter, of thoughts), ‘true’ is a sign *that something is to be done*—for inferring is a doing. (1962b, 38)

Elsewhere, Sellars emphasises the need to

grasp the difference between the *primary* concept of factual truth (truth as correct picture) ... and the *generic* concept of truth as S-assertibility, which involves the quite different mode of correspondence ... in terms of which the ‘correspondence’ statement (i.e. equivalence statement)

That  $2 \text{ plus } 2 = 4$  is true  $\leftrightarrow 2 \text{ plus } 2 = 4$

is to be understood. (1968, 119)

## 2.2 My diagnosis

What is happening here is that a cluster of notions – what we might loosely call the *semantic* notions – are being pulled in two directions, one inclusive and one exclusive. In these passages, we have seen Sellars making this point with respect to the notions of ‘descriptive’, ‘fact’, ‘proposition’ and ‘true’ itself. In all these cases, he ends up saying, there’s a *generic* notion application to declarative statements of all kinds, and a *local* notion applicable much more narrowly – to the matter-of-factual, as Sellars puts it.

Elsewhere (Price 2011, ch. 1; Price et al., 2013, ch. 2) my response to this fundamental terminological tension has been to see it as reflecting the fact that all these notions are trying to serve two quite different masters. I have suggested we get a much clearer view of the landscape by making this explicit – by recognising that we have two quite distinct notions or clusters of notions in play, misleadingly being forced together by our failure to recognise the distinction and to modify our terminology accordingly. My terms *e-representation* and *i-representation* were my attempt to mark this distinction.

This recommendation seems to accord very closely with Sellars’s own conclusions – in particular, with the remarks I have just quoted about the distinction between two notions of truth. Hence it is very natural, from my point of view, to regard Sellars’s account of picturing as an attempt to spell out a particular kind of *e-representation*, and to regard his account of truth as S-assertibility as a contribution to an understanding of an important kind of *i-representation*. I see Sellars’s strenuous efforts to insist that these notions of truth are distinct, and

‘belong in different boxes’, as of a piece with my insistence that e-representation and i-representation are not different attempts to get at the same thing, but different attempts to get at *different* things (each perhaps important in its own right, depending on the details of the case).

Sellars puts the difference in terms of the idea that picturing is a natural relation between *objects* – linguistic items considered as objects, on one side, and objects in our environment, on the other – whereas truth in the generic sense is a ‘pseudo-relation’, to be understood in terms of its inference-supporting role within the language game. I think we can emphasise this distinction even further (as I do in Price et al., 2013, ch. 2), by noting the different theoretical stance we employ in each case.

In the case of the generic notion, we are interested in a notion we find in use in ordinary language. To the extent – the very great extent, in my view – that the explanatory, pragmatist approach recommends itself in such a case, our theoretical focus will be on the use of the notion. We will be asking, in effect, ‘What our creatures like us *doing* when they use this notion? Why do they have in in their language in the first place?’

In the case of picturing, however, our focus, as Sellars himself always stresses, is first-order, matter-of-factual and highly theoretical.<sup>7</sup> There is no reason whatsoever to imagine that the notion we find ourselves investigating will be in play in folk usage. And our theoretical interest is in the relation *in the world*, not in the use of certain terms in ordinary *language*.

Sellars’s notion of picturing is controversial, and rejected by ‘left-wing’ Sellarsians such as Rorty. A left-wing interpretation of Sellars would serve my purposes perfectly well in what follows, where I shall be invoking a fictional philosopher recognisably (I hope) descended from Sellars as a benchmark to compare to McDowell. But I don’t think I *need* to go to the left wing for this purpose, and so in the interests of generality, I want to explain why endorsing the right-wing view would not make any difference to the use I want to make of Sellars in relation to McDowell.

### 2.3 Sellars, matter-of-factual truth and bare naturalism

The crucial question is whether Sellars’s account of matter-of-factual truth supports an argument for the kind of bare naturalism (or object naturalism, to use my own term) that McDowell opposes – the view that ‘all the facts there are’ are the kind of facts discovered and discussed by natural science? The answer must be ‘no’, it seems to me, for on Sellars’s view the phrase ‘all the facts there are’ is simply ambiguous: we can read it in the loose sense, the sense in which ‘we can speak of mathematical and even ethical facts’, as Sellars (1968, 116) puts it in a passage I quoted above; or we can read it in the ‘more specific sense’ Sellars refers

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<sup>7</sup>I mean that our stance in employing the notion is highly theoretical. The language to which we take this highly theoretical notion to be relevant is itself some of the most basic and least theoretical, in Sellars’s view.

to in the same passage, in which it ‘should be thought of as short for “matter-of-factual”, and as equivalent to Leibniz’ technical term “*verité de fait*”.’ (1968, 116) Read one way, the claim that the facts of natural science all the facts there are is trivially false; read the other way, it is trivially true. And on neither side is there scope for a significant *argument* for bare naturalism – on the contrary, we have at least a strong hint that traditional naturalists and anti-naturalists are simply talking past one another.

What has happened here is that for *fact*, as for other semantic notions, we have had to recognise that the notion has an inclusive sense and an exclusive sense. In the exclusive or narrow sense, it is a matter of definition that all the facts there are are natural facts (that’s what the narrow notion *is*). In the inclusive or broad sense, it is immediate – not quite a matter of stipulation, perhaps, but an observation easily made about our language, once the question is in front of us – that this is not the case. Either way, then, there is no interesting *meta-physical* thesis in the offing. So Sellars’s account of matter-of-factual truth, far from supporting an argument for the kind of bare naturalism that McDowell opposes, actually provides us with grounds for denying that there could be such an argument. And this should be no surprise, if we bear in mind how Sellars comes to this point, having given up on the idea that there is any interesting account of descriptive language to be had – any account, that is, that might do the positivists’ work of vindicating the thought that only scientific language is genuinely factual. (Recall Sellars’s own insistence (1958, 282) that ‘once 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*’.)

Elsewhere (Price et al., 2013, ch. 3) I have argued that these considerations show that we need a bifurcation in the notion of the *world*, to match our distinction between inclusive and exclusive senses of these various semantic notions. So far as I know, there is no corresponding move to be found in Sellars, at least not in an explicit form.<sup>8</sup> My impression is that Sellars is in a sense shielded from it by his insistence that facts lie on the language side of a language–world divide.

We have seen, however, that “nonlinguistic facts” in the sense of facts about nonlinguistic entities are *in another sense* themselves *linguistic* entities and that their connection with the nonlinguistic order is something done or to be done rather than a relation. It is the inferring from ‘that-p is true’ to ‘p’. And as long as picturing is construed as a relationship between *facts* about linguistic objects and

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<sup>8</sup>As Lionel Shapiro pointed out to me, there is perhaps a hint of it in a distinction Sellars makes in passing in (Sellars 1962a) between the ‘world of fact in that narrow sense which tractarians like Professor Bergmann and myself find illuminating’ (1962a, 25), on the one hand, and ‘that broad sense in which the “world” includes linguistic norms and roles viewed ...from the standpoint of a fellow participant’ (1962a, 7), on the other.

*facts* about nonlinguistic objects, nothing more can be said. (1962b, 43–44)

Thus Sellars retains a conception of the world as a domain of *objects* and *properties*, not of *facts*. Yet, as he also recognises at some points, these notions, too, come under the same kind of pressure to ‘go generic’:

Is it absurd to speak of goodness as a *prescriptive quality*? Indeed, one use of the terms “property” and “relation” is such that it is correct to say of any meaningful expression which has the grammatical characteristics of a predicate that it means a quality or relation. And in this usage it is correct to say the “good” means a quality. (Sellars 1963a, 450)

So the shield seems unlikely to protect Sellars for very long, even by his own lights.

Once again, my diagnosis is that we need inclusive and exclusive notions of *world*, just as we do for *fact* and the other notions we have mentioned. And for *world*, as for *fact*, it becomes a trivial matter that the world is the natural world, or a trivial matter that it is not, depending on which of the two senses we have in mind – so there is no space here for substantial metaphysical naturalism or metaphysical nonnaturalism, of the old varieties. As I would put it, paraphrasing Sellars, ‘The way is [now] clear to an *ungrudging* recognition that many [*facts, objects and properties*] which [naturalists] have relegated to second-class citizenship ... are not *inferior*, just *different*.’

## 2.4 Sellars and the relevance of deflationism

We thus have a modified Sellarsian view on the table, achieved by insisting on deflationary notions of ‘truth’ (at least in the generic sense), ‘description’, and ‘fact’. Call the advocate of this view ‘Sellars<sub>lite</sub>’ – and set aside the question as to how much this figure actually differs from Sellars himself. The question I now want to raise is what this deflationism does to Sellars’s *positive* program – to his ‘sideways’, explanatory *alternative* to metaphysics? The answer must be that it makes *no difference whatsoever* to his positive claims about the function or logical role of ethical and modal vocabulary, because a *deflated* notion of description doesn’t provide any sort of *rival* theory.

So deflating ‘describing’ doesn’t alter the fact that Sellars is agreeing with empiricism that a fruitful approach is ‘sideways-on’ – to explain the role of the *vocabularies*,<sup>9</sup> not to investigate the nature of moral or modal *facts*. (The notion of fact in play at this point is the deflated one, as above.) Our next question is this one: Does Sellars<sub>lite</sub> fall into the traps that McDowell takes to lie in wait for other varieties (especially empiricist varieties) of naturalism, such as reductionism and projectivism? Can Sellars<sub>lite</sub> be convicted, that is, of *revisionism*, *idealism* or *anti-realism*?

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<sup>9</sup>In the lives of natural creatures like us – hence its naturalism.

## 2.5 Revision, idealism and anti-realism?

### 2.5.1 Revisionism

Here is McDowell on what he takes to be a characteristic philosophical failing:

Ordinary modern philosophy addresses its derivative dualisms in a characteristic way. It takes a stand on one side of a gulf it aims to bridge, accepting without question the way its target dualism conceives the chosen side. Then it constructs something as close as possible to the conception of the other side that figured in the problems, out of materials that are unproblematically available where it has taken its stand.

Of course there no longer seems to be a gulf, but the result is bound to look more or less revisionist. ... Phenomenalism is a good example of a philosophical construction with this traditional shape .... (1994, 94)

Is my Sellars<sub>lite</sub> guilty of this failing? Not at all, in my view. Sellars<sub>lite</sub> isn't offering a *construction* of anything – that would be metaphysics, after all, which is a different business entirely. Sellars<sub>lite</sub> is in the business of philosophical anthropology, as I called it: that of describing and explaining a linguistic practice. And this need not be at all revisionary, as Sellars's own characterisation – 'not inferior, just different' – is clearly intended to suggest.<sup>10</sup>

### 2.5.2 Idealism

Another charge that McDowell makes against some of his opponent is that – recoiling, perhaps, from excessive metaphysics – they lose contact with the world altogether, and lapse into idealism. In this passage he is making the point about certain responses to Wittgensteinian considerations about meaning, and so the immediate charge is that of idealism *about meaning*. But I take McDowell to be pointing out that such idealism would immediately ramify to other matters, by infecting the very statements we would hope to use to talk about such matters, non-idealistically construed. (Indeed, even if it didn't ramify in this way, a similar charge could be laid directly – think of McDowell's charge that Davidson's coherentism leads to 'frictionless spinning in the void'.)

If there is nothing to the normative structure within which meaning comes into view except, say, acceptances and rejections of bits of behaviour by the community at large, then how things are—how things can be said to be with a correctness that must partly consist in being faithful to the meanings one would exploit if one said that

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<sup>10</sup>This is not to deny that the standpoint might be revisionary, in some cases. Its insights might incline us to reform or abandon the language game in question, after all. But there is no presumption that this need be so.



they are thus and so—cannot be independent of the community’s ratifying the judgements that things are thus and so. (1994, 93)

The challenge is thus that the target views allow for no gap between its *being the case* that P and *the community’s ratifying the judgement* that P, within the domains in question. Can Sellars<sub>lite</sub> be held to make this mistake?

Again, I think not. Once again, Sellars<sub>lite</sub> is not in the business of offering truth-conditions for P, or saying what it is for it be the case that P – that would be (something like) metaphysics, which is a different business entirely (and depends on the kind of sideways view I reject). So the problematic equation, of its being the case that P with the community’s agreeing that P, does not arise from the envisaged theoretical standpoint. (Anyone who thinks that it does is confused about the nature of the enquiry.)

Can it arise anywhere else? In particular, does the theoretical standpoint somehow commit us to saying (‘inside the language game’) that to be the case that P is just for us all to agree that P? Again, pretty clearly not, so long as it is a feature of the relevant norms in play in the community that any speaker, or any actual collection of speakers, always allows the possibility that they might be mistaken – i.e., stands ready to justify its claims to *later* or *enlarged* communities.<sup>11</sup>

### 2.5.3 Anti-realism

The third characteristically McDowellian challenge that might be pressed against Sellars<sub>lite</sub> is that his view is committed to *anti-realism* – to *denying* that there are really any values, causes, meanings, or whatever? But once again, the main response is that that would be metaphysics, and hence mistakes the nature of the view. It would presuppose an illegitimate ‘external’ standpoint from which to address the question whether there are such things (or whether they are ‘real’). From ‘inside’ the language game, it is (of course) correct to say that there are such things – and there is nowhere else to stand.

An ally whom Sellars<sub>lite</sub> might invoke at this point is Carnap, that famous critic of externalist metaphysics, here endorsing a deflationary attitude to metaphysical questions that he ascribes to the Vienna circle (influenced by Wittgenstein):

Influenced by ideas of Ludwig Wittgenstein, the [Vienna] Circle rejected *both the thesis of the reality of the external world and the thesis of its irreality* as pseudo-statements; the same was the case for both the thesis of the reality of universals (abstract entities, in our present terminology) and the nominalistic thesis that they are not real and that their alleged names are not names of anything but merely *flatus vocis*. ... It is therefore not correct to classify the members of

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Rorty: ‘For any audience, one can imagine a better-informed audience.’ (1995, 22)

the Vienna Circle as nominalists, as is sometimes done. However, if we look at the basic anti-metaphysical and pro-scientific attitude of most nominalists (and the same holds for many materialists and realists in the modern sense), disregarding their occasional pseudo-theoretical formulations, then it is, of course, true to say that the Vienna Circle was much closer to those philosophers than to their opponents. (Carnap 1950, 215, my emphasis)

Compare McDowell at this point:

Some of these essays can thus be taken to defend a version of what has been called “moral realism”. But that label would risk obscuring the fact that what I urge is more negative than positive; *my stance in these essays is better described as “anti-anti-realism” than as “realism”*. What I urge is that anti-realist positions such as emotivism and its sophisticated descendants, all the way down to Simon Blackburn’s projectivist quasi-realism, are responses to a misconception of the significance of the obvious fact that ethical, and more generally evaluative, thinking is not science. (1998a, *viii*, my emphasis).

My main point is that Sellars<sub>lite</sub> cannot fairly be convicted of the charge that McDowell here lays against Blackburn. However, I think it is an interesting question whether Blackburn himself can fairly be convicted of it. Is Blackburn really an anti-realist? Blackburn himself tells us that he often hears the following challenge to his position: ‘Aren’t you really trying to defend our right to talk ‘as if’ there were moral truths, although in your view *there aren’t any really?*’ He responds emphatically:

No, no, no. I don’t say that we can talk as if kicking dogs were wrong, when ‘really’ it isn’t wrong. I say that it is wrong (so it is true that it is wrong, so it is really true that it is wrong, so this is an example of a moral truth, so there are moral truths).

This misinterpretation is curiously common. Anyone advancing it must believe themselves to have some more robust, metaphysically heavyweight conception of what it would be for there to be moral truths REALLY, and compared with this genuine article, I only have us talking *as if* there are moral truths REALLY. I deny that there is any such coherent conception. (Blackburn 1998, 319)

Indeed, Blackburn had expressed similar views much earlier:

What then is the mistake of describing [quasi-realism] as holding that ‘we talk as if there are necessities when really there are none’? It is the failure to notice that the quasi-realist need allow no sense to what follows the ‘as if’ *except* one in which it is true. And conversely he need allow no sense to the contrasting proposition in which it in turn is true. (Blackburn 1986, 57)

These passages suggest that Blackburn, too, should better be thought of as a deflationary, small-r realist, rather than an anti-realist.<sup>12</sup> I shall return to the issue of McDowell's relation to Blackburn (and his view of it) below.

## 2.6 Getting sidling right

Thus there is an explicitly non-metaphysical option on the table here. ('Sellars<sub>lite</sub>', as I have called it.)

1. It agrees with McDowell in being pluralist, non-reductionist, and non-'second-rate-ist' (e.g., about ethical discourse).
2. It disagrees with (early?) Sellars and Blackburn in rejecting the Bifurcation Thesis – the idea of a 'genuinely descriptive' subset of declarative language.
3. It is not idealist, or (necessarily) revisionist, or anti-realist. (On the contrary, it is like McDowell's own view in being *anti-anti-realist* – though *anti-REALIST*, too!)
4. But it insists that some serious philosophy needs to be done 'sideways' – in an anthropological rather than a metaphysical sense – in that the proper focus is on *vocabularies*, not on their *objects*.

I am interested in the question as to whether this position is close to McDowell's 'naturalised Platonism', and if not, how it differs. The obvious suggestion, I think, is that it is less quietist than McDowell wants to be – that it sees a positive role for philosophical theory, albeit as anthropology not as metaphysics, as I have put it. By McDowell's lights, it looks too close to the position he ascribes to Brandom in the passage I quoted above (§1.1) – the view that endorses quietism in one philosophical voice while pressing the need for theoretical enquiry in another.

Let us assume, then, that McDowell wants to be more quietist than Sellars<sub>lite</sub>. My next step will be to outline a quietist position that seems clearly to lie on the other side of McDowell – it is *more* quietist than he wants to be. The question will then be whether there is scope for McDowell to distance himself from this extreme quietism, without aligning himself with Sellars<sub>lite</sub>. (I shall argue not: addressing the deficiencies of this radical quietism requires that we ask the questions urged on us by Sellars<sub>lite</sub>.)

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<sup>12</sup>Though there may be passages that suggest an anti-realist viewpoint in Blackburn, too. See Macarthur and Price (2007) on this point.

### 3 Idling on the other hand

#### 3.1 How idle can we be?

Imagine this speech, from a would-be opponent:

“McDowell is a clever chap, but like the folk he’s criticising, he’s still trying much too hard. You don’t need therapy if you’re not tempted by the madness to start with. I’m not tempted, so McDowell’s hard work is completely irrelevant to me – it’s just more of that ‘hysterical style of university talk’, as somebody once put it, from my point of view. Of course there are values, colours, and all the rest of it. Just look around you!

Does saying that make me a ‘rampant platonist’? Well, it’s your term, but there are two factors you might want to take into account, before deciding whether to apply it to me. First, I’m not in the least bit rampant – when it comes to philosophical theory, I’m a sloth, not a lion! And second, I’m not a platonist, if that’s a metaphysical viewpoint – again, I’m a quietist. If I had to give myself a label, I’d say I was just a sane, common sense pluralist. If McDowell’s ‘naturalised Platonism’ means anything more than that, then it, too, smacks of the philosophical excesses that I’ve always found it easy to avoid.”

Call this person the *idle* quietist. What is he missing, by McDowell’s lights? Is there some way to argue that there are important questions that the idle quietist cannot address, if we don’t start from *within* the kind of philosophical game that McDowell takes to require therapy?

#### 3.2 Contingency and plurality

Suppose we accept a McDowellian realism (or anti-*anti*-realism) about matters of colour, taste and value, agreeing with McDowell that sensitivity to the facts of the relevant domains are second nature to normal members of our speech communities. Nevertheless, we recognise that there’s some contingency in the vicinity – contingency we might characterise, at a first pass, by saying that had we been brought up differently – had our visual systems been different, in the colour case, for one thing – we wouldn’t be making *those* judgements. What I have in mind here, I think, is what McDowell himself calls the ‘subjectivity’ of some subject matters:

Values are not brutally there—not there independently of our sensibility—any more than colours are: though, as with colours, this does not prevent us from supposing that they are there independently of any particular apparent experience of them. (1985, 146)

Ordinarily we contrast this kind of sensitivity in our judgements to, say, the sensitivity of our judgements about the moon to the fact that we only see one

side of it (it being a contingent matter which side, presumably). The idle quietist seems to lack resources (or intellectual energy) to mark this contrast. To him, the facts as they would appear from the standpoint of any *possible* observer – no matter what its *nature, circumstances* and *upbringing* – must all be thought of as simply ‘out there’, in the same flat-footed sense.

McDowell himself doesn’t want to say this, of course – that’s at least one respect in which differs from the idle pluralist (and, perhaps more importantly, would continue to differ if his less idle philosophical opponents were all to respond well to therapy, so that there was no remaining work of that kind to be done). McDowell takes it that the moon is ‘brutely there’ in a sense in which colours and values are not, presumably. But from what stance can we say this, if we have rejected the option of saying it in metaphysical terms? (‘Brutely there’ might sound like a metaphysical assessment, but that can’t be what McDowell really has in mind.) So far as I can see, the only available option is that it has to be said as a reflection on the language games involved (and the contingencies on which they depend). In other words, we need the modest (anthropological not metaphysical) ‘sideways’ perspective of Sellars<sub>lite</sub>.

### 3.3 McDowell = Sellars<sub>lite</sub>?

I have suggested that in order to distance himself from the idle pluralist, McDowell needs to move in the direction of Sellars<sub>lite</sub>. But I have also remarked that Sellars<sub>lite</sub> is recognisably close to Blackburn, once we pay attention to the passages in which Blackburn, too, stresses that he is a kind of anti-ANTIREALIST. But McDowell rejects the suggestion that his own view could be a form of Blackburnian projectivism:

Can a projectivist claim that the position I have outlined is at best a notational variant, perhaps an inferior notational variant, of his own position?

It would be inferior if, in eschewing the projectivist metaphysical framework, it obscured some important truth. But what truth would that be? (1985, 147)

There are two issues here, presumably. Is McDowell’s view merely a ‘notational variant’ of projectivism, and if so, is it an inferior variant. McDowell’s thought seems to be that ‘eschewing the projectivist metaphysical framework’ marks a significant difference between his view and projectivism – so that the former isn’t merely a notational variant of the latter – and moreover that nothing important is lost in taking this step, so that his view is not thereby inferior to projectivism. But if Sellars<sub>lite</sub> is to be our model of a new projectionist, deflationary about metaphysics, then this view of the difference is surely incorrect. This new projectivist is already on McDowell’s side, concerning the merits of metaphysi-

cal quietism.<sup>13</sup>

If there is a difference between my Sellars<sub>lite</sub> and McDowell, then it must rest on the fact that Sellars<sub>lite</sub> is explicit about the need to ‘go sideways’ in a *non-metaphysical* spirit – in the anthropological voice that asks about the functions and genealogies of the various assertoric language games we find ourselves playing, about their roles in the lives of creatures like us.

But now McDowell faces a clear dilemma, it seems to me. If he eschews this version of a sideways stance, then it can indeed be held that he has ‘obscured some important truth’ – the very kind of important truth he himself needs to avoid idle pluralism. If not, then his view is a variant after all, and at least mildly inferior, in not emphasising the importance of this issue.

It is compatible with this that McDowell’s account might be superior to projectivism in other ways, of course. At the end of a paper criticising projectivism, McDowell concludes like this:

There is surely something right about the Humean idea of a “new creation”—the idea of a range of seeming state of affairs that would not be as they are if it were not for the distinctive affective coloration of our subjectivity. What does not follow is that the seeming states of affairs can be understood as creatures of independently intelligible operations of our affective nature. These seeming objectivities need not be a shadow or reflection of a self-contained subjectivity: understanding the genesis of the “new creation” may be understanding an interlocking complex of subjective and objective, of response and feature responded to. And in that case it is a mistake to think that we can illuminate the metaphysics of these matters by appealing to the image of projection. (1985, 166)

But agreeing with McDowell’s main point here – viz., that the Humean projectivist picture is too crude, in postulating a ‘self-contained subjectivity’ – would not release him from the dilemma we just posed. The dilemma involved a choice between excessive idleness, on the one hand – idleness unable to rise to the task of noting and saying what is distinctive about those subject matters that are not ‘brutely there ... independently of our sensibility’ – and a philosophy that takes

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<sup>13</sup>As I noted above, Blackburn, too, was already on McDowell’s side on the issue of metaphysical quietism, at least in some of his writings, at this point in the mid-1980s. He has remained so consistently, and if anything with greater emphasis. It is true that there are passages in which Blackburn sounds more like a substantive anti-realist, e.g., about ethics; but as David Macarthur and I note (Macarthur and Price, 2007, 238), this impression is misleading. It is also true that Blackburn later became unhappy with the label ‘projectivism’, and now prefers to call himself an ‘expressivist’, or a ‘pragmatist’, but this shift does not reflect any deep change in his view. And nothing hangs on this choice of terminology in the present context. It would not help McDowell to say that his objection was only to projectivism and not to what Blackburn now calls expressivism (or pragmatism). For even if there were a way to separate these positions, the latter still has the commitment that McDowell wants to avoid, to substantial (though non-metaphysical) philosophical theorising, properly conducted after therapy.

on the positive task of illuminating and explaining these distinctions, on the other. McDowell's point in the passage just quoted is that the original projectivist model for such explanations may well be too crude. Fine, but that does not show that the project itself – the project of putting some illuminating content into phrases such as 'brutely there', and 'independently of our sensibility' – is unnecessary or misconceived.

So it may be, as McDowell says, 'a mistake to think that we can illuminate the metaphysics of these matters by appealing to the image of projection'. Indeed, it may be a mistake to think that it is the *metaphysics* of these matters that needs illumination in the first place. But there is *something* that needs saying here, if we are to ground and explore the insight that, as McDowell himself also puts it here, '[t]here is surely something right about the Humean idea of a "new creation"—the idea of a range of seeming state of affairs that would not be as they are if it were not for the distinctive affective coloration of our subjectivity'. This terminology is hardly self-explanatory, and the insight is surely the beginning, not the end, of an interesting line of enquiry. (How far does this 'subjectivity' extend in language, for example, just to mention one direction in which the enquiry might be taken.)

McDowell himself shows a surprising lack of interest in these issues. That in itself is not a misstep, of course – it is rather simply a failure to step in a direction towards which his enquiries might seem to be leading. The misstep comes, it seems to me, in those passages in which he seems to want to *close off* such lines of investigation, as in his rejection (see §1.1 above) of the kind of quietism that opens up new avenues for positive philosophical theory, such as that of Brandom, Blackburn and Sellars.

### 3.3.1 A Davidsonian escape hatch?

It is worth noting that similar remarks apply to McDowell's oft-expressed sympathy for Davidson's famous arguments for the impossibility of an 'external' viewpoint for the project of radical interpretation – the impossibility, that is, of recognising something *as* linguistic behaviour, unless from the 'internal' perspective of some language or other. Once again, such arguments cannot get McDowell off the hook. If we want to make sense of the intuition that 'values are not brutally there', we need some place to stand to do so. If necessary, it can be a place of reflection on our own practice of using evaluative vocabulary – a place from which Davidson cannot snatch away entirely the insight that it is linguistic behaviour, presumably. Without some such vantage point, McDowell, like the rest of us, would be unable to distinguish himself from the flat-footed idle pluralist, who is happy to say that talking about value is different from talking about the moon, but won't be drawn any further. As in the case of his objections to the naive projectionist picture, McDowell can afford to invoke Davidson by way of warning us that the project of making sense of the 'subjectivity' of some vocabularies is less straightforward than we might have hoped. But he can't afford

to take Davidson to have undermined the project itself, unless he's prepared to concede that we might properly find ourselves with nothing to say – with no way to be anything but flat-footed, and no way to escape the second horn of the dilemma.

### 3.3.2 Modesty preserved

Finally, it may be helpful to emphasise that nothing in my argument requires that I side with Dummett, against McDowell, in their well-known dispute about whether a theory of meaning can properly aim to be 'full-blooded', or must remain 'modest'. McDowell himself characterises what is at stake in this debate in these terms (noting that Dummett appears to accept this characterisation):

The point of rejecting modesty [i.e., with Dummett, affirming full-bloodedness – HP] relates ... to the very idea of content, as it might figure in an obvious gloss on phrases like "express the thought that ...". Dummett's conviction is that a properly illuminating account of a language must describe what is in fact a practice of thought-expression, but in other terms; then we can say that the description spells out what it is in virtue of which the practice is the practice of thought-expression that it is. Philosophy demands an account of the practice of speaking a language that displays its character as linguistic, but is given from outside the idea of giving linguistic expression to thoughts. (McDowell, 1997, 111)

But note that in disagreeing with Dummett – in defending modesty – what McDowell is denying is merely that it is possible to give a '*complete* characterisation of the required patterning of linguistic behaviour' (1997, 114, my emphasis) from the 'external' standpoint that Dummett has in mind. So we could agree with McDowell – we could accept that *some* part of the project of something entitled to be called a theory of meaning could only be conducted from 'inside' language – without denying that there are *other* matters that can properly be raised from a more detached perspective. Indeed, to suggest otherwise, in seeking to defend McDowell, would be to saddle him with a crude scope fallacy: the inference from 'Not everything about meaning can be said from the outside' to '*Nothing* about meaning can be said from the outside'.

It may be that there are *some* uses of the term 'meaning', or of related terms such as 'content', that would permit the stronger conclusion, in McDowell's view. But that would be irrelevant to our present concerns, unless it could be maintained that there were no other matters of theoretical interest about language in the vicinity – the kind of matters to which writers such as Brandom, Blackburn and Sellars want to direct our attention, whether they are properly called matters of *meaning* or not – to which the stronger conclusion does not apply. And that seems highly implausible, as in effect McDowell himself points out, in the passage from which my last short quotation was extracted:



*Of course* it matters for one's intelligibility as a speaker of a language, that one's utterances of its expression should be appropriately related to one another, to utterances of others, to the environment, to one's own non-linguistic behaviour, and so forth. But that leaves it open that there is no way to give a complete characterisation of the required patterning of linguistic behaviour—the sort of thing that might answer questions like “What does it *consist in* that people use such-and-such a word so as to predicate agility of things?”—without appealing to such ideas as the idea of acting in such a way that one can be intelligibly taken to be expressing the thought that something is agile. (1997, 114)

As I read this passage, McDowell is noting that (of course) there is much of interest about our use of the expressions of a language that can be said ‘from the outside’ – while insisting, against Dummett, that there is a core that goes the other way.

For present purposes, then, there is no need at all for me to align myself with Dummett on this matter – only a misunderstanding of McDowell's position could lead one to think otherwise. And for the record, in fact, I do have considerable sympathy for McDowell's view, in the sense that I think that one reasonable conception of the task of a theory of meaning that does properly stay ‘internal,’ for much the reasons McDowell gives – see Price (2004) for my most extended discussion of these issues. Where I differ from McDowell, in that piece as in the present essay, is in wanting to call attention to the importance *other* theoretical perspectives on language, to which this restriction does not apply.

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