

Pragmatism, Quasi-realism and the Global Challenge

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William James said that sometimes detailed philosophical argument is irrelevant. Once a current of thought is really under way, trying to oppose it with argument is like planting a stick in a river to try to alter its course: “round your obstacle flows the water and ‘gets there just the same’”. He thought pragmatism was such a river. There is a contemporary river that sometimes calls itself pragmatism, although other titles are probably better. At any rate it is the denial of differences, the celebration of the seamless web of language, the soothing away of distinctions, whether of primary *versus* secondary, fact *versus* value, description *versus* expression, or of any other significant kind. What is left is a smooth, undifferentiated view of language, sometimes a nuanced kind of anthropomorphism or “internal” realism, sometimes the view that no view is possible: minimalism, deflationism, quietism. Wittgenstein is often admired as a high priest of the movement. Planting a stick in this water is probably futile, but having done it before I shall do it again, and—who knows?—enough sticks may make a dam, and the waters of error may subside. (Blackburn, 1998a, 157)

So begins Simon Blackburn’s contribution to a symposium with Crispin Wright on ‘Realism and Truth’. In opposing this “smooth, undifferentiated view of language”, Blackburn takes issue, in particular, with Wright’s view of the implications for expressivism of minimalism about truth. Wright is a leading advocate of a widespread view that semantic minimalism provides a straightforward argument for cognitivism, and hence against expressivism. For his part, of course, Blackburn is the principal proponent of a rather subtle version of expressivism, quasi-realism, which he takes to provide the most plausible treatment of a range of philosophical topics: moral, aesthetic, conditional, causal, and probabilistic judgements, for example. Quasi-realism depends on noting *differences* between discourses, and yet Blackburn himself is very sympathetic to semantic minimalism—hence his desire to resist the claim that minimalism is incompatible with expressivism, and to oppose the “undifferentiated view” in general.

For our part, we have considerable sympathy with quasi-realism and with Blackburn’s campaign against this homogeneous view of language. We also agree with Blackburn that the latter view is not well described as pragmatism. Indeed, we are going to be calling attention to some respects in which it is quasi-realism that counts as a kind of pragmatism. However, we also want to identify a respect in which quasi-realism differs from pragmatism—a respect which turns on the fact that the quasi-realist view of language remains *too* differentiated, in a sense we’ll explain. Among other things, we maintain, this leaves quasi-realism vulnerable to

the argument mentioned above, premised on semantic minimalism, in a way in which more ambitious forms of expressivism (or pragmatism) are not. Indeed, we'll be arguing that the usual version of the argument (as advocated, for example, by Wright) gets the implications of semantic minimalism precisely backwards: semantic minimalism provides almost a knock-down argument *for* a strong or global kind of expressivism, not a knock-down argument against it.

This strong kind of expressivism is also a kind of pragmatism. It is an important and appealing position, in our view, but it remains surprisingly invisible in contemporary philosophy.¹ Our main objective here is to try to make it more visible. Blackburn's paper, and the dialectic of the quasi-realist's struggle with minimalism, provides a useful contrastive background. As just noted, we'll be arguing that minimalism turns out to provide a global argument *for* expressivism. So the news is mixed, from a quasi-realist perspective: good news for the expressivist project, but bad news for any merely *local* form of it, such as quasi-realism itself. The stable view is our form of pragmatism.²

The paper goes like this. In the next section we introduce the variety of pragmatism we have in mind as a particular kind of response to a familiar philosophical puzzle. We then take some care to distinguish it, first, from its neighbours "on the right": from various metaphysical approaches to similar philosophical puzzles. As we'll explain, a key distinguishing feature of pragmatism, in our sense, is that it is metaphysically *quietist*.

Next, we note the position's relation to its neighbours "on the left"—to various familiar forms of expressivism, including quasi-realism. There are certainly affinities, but a major difference is that these familiar views are typically local in scope, intended to apply to

¹ Surprisingly so for two reasons, in our view: first, because the position in question is close in motivation and methodology to familiar views, such as quasi-realism itself; and second, as we'll explain, because the unfamiliar view in question is actually the proper end-point of a familiar line of argument from popular premisses. In both cases, we think, the pragmatist option has been obscured by a dogmatic attachment to an assumption about language with which it conflicts. The assumption in question is often called representationalism, and our point may be put like this: it is surprising that representationalism itself hasn't been more widely challenged, given that the means and motive for doing so have been popular currency for the better part of two decades.

² As we note in Section 8 below, Blackburn himself has entertained this global view in some of his more recent work, and indeed has declared himself 'agnostic' (1998b, 318) about the issue that separates it from the older and better-known local version of quasi-realism. Until Section 8, for ease of exposition, we take our notional Blackburnian opponent to be the original local kind of quasi-realist. If we think of our true opponent as the real (present-day) Simon Blackburn, it is more accurate to say that our message is that he should come off the fence, and opt for the global version of the view.

some topics or vocabularies but not to others—whereas our kind of pragmatism is necessarily a global view, in the relevant respects. Again, the point turns on quietism. Unlike more familiar forms of expressivism, our pragmatism is quietist (in a sense we'll explain) about the representational character of various vocabularies. As a result, it provides a natural and stable response to the challenge from minimalism, mentioned above. And it retains the best aspects of the differentiation offered by quasi-realism (while avoiding, via representational quietism, a more problematic kind of differentiation).

1. Pragmatism and the placement problem

Our first task is to bring our target variety of pragmatism into view, by contrasting it with some metaphysical views on one side, and some more familiar expressivist views, on the other. Both contrasts are best drawn against the background of a familiar kind of philosophical puzzle—a puzzle that often presents itself as a metaphysical issue about the nature, or essence, of some thing or property: What is mind? What is causation? What is goodness? What is truth? Often, what gives such questions their distinctive flavour is that the thing or property in question seems hard to “place” in the kind of world described by science. In this form, these “placement problems” stem from a presupposition about the ontological scope of science—roughly, the naturalist assumption that all there is is the world as studied by science.³

The pragmatist we have in mind wants to dismiss or demote such metaphysical puzzles in favour of more practical questions, about the roles and functions of the matters in question in human life.⁴ But what are these matters, precisely? Not the metaphysician's objects, or properties, themselves, but the words, concepts and thoughts in terms of which, as we ordinarily put it, we talk and think about such things and properties. In other words, a pragmatist about causation doesn't ask about the roles of causation itself in human life, but about the roles and genealogy of the notion, term or concept *causation*. The former question

³ This ‘naturalist’ assumption implies that anything with a good claim ‘to be real’ must in some sense—perhaps under some other description, for example—be the kind of thing recognised in scientific theory. Naturalism of this kind is enormously influential in contemporary philosophy. Here, what we want to stress is its role as a motivation for metaphysics.

⁴ These questions can be naturalist, too, but in the sense that they involve a naturalistic reflection on aspects of human behaviour. More on this below.

may be an interesting question, from some philosophical or scientific standpoints, but it isn't the pragmatist's question.

Pragmatism thus has a second-order, or linguistic focus. We acknowledge that the term 'linguistic' isn't entirely happy in this context. If we don't want to beg important questions about the relative priority of thought and language, it might seem better to say that pragmatism begins with a focus on *representations*—leaving it open whether the fundamental representations are mental or linguistic in nature. But this terminology has a countervailing disadvantage. The term 'representation' equivocates between two meanings that a pragmatist, of all people, needs to distinguish. In one sense, the term refers to a quasi-syntactical item on the page, or in the head, as it were—e.g., to the sentence or term, in the strictly linguistic case.⁵ In the other sense, it characterises the (supposed) function of that item (i.e., that it represents). As we'll see, a pragmatist has a strong reason to reject characterisations of this kind—standard representationalist accounts of the functions of the psychological or linguistic items in question. Even if intended only as a label for the meaning-bearing items in question, the term 'representation' thus provides an uncomfortable vehicle for a view of this kind.

Accordingly, choosing the lesser of terminological evils, we'll say that pragmatism begins with questions about the functions and genealogy of certain linguistic items—emphasising that unless we stipulate otherwise, we're always assuming that these items may be mental, as well as strictly linguistic (in the ordinary sense).

Pragmatism thus begins with linguistic explananda rather than material explananda; with phenomena concerning the *use* of certain terms and concepts, rather than with things or properties of a non-linguistic nature. It begins with linguistic behaviour, and asks broadly anthropological questions: How are we to understand the roles and functions of the behaviour in question, in the lives of the creatures concerned? What is its practical significance? Whence its genealogy?

⁵ This will admit of further differentiation, depending on whether we think of symbols as mere marks, or as something like 'symbols-in-a-language'. These issues are important, but not immediately relevant to the distinctions we're drawing here.

In philosophically interesting cases, such as the ones thought to give rise to placement problems, pragmatists will be looking for answers that explain the distinctive character of the topics in question—that account for the distinctive character of evaluative concepts, for example. Their aim is to dissolve the apparent puzzle of these cases, by accounting for the linguistic phenomena at the heart of the puzzle. And their guiding intuition is that if we can explain how natural creatures in our circumstances naturally come to speak in these ways, there is no further puzzle about the place of the topics concerned, in the kind of world described by science.

This intuition isn't self-supporting, however. It needs to be backed up by a case for rejecting a train of thought that otherwise allows the placement problem to re-emerge in metaphysical guise, as puzzling as before. As we are about to see, metaphysicians, too, can ask questions about the functions of the relevant parts of language. For a pragmatist, the crucial thing is to resist the invitation to answer these questions in a way which leads back to metaphysics.

2. Two ways of starting with language

At first sight, it might seem that the linguistic focus itself is sufficient to distinguish pragmatism from metaphysical approaches to the placement puzzles. After all, doesn't metaphysics presuppose a material focus? Isn't its interest necessarily in the objects and properties—goodness, causation, mind, or whatever—rather than in the use of the corresponding terms?

But things are not so simple. Let's grant that it is definitive of metaphysics, according to its own self-image, that it has its eyes on the world at large, and not on language specifically. Nevertheless, as the contemporary literature demonstrates, a surprising amount of metaphysical business can be conducted at a linguistic level. Thus contemporary writers interested in the nature of causation, say, or mental states, will often take themselves to be investigating the "truthmakers" of causal claims, or the "referents" of terms such as 'belief'. They thus characterise their metaphysical targets in *semantic* terms, as the objects, properties or states of affairs at the "far end" of some semantic relation. The item at the near end is a term

or a sentence, a concept or a proposition, a thought or a belief—in other words (in the broad sense we’re presently assuming) something linguistic.⁶ In one sense, then, metaphysics of this kind begins with a linguistic focus.⁷

Thus a metaphysician, too, may begin her enquiry with a more-or-less anthropological concern to account for certain aspects of human linguistic behaviour. If we took that concern to be constitutive of the kind of pragmatism we have in mind, the upshot would be that there is an overlap, in principle, between pragmatism (in this sense) and metaphysics. The choice is terminological, but our interest is in highlighting the view that begins with such an anthropological concern, without treating it as a stepping-stone to metaphysics. Since the stepping-stone is provided by semantic or representationalist assumptions, we’ll reserve the term pragmatism for the view that rejects such assumptions.⁸

So it isn’t a linguistic starting-point alone that distinguishes pragmatism from metaphysics. Rather, it is a combination of such a starting-point and a rejection of the semantic or ‘representationalist’ presuppositions which otherwise lead our theoretical gaze from language to the world—which turn an anthropological concern into a metaphysical concern, in effect. Diagrammatically:

⁶ We’re blurring a distinction here between the case in which the linguistic item in question is something concrete, such as a linguistic token, and the case in which it is something abstract, such as a proposition. A metaphysics that begins with abstract propositions doesn’t overlap with pragmatism, in the sense we have in mind here, of course. But in practice, the case for believing in propositions is likely to rest on linguistic practices, so that such a view becomes linguistically-grounded, in the present sense, after all.

⁷ This route to metaphysics needs to be distinguished from a kind of pseudo-linguistic mode permitted by semantic ascent, in Quine’s sense. For Quine, talking about the *referent* of the term ‘X’, or the *truth* of the sentence ‘X is F’, is just another way of talking about the *object*, X. (As he himself puts it: ‘By calling the sentence [“Snow is white”] true, we call snow white. The truth predicate is a device of disquotation.’ (1970, 12).) Quine’s deflationary semantic notions are therefore too thin for a genuinely linguistically-grounded metaphysical program—too thin to provide the substantial issues *about language* with which such a program needs to begin (viz., substantial issues about referents and truthmakers). See (Price 2004a) for more on this point. Blackburn often makes a similar point about semantic ascent construed à la Ramsey. Noting that ‘Ramsey’s Ladder’ doesn’t take us to a new theoretical level, Blackburn remarks that there are ‘philosophies that take advantage of the horizontal nature of Ramsey’s ladder to climb it, and then announce a better view from the top’. (1998b, 78, n25). In our terms, the philosophers that Blackburn has in mind are those who fail to see that the fashionable linguistic methods—talk of truthmakers, truthconditions, referents, and the like—adds precisely nothing to the repertoire or prospects of metaphysics, unless the semantic notions in question are more robust than those of Ramsey and Quine.

⁸ Our choice has a long and excellent pedigree in the pragmatist tradition, of course. Menand (2001, 361) notes that already in 1905, Dewey writes that pragmatism will ‘give the *coup de grace* to *representationalism*.’ In fact, as we’ll see later, it turns out to be important to distinguish several different ways of rejecting representationalism. This will be crucial to our disagreement with Blackburn.

PRAGMATISM = LINGUISTIC PRIORITY without REPRESENTATIONALISM.

It is easy to miss the possibility of beginning where pragmatism begins, without feeling the pull of the metaphysical questions. Unless the role of the representationalist assumption is made explicit, it is liable to remain part of the implicit geography of our thought about these matters—a pathway that cannot help but lead us from one place to the other. Once properly mapped, however, the presupposition can be challenged. We pragmatists can maintain that our predecessors' mistake was precisely to follow that representationalist path, into the cul de sac of metaphysics.

3. Three ways of rejecting metaphysics

Our next task is to be clear about the ways in which pragmatism (in our sense) differs from its metaphysical neighbours. It rejects metaphysics, but in a specific sense, which we need to distinguish from two weaker ways of rejecting traditional metaphysical concerns.

3.1 No metaphysics versus antirealist metaphysics

Consider the familiar view that moral values are a useful fiction. This view shares with pragmatism an interest in the role and genealogy of moral concepts in human life. But it retains a metaphysical face: it maintains that literally speaking, there are no moral values. Clearly, this is an ontological claim. (Similarly for fictionalism about other contentious topics, such as possible worlds, or truth itself.)

There are some senses in which fictionalism does reject metaphysics, of course. Moral fictionalists reject metaphysical enquiries into the nature of moral values. Since there are no such things as moral values, according to the fictionalist, there is no nature to discover (except “within the fiction”, as it were). The negative, antirealist, metaphysical thesis thus disallows a positive metaphysical enquiry.

Now contrast this antirealist metaphysics to views which reject metaphysics altogether. Famously, there are global versions of anti-metaphysical theses of this kind, such as that of Carnap's ‘Empiricism, Semantic and Ontology’ (1950), and (at least arguably) Quine's ‘On What There Is’ (1948). There are also local versions, often based on the claim that the

metaphysical enquiry, in some area, presupposes a mistaken view of the function of the language in which it is couched. As we note below, quasi-realism provides a particularly explicit version of the latter kind of view.

Either way, globally or locally, the relevant contrast is between views which reject the metaphysical issues altogether, and views which allow antirealist, existence-denying metaphysics. Orthodox fictionalism is the latter view, the pragmatism we have in mind is the former. Pragmatism in our sense is thus a no metaphysics view rather than an antirealist view, in the metaphysical sense. Pragmatists are metaphysical *quietists*.⁹

3.2 No metaphysics versus subjectivist metaphysics

The second contrast we need turns on the fact that there is a way of answering the ‘what is’ question which blurs the contrast with pragmatism, by offering an answer to some degree subjectivist. What is causation, or truth, or value? Not something as objective as we might have thought at first sight, according to this proposal, but something that involves us—something partly psychological in nature, perhaps, or something with an implicit relational aspect. In the contemporary literature, the neo-Lockean notion of “response-dependence” is a popular model for views of this kind. On this view, to be red, for example, is to be such as to produce a certain response in normal human observers, under appropriate conditions. So colours are treated as real properties, fit objects of metaphysical scrutiny, but more subjective (or subject-involving) than we might have supposed.

These views are hybrids. They are metaphysical, in that they take seriously the ‘what is’ questions. But they give the objects or properties or states of affairs a human face, or human foundations—even foundations cast explicitly in terms of use. Again, it is to some extent a terminological matter whether we call these views pragmatist.¹⁰ But whatever term we use, one sharp way of marking the distinction with what we’re calling pragmatism is to note that these subjectivists are not quietist about semantic or representationalist matters. On the contrary,

⁹ Who may well agree with fictionalists about the *genealogy* of moral terms, however. More on this below.

¹⁰ Johnston (1993) treats response-dependence as a variety of pragmatism, as does Price (1998), in a paper in which he argues that the kind of use-based approach we are defending here provides a superior home for the pragmatist intuitions that motivate the response-dependence program.

they think that questions about the truthmakers, or truthconditions, of sentences, statements or beliefs, or the referents of terms or concepts, have determinate answers—answers that it is the task of philosophy to uncover. (Their distinctive message is that these things turn out to lie closer to home than we thought.)

Thus subjectivism is best viewed as a form of metaphysics. It takes on board the material questions, and the representational conception of language which leads to them. In particular, therefore, it is not a quietist view, either about the representational status of the language in question, or about associated ontological matters.

3.3 No metaphysics—pragmatists as metaphysical quietists

Thus by pragmatism, henceforth, we mean a view that contrasts both with this kind of subjectivist metaphysics and with the antirealist metaphysics of fictionalism and error theories. Our pragmatists are (normally¹¹) happy to stand with the folk, and to affirm the first-order truths of the domains in question—to affirm that there are beliefs, and values, and causes, and ways things might have been, and so on. What they reject is any distinctively metaphysical theoretical perspective from which to say more about these matters—that they *don't really* (or *do really*) exist, that they are *really* something subjective, or whatever.

This contrast between metaphysical quietism, on the one side, and fictionalism and subjectivism, on the other, echoes an observation made by David Lewis in one of his last papers. In his (2004), Lewis's main claim is that quasi-realism is effectively a form of fictionalism. Lewis notes that both views (fictionalism and quasi-realism) endorse the first-order folk claims of a target discourse, but then offer us a second-order qualification. Thus in the modal case, for example, it goes like this: "There are ways things could have been"—that's the first-order claim—"but only in the modal fiction in which we all participate"—that's the fictionalist rider. Lewis seems to suggest that fictionalism and quasi-realism are therefore inferior to the view which accepts such statements without qualification—i.e., as he interprets the unqualified view, to realism.

¹¹The exceptions will be the cases in which the pragmatists are *mere* anthropologists, reflecting on a discourse in which they themselves do not participate.

Let's set aside for the moment the question as to whether Lewis is right to interpret quasi-realism as a form of fictionalism, and focus on the nature of this unqualified alternative, to which Lewis contrasts fictionalism and quasi-realism. What is this unqualified "realism"? Is it the view that *just* says, with the folk, 'There are ways things might have been'? Or is it the view that says 'There REALLY ARE ways things might have been'—where the capital letters mark some distinctively philosophical claim? If there's a difference between these two possibilities, and if it's the unqualified position we're after—in order to claim Lewis's comparative advantage over fictionalism and quasi-realism—then it must be the weaker position. Why? Because the stronger also requires an additional qualification, though this time of a positive rather than a negative kind. (The folk don't add the capital letters, if adding the capital letters adds philosophical theory.)

What if there isn't a difference between the weaker and stronger views? That would imply that—as Carnap (1950) thought, for example—there isn't any distinctively theoretical viewpoint that philosophy can bring to such matters of ontology. In other words, it implies that there isn't any distinct stronger position. Again, then, the unqualified position is the weaker position.

The point we want to stress is that this weaker position is effectively our metaphysical quietism. Thus—still bracketing the question as to whether Lewis is right to identify quasi-realism with fictionalism—the distinction Lewis identifies, between unqualified and qualified ways of speaking with the folk, is essentially the distinction that we need, between pragmatism and its metaphysical neighbours.

So our pragmatists are metaphysical quietists. But they are not philosophical quietists *tout court*, if there could be such a view. On the contrary, they take some relevant theoretical matters very seriously indeed: especially some broadly anthropological issues about the roles and genealogy of various aspects of human linguistic behaviour. It is arguable that these issues are compulsory questions, necessarily addressed, at least implicitly, by all the views we have considered so far.

What distinguishes pragmatism is a determination to address these questions without the resources of a representationalist model of language. And as we are about to see, this is a feature that our kind of pragmatism shares, at least locally, with quasi-realism.

4. Quasi-realism as local pragmatism

We earlier said that we intended to outline a variety of pragmatism according to which quasi-realism counts as a pragmatist view, in significant respects. What we meant by that claim should now be apparent. Consider, say, a quasi-realist view of evaluative discourse. Such a view is certainly anthropological, or genealogical, in the sense outlined above. And it rejects what we called the representationalist assumption with respect to evaluative discourse. In other words, crucially, it rejects the assumption that otherwise leads from a linguistic conception of the original puzzle about evaluative discourse, to metaphysical issues about the nature of value.

So far, of course, quasi-realism keeps company with orthodox noncognitivism or expressivism on these matters. (Like those views, in particular, it should not be confused for some version of metaphysical subjectivism. It does not say that in claiming that *X* is good, we *report* our approval of *X*, or *describe* *X* as being disposed to elicit our approval.) Where quasi-realism begins to part company with some cruder forms of noncognitivism is at the choice point between metaphysical antirealism and metaphysical quietism. Does noncognitivism about evaluative concepts imply that, literally speaking, there are no values (thus agreeing with fictionalists and error theorists)? Some noncognitivists seem to have thought so, but Blackburn is not one of them. As he himself often stresses, quasi-realism is not an error theory: on the contrary, as he puts it, ‘quasi-realism is most easily thought of as the enterprise of showing why projectivism needs no truck with an error theory.’ (1998a, 175) Elsewhere, responding to this question—“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?*”—his answer is emphatic: ‘No, no, no.’ (1998b, 319)

Thus Blackburn’s view is (i) that when we speak with the folk, we are fully (and literally) entitled to say that there are values—and (ii) that no other legitimate standpoint is available to philosophy, from which we can properly retract such a claim. In our terminology,

this amounts to saying that quasi-realism is metaphysically quietist. *Pace* Lewis, in fact, it is precisely this point that distinguishes quasi-realism from fictionalism. Unlike a fictionalist, a quasi-realist who stands with the folk in affirming that there are values (say), does not then proceed to add a negative qualification. (At worst, he merely withholds some further accolade or emphasis or capital letter, to which he takes our “non-quasi” commitments to be entitled. But this means that if it is the extra qualification which is objectionable, as Lewis suggests, then quasi-realism stays on the side of virtue, in the “quasi” cases.)

This reading of Blackburn might seem in tension with his own description of quasi-realism as a variety of antirealism, and especially with an account of the place and nature of quasi-realism he offers in Blackburn (1993b). In that context, he contrasts quasi-realism with what he calls “immanent realism”:

Immanent realism is the position that the forms of ordinary discourse in the area form the only data, and themselves impose realism. ... External realism would be a conjunction of the view that (a) there is a further external, metaphysical issue over whether the right theory of the area is realistic, and (b) the answer to this issue is that it is. Immanent realism entails the denial of (a); quasi-realism agrees with (a), but denies (b). (1993b, 368)

Isn't agreeing with (a) incompatible with being a metaphysical quietist? Indeed, isn't it the immanent realist, in Blackburn's sense, who better counts as such a quietist?

No, in our view—although this is perhaps a matter on which Blackburn could usefully have been clearer. For consider the external issue allowed by (a), as seen from the perspective of a quasi-realist. The first external question that arises is not metaphysical, but linguistic. It is the question: “Is the right theory of this area of commitment a theory that treats it as genuinely descriptive?” If the answer is that the area is genuinely descriptive, the orthodox metaphysical questions are thereby deemed appropriate: is the area in question in good shape, is there really anything (and if so, what) to which its claims answer, and so on. But if the answer to the initial question is that the best theory in this case is not genuinely descriptive, then the quasi-realist regards these metaphysical enquiries as inappropriate—a kind of category mistake, in effect.

In the latter case, moreover, the quasi-realist is an antirealist not in the sense of endorsing negative, existence-denying metaphysical claims, but only in the sense of not endorsing positive, capital-R Realist, existence-affirming metaphysical claims. (Compare the difference between an anti-theist who denies the existence of God, and an anti-theist who simply rejects the issue altogether, refusing to take sides—or even to label herself as an agnostic—on an issue she regards as in some way ill-founded.)

Thus, once we distinguish these two kinds of antirealism, and recognise that the kind of external question properly allowed by a quasi-realist is not itself metaphysical—rather, it is the linguistically-grounded meta-metaphysical question whether metaphysics is in order, in the domain in question—we can see how it is indeed true, as we claimed, that a quasi-realist is a metaphysical quietist, about those domains he takes to require the quasi-realist treatment.

Quasi-realism thus has all the marks of our species of anthropological pragmatism. In reading quasi-realism in this way, however, we need to stress once more that it is a local pragmatism. It adopts the pragmatist attitude with respect to some areas of discourse, some topics of philosophical puzzlement, but not universally. Elsewhere, as it were, representationalism and metaphysics still reign.

5. The global challenge

In our view, however, quasi-realism is untenable in this local form. Like other local forms of expressivism, it faces irresistible pressures towards “globalisation”—pressures to concede the field to a view which, approached from this direction, is aptly characterised as *global* quasi-realism, or *global* expressivism. Seen head-on, this new view is the anthropological pragmatism with which we began, in its unrestricted form. Our next task is to explore the sources and consequences of this “global challenge” to quasi-realism.

It turns out that the pressure towards globalisation threatens quasi-realism from two distinct directions, one external and one internal. The internal pressure stems from an argument to the effect that unless quasi-realism becomes a global view, it is condemned to be a victim of its own successes: roughly, its own successes render redundant any stronger form of realism, of whatever kind a local quasi-realist wants to invoke in the “non-quasi” cases. We

defer this challenge for the time being, however, and turn first to the external challenge.

The external challenge relies on reversing one of the main currents in the river to which Blackburn refers (and which he himself sets out to obstruct), in the passage with which we began. As we noted, semantic minimalism is commonly taken to provide a strong argument against expressivism. In our view, as we said, this gets things precisely backwards. In fact, semantic minimalism provides a global argument in favour of expressivism, and this argument is the external challenge to merely local forms of expressivism, such as Blackburn's quasi-realism.

In turning the familiar appeal to semantic minimalism on its head in this way, we end up agreeing with Blackburn in one sense, but disagreeing with him in another. Blackburn is right, in our view, to deny that semantic minimalism implies an undifferentiated, homogeneous, view of language—on the contrary, as Blackburn argues, the important differentiation most characteristic of pragmatism and expressivism remains firmly in place. On the other hand, we want to argue that minimalism does sweep away the kind of bifurcation that distinguishes Blackburn's quasi-realism—as a local form of pragmatism—from a more global version of the same kind of view.

6. The minimalist challenge¹²

In its simplest form, the conventional argument that minimalism about truth is an enemy of noncognitivism and expressivism goes something like this. If there is nothing more to truth than the equivalence schema, then any meaningful sentence 'P' whose syntax permits it to be embedded in the form 'P is true' immediately possesses truthconditions, in the only sense available: viz., 'P' is true if and only if P. Since moral claims, for example, are certainly embeddable in this way, it is immediate that moral claims are truth-conditional, or truth-evaluable, as the cognitivist maintains. In general, then, the thought is that if truth is minimal, it is easy for sentences to be truth-evaluable—and hence implausible for a noncognitivist to maintain that a superficially truth-conditional statement is not genuinely truth-conditional.¹³

¹² This section draws heavily on material from Price (2006).

¹³ An early version of the argument may be found in McDowell (1981), though the point seems to have been in play before that. (It is closely related to some points raised in a filmed discussion between Peter Strawson and

In our view, as we said, this argument is almost completely wrong-headed. The key to seeing this is to note that expressivism normally makes *two* claims about its target discourse, one negative and one positive. The negative claim says that these terms or statements lack some semantic feature: they are non-referential, non-truth-apt, non-descriptive, non-factual, or something of the kind. The positive claim offers an alternative, non-semantic, account of the functions of the language in question—for example, that it expresses, or projects, evaluative attitudes of the speaker in question. Thus the negative claim is *anti-representational*, the positive claim *expressivist*.

What is the effect on such a combination of views of deflationism about the semantic vocabulary in which the negative claim is couched? If we read the minimalist as claiming, *inter alia*, that the semantic notions have no substantial theoretical role to play, then the consequence is that the negative claim must be abandoned. For it is a substantial theoretical claim, cast (essentially) in semantic vocabulary. But abandoning this claim does not imply that, *qua* theoreticians, we must endorse its negation—i.e., endorse cognitivism. On the contrary, what's thin for the goose is thin for the gander: if semantic terms can't be used in a thick sense, they can't be used on either side of a (thick) dispute as to whether evaluative claims are genuinely representational.

Consider again the theological analogy. Evolutionary biologists don't think that the species were created by God. Does this mean that they must use the term 'God', in their theoretical voice, in order to deny that the species were created by God? Obviously not—they simply offer an account of the origin of the species in which the term 'God' does not appear. So rejecting the view that God created the species does not require accepting the following claim: God did not create the species. The alternative—the right alternative, obviously, in this case—is a kind of passive rejection: simply avoiding theological vocabulary, in scientific contexts.

Gareth Evans, made for the Open University in 1972.) More recent versions may be found in Boghossian (1990), Wright (1992), and Humberstone (1991). The argument is also endorsed by Jackson, Oppy and Smith (1994), who propose a response for noncognitivism, based on the argument that minimalism about *truth* need not imply minimalism about *truth-aptness*, and that it is nonminimalism about truth-aptness that matters for the noncognitivist's purposes. In our view, noncognitivism does not need saving: in the important respects, semantic minimalism already represents victory by default.

As before, the point of the example is that not affirming is not the same as denying, and the lesson carries over to the present case. From a theoretician's point of view, declining to affirm that a linguistic item stands in semantic relations does not entail denying that it does so. One may simply dismiss the issue, as having no relevant theoretical content.

So what is the effect of deflationism on expressivism? It is to deflate the expressivist's (usual) negative claim, *while leaving intact the positive claim*—the expressivist's pragmatic account of the function of the terms in question. Contrary to the received view, then, semantic minimalism is a friend rather an enemy of expressivism. Provided that we take it that the core of the expressivist position is what we've called a pragmatic account of the key functions of the judgements in question—an account not cast in representational, 'descriptive', or semantic terms—then deflationism about the key semantic notions is a *global* motivation for expressivism. It is a global reason for thinking that whatever the interesting theoretical view of the functions of a class of judgements turns out to be, it cannot be that they are referential, or truth-conditional. (To repeat—deflationism amounts to a denial that these notions have a substantial theoretical role.)

Of course, the difficulty for most expressivists is that they are explicit in wanting their expressivism to be a local view. Thus they want a contrast between the domains in which they offer a non-representational account of the functions of the language in question, and the domains they want to regard as genuinely representational. Deflationism certainly disallows this contrast—but not, as we have just seen, by disallowing the positive, pragmatist account of what supposedly lies on the non-representational side of the fence. On the contrary, the problem is with what supposedly lies on the representational side.

Semantic minimalism thus implies global pragmatism, in our sense. Recall our equation above:

$$\text{PRAGMATISM} = \text{LINGUISTIC PRIORITY without REPRESENTATIONALISM.}$$

Semantic minimalism requires that substantial theory about our linguistic behaviour must operate without the semantic categories which underpin representationalism—necessarily without REPRESENTATIONALISM, in other words.

Finally, note that this conclusion does not entail an homogeneous, undifferentiated view of language. On the contrary, there's plenty of scope for differentiation, in the pragmatist's functional key. The only differentiation disallowed is that between genuinely and 'quasi' representational discourse. So, as we said, it is good news and bad news, from a quasi-realist point's of view: a cheer for expressivism and genealogy, but a boo for one distinctive aspect of the quasi-realist's version of these ideas, viz., the view that quasi-realism can remain a local doctrine.

7. The eleatic equivocation

There are two sides to this conclusion, the general pro-expressivist aspect and the more specific anti (local) quasi-realist aspect. One reason that both aspects have been overlooked, presumably, is that the representationalist conception of language is so deeply entrenched that it has been hard to see how directly it is challenged by semantic minimalism—hard to see what a radical thesis semantic minimalism is, in this sense. (So much the worse for semantic realism, perhaps—more on this possibility later.)

Another reason has to do with the dialectics of contemporary expressivist positions. Seeing themselves as local views, these theories come to the field with an interest in maintaining the representationalist picture, while reducing its domain. In that context, writers concerned to defend expressivism against the supposed threat of semantic minimalism seem to have confused two tasks. One task is that of arguing that semantic minimalism leaves plenty of room for differentiation, in an expressivist key—that it doesn't 'make everything the same'. The other is that of arguing that semantic minimalism leaves room for a particular kind of differentiation, namely, that between genuinely representational and non-representational uses of language. The strength of the expressivist's case for the first point has perhaps obscured the weakness of the argument for the second. The two conclusions haven't been properly distinguished, and strong argument has tended to shield its weaker sibling.

The most popular argument for the second point—i.e., for the defence of the "bifurcation thesis", as it is called by Kraut (1990), following Rorty—appeals to what we might call the Eleatic Criterion. The central thought goes something like this. We need to

appeal to trees to explain our use of the term ‘tree’, but we don’t need to appeal to goodness to explain our use of the term ‘good’. So we should interpret talk of trees “really” realistically, but talk of goodness only quasi-realistically. (See, e.g., Blackburn (1984, 257; 1998b, 80), Kraut (1990) and Dreier (2004), for various versions of this idea.)

This is an appealing idea, and the Eleatic Criterion may well mark some distinction of interest. However, there are some interesting reasons for doubting whether it draws a line where its proponents would like to draw a line—say, around scientific claims.¹⁴ More importantly for present purposes, semantic minimalism entails that any distinction drawn this way simply can’t be a distinction between those utterances which do stand in substantial semantic relations to the world and those that do not. But since that’s what it would take to distinguish representational from non-representational uses of language, the Eleatic Criterion can’t provide a way of retaining the bifurcation thesis, in the face of semantic minimalism. If the Eleatic Criterion could ground the bifurcation thesis, in other words, that would show that semantic minimalism is simply false—that substantial semantic notions can be built on eleatic considerations.

Thus the Eleatic Criterion can’t save expressivists from the following dilemma: either (i) they reject semantic minimalism, building substantial semantic relations on some basis or other (eleatic or otherwise); or (ii) they concede that their expressivism is a global position (albeit one with plenty of scope for distinctions of a non-semantic kind—including some, perhaps, marked by the Eleatic Criterion itself). The latter horn is the one that we recommend—our global anthropological pragmatism, or global expressivism. In a moment, we want to explain why the former horn ought to seem particularly unattractive, from a quasi-realist point of view.

Before we leave the Eleatic Criterion, however, there is another possible move to which

¹⁴ Briefly, one large issue concerns the status of causal discourse, which is arguably both properly treated in expressivist terms, and essential in science. An even deeper issue, perhaps, turns on the status of logical and conceptual generality. Plausibly, the relevant explanations of our use of *general* terms depends only on the *particular* instances we and our ancestors happen to have encountered in the past—generality itself seems to play no explanatory role. This point—closely related to the rule-following considerations, apparently—suggests that no interesting part of language really meets the explanatory test. Finally, and in a different vein, it is arguable (see Price 1997) that much of the appeal of the eleatic intuition rests on a kind of perspectival fallacy: of course the ontology invoked in the explanations in question looks privileged, in those contexts; but so it should, for the explanatory perspective is itself scientific!

we want to call attention. It might be suggested that the proper role of the Eleatic Criterion is not to underpin a *semantic* distinction between genuinely descriptive and quasi-descriptive discourse, but a *metaphysical* distinction, between ontology that deserves our allegiance as realists and ontology that does not.¹⁵ Here, we simply want to point out that this move is out of bounds to a quasi-realist such as Blackburn himself, for at least two reasons. The first is that it would challenge his metaphysical quietism, his insistence in speaking with the folk on the topics to which he applies the quasi-realist treatment—his rejection of error theories, for example. The second is that it would mean that quasi-realism was simply tilling the wrong patch of ground, in taking emulation of realism to be a matter of entitlement to the semantic trimmings: to being treated as ‘true’ and ‘false’, for example. Quasi-realism would require quasi-causation, not quasi-truth.

8. Blackburn as global quasi-realist?

At some points, Blackburn himself comes very close to accepting the latter horn of the above dilemma. Here, for example, is a passage in which he is arguing that Wright is blind to the distinctions permitted in Ramsey’s and Wittgenstein’s view of the matter—and blind, in particular, to the fact that these distinctions are thoroughly compatible with Ramsey’s thin notion of truth.

The point is that Ramsey and Wittgenstein do not need to work with a sorted notion of *truth*—robust, upright, hard truth versus some soft and effeminate imitation. They need to work with a sorted notion of a *proposition*, or if we prefer it a sorted notion of *truth-aptness*. There are propositions properly theorized about in one way, and ones properly theorized about in another. The focus of theory is the nature of the commitment voiced by one adhering to the proposition, and the different functional roles in peoples’ lives (or forms of life, or language games) that these different commitments occupy. Indeed, I should say that although a good title for the position might be “non-descriptive functionalism”, Wittgenstein could even afford to throw “description” into the minimalist pot. Even if we have to say that all commitments describe their coordinate slices of reality, we can still say that they are to be theorized about in a *distinctive* way. You come at them differently, offering a different theory of

¹⁵ This is Armstrong’s (1997, 41) ‘Eleatic Principle’.

their truth-aptness (again, this ought not to be uncongenial to Wright, since it is only extending the very kind of move he himself makes to rehabilitate versions of the realism debate, in the face of minimalism about truth). You may end up, that is, saying that these assertions describe how things are with values, probability, modality, and the rest. But the way you arrive at this bland result will be distinctive, and it will be the bit that matters.¹⁶

Indeed, we say, but where this leads is global quasi-realism! It leads to a view in which all the interesting theoretical work, including any contribution from the Eleatic Criterion, is done on the positive, non-representational, side of the expressivist's account. There is sorting, in other words, but no sorting conducted in a representational key—everything is done in pragmatic terms.¹⁷

9. The internal challenge

To resist this conclusion a (local) quasi-realist needs to take the first horn of the dilemma—in other words, to be non-minimalist about truth and associated semantic notions. As a friend of semantic minimalism, Blackburn himself would find this option highly uncongenial. Indeed, he ought to find it so for a reason more basic than a mere preference for semantic minimalism. This horn of the dilemma is inherently unappealing, from a quasi-realist's point of view, for a reason connected to what we called the internal version of the pressure towards globalisation.

To see why, note that what is distinctive and admirable about quasi-realism is that unlike less careful forms of expressivism, it takes seriously the need to explain the representational appearances—the various respects in which the target discourses 'behave like' genuinely representational parts of language. But this exposes it to a familiar challenge, which might be formulated like this:

“Suppose you (the quasi-realist) succeed in explaining, on expressivist foundations, why non-descriptive claims behave like (what you take to be) genuinely descriptive

¹⁶ Blackburn (1998a, 166–167). Cf. Blackburn (1998b, 77–83), for a more detailed discussion of this “Wittgensteinian” option. Note that Blackburn (1990, 1993a) had previously interpreted Wittgenstein as a *local* quasi-realist, so the above view marks a shift.

¹⁷ We suspect that Ramsey, too, never saw this point—like Blackburn, his expressivism was a kind of halfway house, whose foundations were considerably weakened by his failure to see that he needed to abandon representationalism altogether, in order to cast the view in a stable form. On a related aspect of this instability, see Holton and Price (2003).

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

Why, then, is a non-minimalist view of semantic notions necessarily unattractive for a quasi-realist? Because it impales him on the horns of the new dilemma just mentioned: either his own methods render any thick component of his semantic theory an idle cog, unnecessary in accounting for the use of semantic vocabulary; or the failure of his methods to do so reveals a failure to achieve his own professed aims, of explaining how non-descriptive discourse can emulate the real thing.

Thus the option of appealing to a non-minimalist semantic theory, in order to meet the external version of the global challenge—i.e., our argument that semantic minimalism entails global expressivism—is not one that a quasi-realist can easily entertain. And the problem turns on the internal version of the global challenge: on the fact that the more successful the quasi-realist program is in its own terms, the greater its difficulty in not swallowing everything. Since the current sweeping the quasi-realist towards globalisation is driven by his program's own engines, he cannot invoke substantial semantic notions to stem the flow, without putting a spanner in his own works.

Once again, however, we want to emphasise there is an attractive alternative close at hand. It is global solution represented by our brand of pragmatism, or global expressivism. The near-invisibility of this alternative in contemporary philosophy seems due in large part to the enormous inertia of the representationalist orthodoxy. The point we've stressed is that to

the extent that semantic minimalism is taken seriously—as it has been, in many hands, in twentieth century philosophy—it actually sweeps away the foundations of this orthodoxy. But far from sweeping away, with it, the diversity of the things that expressivists want to claim that we do with assertoric language, the effect is to reveal the underlying diversity to the theoretician's gaze, unencrusted with the dogma that is all just DESCRIBING.

This concludes the main argument of the paper. In the two remaining sections, we want to elaborate two aspects of the picture we have outlined so far. In Section 10 we sketch the view of language that this form of pragmatism entails. Crucially, as we'll explain, it combines differentiation at one level with homogeneity at another—a single assertoric tool or template, capable of being put to work in the service of many different projects—with both levels being properly investigated in pragmatic terms. In Section 11, finally, we return to the theme of quietism, and offer a taxonomy intended to clarify the analogies and dianalogies between the various positions that have been in play.

10. The puzzle of many in one

We began with Blackburn's attempts to defend the possibility of linguistic diversity, in the face of a flood of homogeneity, thought by some to spring from quietism and minimalism. We've agreed with Blackburn on most points, but argued that the flood does sweep away any merely local version of expressivism or quasi-realism. At this point, however, readers may feel that they've been shown a kind of conjuring trick. As we ourselves have emphasised, our view has less diversity than that of a local quasi-realist, because it lacks a distinction between genuine and merely quasi description. It's the same thin or quasi semantic notions, in our picture, across the entire linguistic landscape. But where, then, is the promised diversity? Are we claiming that these same thin semantic notions have different functions in different areas? Surely they are both too thin and too homogeneous for that to be the case?

This challenge calls attention to a feature of our view which deserves greater emphasis. It is, indeed, highly implausible—especially for a semantic minimalist—that there is not a certain unity to basic applications of semantic predicates, in different domains of discourse. If

truth is merely a device for disquotation, it has that same function, surely, no matter what the content of the sentences to which it attaches?

One way to see that this needn't be incompatible with the idea that those sentences themselves might have different functions and genealogies, as a pragmatist maintains, is to examine the corresponding point in a broader context. It is highly plausible that there are certain more-or-less universal features of assertion and judgement—e.g., to borrow Brandom's (1994) way of looking at these matters, a common practice of undertaking commitments, and giving and asking for reasons. In some sense, it seems, there is simply one grand language game in which we do these things. The overarching unity of applications of a disquotational truth predicate might be viewed as one small aspect of these broader unity of this "assertion game".¹⁸

What needs to be established is that broad unity at this level is compatible with differentiation at a lower level, of the kind our pragmatism requires. It isn't immediately obvious that this is possible, and indeed the task of showing that it is possible takes rather different forms, depending on whether one is a global or merely local pragmatist. Blackburn's local quasi-realist will presumably come to the table with some ready-made (Fregean?) theory of how the relevant phenomena are to be explained in the genuinely descriptive domains, where there isn't a need to accommodate underlying functional diversity (at least of the relevant kind). The task is then to show how bits of language with different basic functions can then properly emulate the surface characteristics of the genuinely descriptive domains.

Global pragmatism requires a different approach. Since it rejects representationalism altogether, it cannot begin by assuming that there is a class of cases for which the explanation of the surface phenomena is already available, at least in principle. In one sense, however, abandoning this assumption makes things easier. We pragmatists can begin with a clean slate, and look for a unitary account of roles and genealogy of the assertion game. In particular, we can look for an account which leaves room for underlying diversity, of the kind needed to

¹⁸ However, it is questionable whether the disquotational account of the function of the truth predicate is adequate, in this context. See Price (1988, 2003) for a defence an alternative version of deflationism, based on the proposal that the truth predicate has a richer, essentially normative, role in discourse.

accommodate the intuitions that we share with merely local quasi-realists, that there are important senses in which different bits of language do different jobs.

We don't have space here to make a detailed case that this is possible, but we want to mention a proposal that one of us has outlined elsewhere (Price, 1988, 2004b), to give some sense of how a case might go. The proposal starts with the thought that many of our proto-linguistic psychological states might be such that it would be advantageous, with respect to those states, that we tend to towards conformity across our communities. Assertoric language seems to facilitate and encourage such alignment—within the assertion game, we give voice to our psychological dispositions in ways which invite challenges by speakers with contrary dispositions. ('That's false' and 'That's true' are markers of challenge and concession, respectively—cf. Price (1988, 2003)).

As ordinary speakers, of course, we don't understand that this is what assertoric language is for—we just do it, as it were, and from our point of view, seem to be “saying how things are”. But the function of this practice of “saying how things are” is the one in the background—the function of altering our behaviourally significant commitments much more rapidly than our individual experience in the environment could do, by giving us access to the corresponding states of our fellows (and much else besides).

The suggestion is thus that “representational” language is a tool for aligning commitments across a speech community. But though in this sense a single tool, it is a tool with many distinct applications, corresponding to the distinct primary functions of the various kinds of psychological states that take advantage of it—that facilitate their own alignment by expressing themselves in assertoric form. And none of these primary functions is representation as such, in the traditional sense—there are no substantial semantic properties in the picture.

Wittgenstein is well known for the view that the surface uniformity of language masks underlying diversity, and one of the analogies he offers in support of this idea in the *Investigations* fits this two-level functional architecture particularly nicely. Speaking of what we see as we look at the linguistic “surface”, Wittgenstein says this:

It is like looking into the cabin of a locomotive. We see handles all looking more or less alike. (Naturally, since they are all supposed to be handled.) But one is the handle of a crank which can be moved continuously (it regulates the opening of a valve); another is the handle of a switch, which has only two effective positions, it is either off or on; a third is the handle of a brake-lever, the harder one pulls on it, the harder it brakes; a fourth, the handle of a pump: it has an effect only so long as it is moved to and fro. (*PI*, §12)

In one sense, as Wittgenstein's stresses, the various different handles have very different functions. But they are all "designed to be handled". In that sense, then, they are members of a category with a significant functional unity (a unity not possessed by the more assorted tools—"a screw-driver, a rule, a glue-pot, glue ..."—of another of Wittgenstein's examples).

So here's the proposal, as our pragmatist sees it. Thinking of the function of assertions uniformly as representation misses important functional distinctions—distinctions we can't put back in just by appealing to differences in what is represented. To get the direction of explanation right, we need to begin with pragmatic differences, differences among the kinds of things that the assertions in question *do* (or more accurately, perhaps, differences among the kinds of things that their underlying psychological states *do*, for complex creatures in a complex environment). And to get the unity right, we need to note that in their different ways, all of these tasks are tasks whose verbal expressions appropriately invoke the kind of multi-purpose tool that assertion in general *is*. To say this, we need to say what kind of tool it is—what general things we do with it that we couldn't do otherwise. If the answer is in part that we expose our commitments to criticism by our fellows, then the point will be that this may be a useful thing to do, for commitments with a range of different functional roles (none of them representation as such).

11. Varieties of quietism

We began with Blackburn's remarks about "contemporary river that sometimes calls itself pragmatism". In recommending our own alternative form of pragmatism, we have agreed with Blackburn, in the main, in resisting the "smooth, undifferentiated view of language" that flows from the river in question. Yet as Blackburn notes, the philosophers who ride this river often

call themselves minimalists, deflationists, or quietists. We, too, have claimed these labels, at various points—as does Blackburn himself, in certain respects. How, then, do we (and he) avoid being swept downstream?

The trick is to distinguish several different matters with respect to which it is possible to be a philosophical quietist. In this final section, we want to sketch a taxonomy of this kind. This will make it obvious how quietism in one key can be compatible with non-quietism in another—and hence, therefore, how there is room for the kind of stance that we and Blackburn wish to adopt, in opposition to the homogenising river. As we'll see, it also provides a sharp way of distinguishing our kind of pragmatism from local quasi-realism.

For present purposes, quietism about a particular vocabulary amounts to a rejection of that vocabulary, for the purposes of philosophical theory. This may or may not involve a rejection of the vocabulary in question for other purposes. Thus, to return to our theological example, a theological quietist is not merely agnostic about the issues that divide theists from atheists. She rejects theological discourse altogether, at least as a vocabulary for theoretical investigation. She may reject it for all purposes, simply declining to play that language game at all; or she may regard it as playable with some other point. In the latter case, her attitude is analogous to that of a typical semantic deflationist, who doesn't want to abandon the truth predicate altogether, but merely to insist that it has no independent role to play in marking a legitimate topic of theoretical investigation.

Concerning the issues we have been discussing, there are three main topics or vocabularies, with respect to which quietism is a possibility. The first involves metaphysical issues, the second semantic and representational issues, and the third the broadly anthropological issues about language, emphasised by our kind of explanatory pragmatist. In principle, perhaps, one might be a quietist about any combination of these three topics, giving eight possible variations. In practice, the five options listed in Table 1 seem particularly significant.

	Metaphysical quietism	Representational quietism	Use-explanatory quietism
A	No	No	No
B	No	Yes	No
C	Yes	No	No
D	Yes	Yes	No
E	Yes	Yes	Yes

TABLE 1: Options for quietism.

Option A is occupied by many contemporary metaphysical positions. It accepts that there is a legitimate metaphysical or ontological standpoint for philosophy, and also a non-minimalist view of semantic notions such as truth and reference. Finally, it also recognises as a well-founded theoretical enquiry the project of explaining various aspects of linguistic usage—our use of causal or moral terms, for example. Clearly, it is likely to regard these three areas of theoretical investigation as closely connected: it might regard metaphysics as a search for truthmakers, for example, thus connecting (at least) the first and the second investigations.

Option B represents a different kind of metaphysics—a view that rejects the linguistic methods of contemporary metaphysics on the grounds that the semantic notions are too thin to bear the weight. Stephen Stich (1996) defends a view somewhat like this, arguing that it is a mistake to think of the issue as to whether there are beliefs and desires as the question as to whether the terms ‘belief’ and ‘desire’ actually refer to anything. Stich’s main case for this view rests not so much on semantic minimalism as such, as on an argument that there is no prospect of a theory of reference that would adequately decide the issue, one way or the other. But semantic minimalism has the same effect.

Option C represents the attitude of local quasi-realism towards areas of commitments which it treats quasi-realistically. Concerning moral discourse, for example, we saw that (the original, non-global) Blackburn is not a quietist about the question whether moral commitments are genuinely representational, or descriptive—on the contrary, he regards it as a substantial theoretical discovery that they are not. Having reached that conclusion, he then regards the metaphysical issues as mute, *for that case*. In that sense, he is a (local) metaphysical

quietist about the topic in question. But he is not a quietist in the third column, of course—on the contrary, that’s where he takes the interesting work to be.

Option D is our kind of pragmatism. The table helps to make clear what’s right and what’s wrong about characterising our view as global quasi-realism, or describing quasi-realism as a local variety of pragmatism. What’s right about the characterisation is that our view does globally what quasi-realism does locally, *in columns 1 and 3*—viz., it combines metaphysical quietism with an interest in the issues which mark a radically non-quietist attitude to the use-explanatory issues in the third column. What’s wrong about the characterisation is that the two views never agree in column 2. The quasi-realist holds that there is always a substantial issue as to whether a domain of commitment is genuinely descriptive, or representational (and takes quasi-realism to be appropriate when the answer is that it is not); whereas our pragmatist holds that there is never a substantial issue of this kind.

Option E, finally, recommends quietism in all three modes. Some interpreters of Wittgenstein read him in these terms—among them, presumably, the interpreters that Blackburn has in mind, in the passage with which we began, when he says that Wittgenstein is often admired as a high priest of the crusade to deny differences and celebrate “the seamless web of language”. In earlier work (Blackburn 1990, 1993a), noting that this reading flies in the face of the fact that Wittgenstein repeatedly emphasises that the surface uniformity of linguistic forms masks deep differences in the things we do with language, Blackburn had proposed that Wittgenstein should be interpreted as a (local) quasi-realist—albeit one who leaves “unfinished business” (1993a, 589), in failing to address the issue of explaining how we can continue to speak of truth, fact, knowledge and so forth, in the non-descriptive discourses. This, of course, is the task undertaken by the quasi-realist. Hence Wittgenstein is only a proto-quasi-realist, on this reading.

As we have already noted, however, Blackburn’s view of Wittgenstein seems to have changed. In the paper with which we began, and in *Ruling Passions* (1998b) from the same year, Blackburn offers Wittgenstein as a model of what we’ve termed a global quasi-realist,

who throws even the term description “into the minimalist pot”. On this view, then—having thrown the representational notions into the pot—Wittgenstein emerges as our kind of pragmatist, a representational quietist, and belongs in row D.

We close by noting that there is another possible reading, which does locate Wittgenstein on row E—a philosophical quietist in all modes—without ignoring his insistence that language is not a “seamless web”. The key is to read Wittgenstein as interested in *description*, rather than *explanation*. He calls our attention to the differences, according to this reading of his project, but doesn’t regard it as part of the task of philosophy to try to explain them. In particular, he doesn’t regard the sideways, third-person stance of our anthropological pragmatists as an available *philosophical* stance.

At this point, there are two possibilities. One takes Wittgenstein to acknowledge that there are significant questions of the kind the pragmatist wants to ask, but to regard them as scientific issues, rather than philosophical issues. The other is more radical, taking Wittgenstein to maintain that there is no legitimate theoretical stance of this kind at all, philosophical or scientific. The former possibility is no challenge to our kind of pragmatism as such, but only its right to call itself philosophy. We have no strong views on this matter. (If pressed, we could always follow Peirce’s famous lead, inventing a new name for the enterprise.)

The second possibility is more serious, and connects with deep and interesting issues about the nature and possibility of theorising about language. These are issues for another time, however. Our task here has been to distinguish our kind of pragmatism from its less quietist neighbours, and especially from quasi-realism. Pragmatism agrees with quasi-realism that the use-explanatory issues in the third column are no place for quietism—on the contrary, they are some of the most interesting issues in philosophy, and worthy of much noise indeed. But noise should be that of a single voice, singing only in the key that these issues themselves demand, and resisting the temptation to mix its melody with the familiar but discredited themes of metaphysics and representationalism. We’ve urged, in particular, that semantic minimalism leads us to this kind of pragmatism. Whistled down the years by Wittgenstein,

Ramsey, Quine, and many lesser lips, semantic minimalism has long been a tune that everybody has in their head. What's surprising, in our view, is that so few people have realised how it finishes—the last quiet gasp of representationalism itself, still prelude to the new pragmatism.

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