Handout for Week 11

Passages from Huw Price: "Wilfrid Sellars Meets Cambridge Pragmatism"

This appealingly broad church was the view that for some interesting topics, the path to philosophical illumination lies not, as other philosophers have thought, in an enquiry into the (apparent) *subject matter* of the discourse in question, but in asking about the distinctive role of the *concepts* involved—how we come to have such concepts, what roles they play in our lives, and so on. A view of this sort is very familiar in Blackburn's work on topics such as morality and modality, for example—Blackburn now calls the approach 'expressivism' and traces it in both these cases to Hume. But it also turns up, in places, in the work of a very wide range of other Cambridge philosophers. At least arguably, for example, we find it in the work of Mellor on tense, Anscombe on the first person, Craig on knowledge, von Wright on causation, Williams on truth, as well as Wittgenstein and Ramsey, famously, on various matters. [WSMCP 123]

The view in question seems appropriately called a kind of *pragmatism.* It claims to understand the concepts in question in terms of their *use*—their practical role in our lives—rather than in terms of any 'corresponding' metaphysics. [WSMCP 124]

We can link Sellars and Cambridge Pragmatists under the banner of Humean expressivism, in Blackburn's sense. [WSMCP 124]

my conclusion will be that there are lessons to be learnt in both directions. Sellars has something important to offer to Cambridge Pragmatists in response to creeping cognitivism. But they in turn have something to offer Sellars, in their clarity about the fact that the view offers an *alternative* to metaphysics. And there's a common lesson, close to the surface but not explicit in Sellars, that both sides do well to take on board. [WSMCP 125]

it is clear that they agree on two key points. First, the boundaries of the *propositional* (Ramsey) or *descriptive* (Sellars) are not where we naively take them to be—causal claims (and at least for Sellars, ethical claims) lie beyond those boundaries. Second, the boundaries of the *propositional* or *descriptive* do not line up with the boundaries of the *cognitive.* The latter category is much more inclusive. It includes causal claims (and for Sellars, ethical claims). [WSMCP 126]

It is helpful to distinguish two claims normally combined in a view of this kind—I call them the *negative thesis* and the *positive thesis.* The negative thesis tells us, in what we may call *semantic* terms, what the vocabulary is *not* doing…Ramsey says that variable hypotheticals are not *propositions;* Sellars that ethical talk and causal talk are not *descriptive.* The positive thesis tells us, in what I shall call *pragmatic* terms, what the vocabulary in question *is* doing—for example,

that it is expressing evaluative attitudes, or dispositions to follow a rule….I prefer to use the term 'expressivism' broadly, for any view whose positive account of the function of a vocabulary lies on this pragmatic side. [WSMCP 127-128]

Quasi-realism:
What then is the mistake in describing such a philosophy [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)
Again, the idea is that quasi-realism *deflates* the metaphysical language. The quasi-realist is a realist in these deflated terms, and denies that there are any other terms available—in particular, that there are any meaningful terms in which he might properly be said to be an anti-realist. [WSMCP 129]

modern versions of this position tend to be deflationist about the relevant semantic notions. It then becomes hard to maintain that there is any interesting bifurcation left, and any sense in which the negative thesis is true, of the vocabularies in question. As Dreier complains, expressivists end up sounding just like realists….Dreier calls this the problem of 'creeping minimalism'. I want to isolate a subspecies of the problem, one that seems particularly acute for Ramsey, Sellars, and Blackburn. It is internally generated, a product of their (commendable) willingness to concede that the domains in question *are* cognitive. Having conceded this, they confront the question: "Well, if they're *cognitive,* what does it mean to say that they're not *propositional,* or not *descriptive*?" [WSMCP 130-131]

Sellars:
The 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, bedsides logical terms in a suitably narrow sense, *prescriptive* terms, and the logical and causal modalities. . . . But what is it 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 correctly said to be either true or false. Perhaps to describe an object is to specify some of its properties and/or relations. Unfortunately, the terms "quality" and "relations" raise parallel difficulties. Is it absurd to
speak of goodness as a prescriptive quality? 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" that 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 Φ? That *y* is Φ. where what is requested in a causal explanation. (EAE, 450–51)
At this point, then, Sellars is appealing to what is sometimes called an Eleatic principle. [WSMCP 132]

Sellars is clear that to the extent that there is a category of the genuinely factual, or genuinely descriptive, it is not to be characterised in terms of *semantical* notions such as truth or reference—on the contrary, Sellars says, it must be "carefully . . . distinguished" from those notions. How should it be characterised, if not in these terms? [WSMCP 133]

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-fact truths*. This is a descendant 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. (O'Shea 2007, 144)

In my view, the realisation that there are two quite different notions in play in this vicinity— notions easily confused for one another—is a lesson that Humean expressivists should learn from Sellars. However, I think that not even Sellars properly understands its impact. Properly understood, I think, it means the end of the Bifurcation Thesis and commits us to a 'global' pragmatism, or global expressivism. [WSMCP 135]

Sellars' clarity about the fact that semantic notion of truth is generic means that it is for him a very small step to the move I recommend: We should simply *abandon* the negative thesis, and with it the idea that there is any well-grounded *semantic* bifurcation in the first place. On the contrary: all the vocabularies in question are *equally* fact-stating, *in this generic sense.* [WSMCP 135]

The one piece of this view that Sellars doesn't quite have, in my view, is an explicit recognition that his 'picturing'-based notion of truth belongs on the pragmatic side—that it simply goes into the mix as one positive *pragmatic* proposal about the role of particular vocabularies. [WSMCP 136]

7. Two Notions of Representation
In one of my two boxes—the *e-representational* cluster, as I call it—the defining feature is environment tracking, causal covariation, indicator relations, or something of that kind. In this cluster, at least at first pass, we put the internal states that frogs use to keep track of flies, the states of thermometers that keep track of temperature, and the like. In the other box—the

i-representational cluster—the defining feature is a role is some sort of functional, computational, or inferential network; for example, being a move in Brandom's game of giving and asking for reasons. [WSMCP 136]

Finally, to the lesson I propose that Sellars might learn from Cambridge Pragmatists, and from contemporary Humean expressivists in general….
In recent work (Price *et al.,* 2013, Ch 3) I have proposed that alongside the distinction between e-representational and i-representational notions in play in contemporary philosophy, we need to recognise a corresponding distinction between two notions of *world*. One notion (the 'e-world', as I called it) is the natural world, the object of study of science in a broad sense. The other notion (the 'i-world') is something like 'all the facts'—everything we take to be the case. As in the case of e-representation and i-representation, both notions here are to some extent clusters, capable of being refined in various ways. But the important thing is to recognise that they are distinct, and answerable to different considerations. We look to science for answers to questions about the e-world, but often to different domains of enquiry altogether for questions about the i-world. The i-world is equally at home with mathematical and moral facts, for example. [WSMCP 137-138]

For me, the distinction between i-world and e-world is intended to further the expressivist project of setting aside many of the concerns of contemporary metaphysics. In this case, I have in mind the kind of metaphysical naturalism that maintains that the natural world is 'all there is' (i.e., that declares itself to be 'realist' about the natural world and 'antirealist' about anything else). I want to say that this view is trivially true or trivially false, depending on whether we mean the e-world or the i-world when we talk about 'what there is'. In neither case is there an interesting philosophical issue—the appearance that there is one rests on confusing these two senses of 'world'. [WSMCP 138]

My closing suggestion is that Sellars needs to go this way, too. That is, he needs to accept for *facts,* as he affirms for *expressions,* that, as he puts it:
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 [**facts**] which empiricists have relegated to second-class citizenship . . . are not *inferior, just different*? (CDCM, §79, emphasis in bold mine—Sellars says 'expressions' at this point) In other words, I think that Sellars should accept that mathematical facts, moral facts, modal facts, and the like, are "not inferior, just different". [WSMCP 138]

To sum up, I have argued that in his emphatic distinction between two notions of truth, Sellars has a basis for the response that Humean expressivism needs to creeping cognitivism. It involves an explicit rejection of the semantic Bifurcation Thesis. The result is in an important sense an anti-representationalist position, because it gives up a link at the core of orthodox

representationalism between propositional content and word–natural world correspondence. In Sellars' terms, the former keeps company with S-assertibility, the latter with 'picturing', and these notions simply live in different boxes. In effect, then, Sellars is already a global expressivist, and Cambridge Pragmatists should follow him down that path. But Sellars in turn needs the metaphysical quietism that Cambridge had with the Ramsey of GPC, and later with Blackburn. And his naturalism should be that of Hume, not the object naturalism of much of contemporary metaphysics. [WSMCP 139]

Passages from Huw Price: "Idling and Sidling Towards Philosophic Peace"

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. [ISTPP 5]

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. [ISTPP 5]

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.) [ISTPP 6]

McDowell:
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. [ISTPP 7]

Re Sellars:
        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 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. [ISTPP 12]

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 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 *metaphysical* 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.   [ISTPP 14]

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.*' [ISTPP 15]

Thus there is an explicitly non-metaphysical option on the table here. ('Sellars*lite*', 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==. [ISTPP 19]

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. [ISTPP 20]

McDowell:
Values are not brutely 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. [ISTPP 20]