

[Draft, references to be added later]

## **Naturalism, Pragmatism and the Retreat from Metaphysics:**

### **Scientific versus Subject Naturalism**

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In this paper I will be discussing and contrasting three kinds of naturalism, with special focus on two of them. These two latter positions represent different forms of what I call anti-metaphysical naturalism, insofar as they self-consciously demur at the so-called big questions of what the ultimate constituents of reality are, what is true and how everything hangs together. Both these positions also involve a certain element of pragmatism, one more explicitly and positively than the other. They contrast with the third kind of naturalism I will be discussing, mainly critically: (what I see as) the standard *metaphysical naturalism* of much recent analytical philosophy. On my (for present purposes simply stipulated) understanding of metaphysical naturalism, the position is an ontological one which claims that what most fundamentally exists are the entities posited by basic physics, at least in some suitably idealised form. *Prima facie* non-physical phenomena such as intentional mental states or moral values are to ‘discerned’ within this physicalistic ontology, that is, in some sense, *reduced* to this ontology, at least to the extent that they can be countenanced as real phenomena at all.

Turning to the anti-metaphysical forms of naturalism, the position that I myself recommend and have defended elsewhere is what I call ‘scientific naturalism’

(cf. Knowles 2006, 2008, forthcoming). According to scientific naturalism, science – natural science – is our unique source of fundamental knowledge, where ‘fundamental’ is understood to mean something like ‘explanatory most basic’. There is no assumption that science will ever reach any kind of fundament, but only that it is science that any given time will be what provides with what is most fundamental. The view is meant to be close to what Quine, at least in certain central texts, understands by naturalism, in particular, it is tightly related to his rejection of any first philosophy prior to science. Scientific naturalism is usefully seen as a metaphilosophical position, not simply because it contrasts philosophy with science in the way just mentioned, but also insofar as it doesn’t see naturalism as providing answers to any peculiarly philosophical problems – in this way, it clearly contrasts with metaphysical naturalism (I will say more on this below). In this respect, it thus also has affiliations with Fine’s *natural ontological attitude* stance in the realism-anti-realism debate in philosophy of science (see Fine XX). In my view, scientific naturalism is at least close to being what any defensible position that justifiably calls itself naturalistic must ultimately hold, and hence that it is worthy of the simple epithet ‘naturalism’ (cf. Knowles 2008). For purposes of placement in the territory defined by the current literature, however, the label ‘scientific naturalism’ is not inapt.

The other anti-metaphysical or pragmatist form of naturalism I will discuss is Huw Price’s *subject naturalism*, as elaborated in several recent publications (see especially Price 2003, 2004, 2006, forthcoming).<sup>1</sup> Spelling out subject naturalism instructively will require a more systematic treatment, to be offered below, but a

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<sup>1</sup> Price (forthcoming) refers to the introductory chapter of his forthcoming book *Naturalism Without Mirrors*, which is used with the author’s permission. Partly because this exists as yet only in manuscript form, I will not generally give details of references to the ideas of Price I will discuss in this paper, except where I cite material explicitly. In addition to the introductory chapter, the main source of my material is his 2003 article ‘Naturalism without representationalism’.

rough outline can be sketched here. Price presents subject naturalism as an alternative to a position he calls *object naturalism*, which, as we shall see below, is closely related to metaphysical naturalism. Elsewhere (Knowles forthcoming) I have classified Price as espousing a generic kind of view I call ‘non-scientific naturalism’, whose defenders are concerned to argue for a naturalism in which science is not our only source of fundamental knowledge; other prominent non-scientific naturalists include John McDowell, Susan Haack and Jennifer Hornsby. It is however debatable whether Price’s naturalism should be classed alongside these views. For example, Price does not see subject naturalism as involving the delimiting of natural scientific understanding with respect to certain domains, as, say, McDowell and Hornsby do (see moreover Price forthcoming a, which is a reply to Knowles forthcoming).

Whether there are aspects of subject naturalism that distinguish it from anything scientific naturalism positively claims is also open to debate, as we shall see later, but there is at least one clear negative difference between them, which concerns the fact that scientific naturalism demurs at giving any kind of account how thought and language relate to reality, in the way subject naturalism does. (Note I will not be explicitly considering here the other kinds of non-scientific naturalism mentioned above; for discussion of these see Knowles 2008, forthcoming.)

As I have mentioned, both scientific and subject naturalism are positions reasonably seen as pragmatist in their own different ways. When it comes to scientific naturalism the pragmatism is more a negative feature than a positive theoretical commitment: it consists, first, in the fact that there is no independent epistemological basis on which science rests – so that our commitment to science itself is thereby reasonably characterised as pragmatically, rather than in a narrow sense rationally based; and, second, in the fact that it doesn’t see science as offering a metaphysical

picture – some fully intelligible account of everything and how it hangs together, including our place within this picture. These themes are also Quinean, and bear further discussion in relation to the idea of what a ‘naturalised epistemology’ might amount to, but I won’t go into them in any detail here.<sup>2</sup> When it comes to subject naturalism, the pragmatist commitment is precisely more theoretical or ‘full-blooded’ as Price might put it, in ways I shall explain below.

In my view, either one of these non-metaphysical-cum-pragmatist naturalistic positions – scientific naturalism (or SN) or subject naturalism (or SuN) – is superior to metaphysical naturalism (or MN). In spite of its popularity, MN suffers in my view from insuperable problems, something that Price’s critique of what he calls ‘object naturalism’ is also largely aimed to demonstrate. When it comes to SN and SuN, the issues are somewhat more delicate.<sup>3</sup> SuN has considerable appeal insofar as it offers what can seem a naturalistically plausible explanatory framework for understanding how language and thought relate to the world they are in some sense about. However, since this account ultimately also runs into incoherence, or so I will argue, we must reject SuN and embrace SN. SN’s potential drawback is that it doesn’t offer any general account of the relation between thought/language and reality; on this issue, it essays a rather radical kind of quietism. I will discuss the plausibility of such a stance towards the end of this piece.

Even if my arguments are cogent and Price’s SuN is doomed, given the pragmatist elements in SN, I would not want to see this as a general refutation of pragmatist naturalism *per se* (even assuming that Price’s position gives the best and most plausible rendering of this overall philosophical position). It seems to me that

<sup>2</sup> An important part of this pragmatism in my view is that naturalised epistemology, at least under one understanding of what this is, simply doesn’t exist – see Knowles 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Subject naturalism has been endorsed by at least one pre-eminent neo-pragmatist, the late Richard Rorty (2005).

naturalism and pragmatism are not so much diametrically opposed positions, but rather epithets characterising a (possibly multi-dimensional) spectrum of positions ranging from the more to the less pragmatic, the less to the more naturalistic. If this characterisation of the situation is correct, then my hope is merely to make a case for shift to the right along this spectrum, as it were – towards its naturalistic end.

The plan for the rest of the paper is as follows. In section 1, I consider naturalism as a general philosophical position, arguing that, contrary to some recent sentiment in the literature, there are certain constraints or criteria a position has to fulfill to qualify as naturalism beyond a bland renouncement of entities like elves and ghosts together with respect for the achievements of natural science. I compare this with Price's general understanding of naturalism and present his conception of object and subject naturalism, indicating in particular how the former differs from scientific naturalism.

In section 2, I consider metaphysical naturalism: this turns out to be very close to object naturalism in view of Price's take on the latter, and both are open to devastating objections according to both me and Price, based on the criteria for naturalism adumbrated in section 2. Finally, in section 3, I turn to subject naturalism and the global expressivism it leads to in Price's hands, presenting first a moderately detailed summary, and then a critique that is also at least partly based on the criteria for naturalism. I conclude with a brief overview and defence of scientific naturalism's quietist stand on the mind-world relation.

## 1. Naturalism in contemporary philosophy

I want to start by saying something general about the naturalism debate today. It seems that for many the term ‘naturalism’ has become devoid of interesting content. No serious philosopher in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is often said, countenances strange supernatural entities like elves or gods that intervene in the day to day operations of the world, nor do they have any truck with the superficially less naïve but equally delusory ideas of psychic and spiritual forces of New Ageism. Moreover, most serious philosophers have nothing but a healthy respect for natural science within its proper domain. In that sense ‘we are all naturalists now’, as Roy Wood Sellars put it nearly a century ago now (Sellars 1922: *i*), and there is little of philosophical substance to *naturalism* per se. (For modern sentiments somewhat along these lines, see Feldman 2001, Haack 1993, Keil 2008 and several of the essays collected in de Caro and Macarthur 2003).

A curious dimension to this line of thought is that it takes for granted the falsity of what we might ordinarily think of as having taken centuries of hard work in science in order to overcome, namely, a magical or quasi-magical world view. This I think is in fact highly relevant to understanding the real nature of the naturalism debate as well as different varieties of non-scientific naturalism, as I argue elsewhere (Knowles 2008, forthcoming). What I want to do here, however, is point out there are at least two further criteria which I think any genuine and interesting naturalistic position must fulfill, in addition to renouncing belief in ‘ghosties and ghoulies’ (as it were) and acknowledging science’s successes.

The first and most fundamental of these is the Quinean rejection of first philosophy – the rejection of the view that there are ideas and categories that are in some sense prior to science and its discoveries, but that nevertheless form a basis for science and which it therefore must respect. Though both Kant and Carnap have

nothing but the fullest and healthiest respect for natural science, and indeed see much of philosophy as concerned to vindicate science, they do not qualify as naturalists by this standard. For both of them science has to be understood in relation to ideas that are not merely more science. The debate between naturalists and non-naturalists on this issue is not one I intend to enter there; the point is that it marks a very significant and non-trivial point of departure for distinctively naturalist philosophy.

Following closely on the rejection of first philosophy is a second criterion of naturalism that also finds a famous expression in Quine: what he calls *reciprocal containment* (see e.g. Quine 1969). For a naturalist, it is not only the case that epistemology is contained in science as the psychological study of knowledge; further, the activity of science itself is a suitable object for scientific enquiry, at least in principle – it being ultimately just another mode of human knowledge acquisition. What exactly reciprocal containment commits one to depends, as we shall see, on what one's naturalism otherwise involves. With regard to naturalism *per se*, I see reciprocal containment as essentially just a corollary of the rejection of first philosophy, but it bears emphasis as a separate commitment.

I think many would want to add a third criterion of naturalism at this point, one that some might in turn see as tightly related to the idea of reciprocal containment. This criterion I call *immanent realism*. I call it 'immanent' realism because it does not aim to be a metaphysical doctrine about what *really* exists, nor does it say anything specific about how thought relates to reality in the way metaphysical realism does (see below); I would call it *common sense realism* were it not for the anti-scientific connotations that 'common sense' has in the literature. I myself have been tempted to see immanent realism as part of anything worthy of the naturalism epithet, but in fact have come to think that we should refrain from

including it into the very definition of naturalism, as I will now explain. Immanent realism can be stated roughly as the view that human thought and language are parts of and products of an independent reality consisting of the universe and its origin, including at a smaller scale the evolution of life on earth – i.e. the reality that is detailed in the standard modern natural scientific story of how things came to be as they are today. Now there is certainly one implication of scientific realism I would endorse, namely the denial of idealism – the view that reality is in some way constituted by human thought and consciousness. It certainly seems hard to see how naturalism could accommodate idealism. However, recoiling to something even as non-committal as immanent realism aims to be would still be saying too much by way of a characterization of any naturalistic view whatsoever. Certainly *it may turn out* that human thought and language are in some recognizable sense ‘parts and products’ of a more basic set of processes. However it may also turn out that our theories of the former are to such an extent autonomous from theories of physical things that we would not want to say this. As an analogy, consider those who see theories of life as detailing a phenomenon that may be more generic than purely physical phenomena, in spite of the latter’s quantitative predominance in the universe (cf. Rosen 1991, a view discussed by Thompson 2007: 238). On such a line, it would not be correct to see living systems as ‘parts and products’ of a prior physical reality; something similar, I am suggesting, might hold for minds. In brief, if there is certain kind of pluralism in science, then we may end up with a view in which theories of the inanimate simply *line up alongside* theories of the animate and minded, in such a way that realistic talk of the kind in question here simply lapses.

For this reason, I draw the line at the rejection of first philosophy and the embracement of reciprocal containment when it comes to characterising naturalism



generally. Though certainly knowledge must be studied scientifically for a naturalist, there is no requirement that this study sees knowledge as part of a nature that is somehow more fundamental than it.

It is then these two criteria – along with respect for science and rejection of the supernatural – that should be respected, I contend, by any position that wants to call itself naturalist in any genuine and interesting sense. My view in fact is that these criteria in effect yield scientific naturalism as the only defensible form of naturalism: that they have bite in relation to any other position that seeks to satisfy them, rendering that position equivalent to scientific naturalism to the extent it is meaningfully characterised as naturalistic, and is plausible as such. Noteworthy, the criteria have bite in spite of the fact that the characterization they offer gives little clue as to what exactly does or should lie within the ambit of ‘science’. Thus some will still see naturalism, even strengthened in the way outlined, as fairly anodyne because it has no resources for drawing a non-arbitrary line between, in particular, natural and human science, where the latter is seen as an enquiry that seeks a different kind of insight from that natural scientific explanation can offer. I have argued that this is in fact not the case (cf. Knowles 2008, forthcoming). In this paper, my aim is to show they have bite in relation to other naturalistic positions that do not make use of this idea – in particular, in relation to metaphysical naturalism and Price’s subject naturalism.

I turn now to Price’s discussion of naturalism. For him philosophical naturalism is most fundamentally

...the view that natural science constrains philosophy in the following sense. The concerns of the two disciplines are not simply disjoint, and science takes the lead where the two overlap. At the very least, then, to be a philosophical naturalist is to believe that philosophy is not simply a different enterprise from science, and that

philosophy properly defers to science, where the concerns of the two disciplines coincide. (Price 2003: XX)

Without going into detailed interpretation of this passage I think it can safely be seen as consistent with my characterisation of it in terms of a rejection of first philosophy. Whether it implies a commitment to reciprocal containment is less clear, but I hold that this is something a naturalist should abide by (in the general sense above), and it will be clear from what follows that Price holds this too – at least officially.

Price goes on in the paper cited above to note that though hardly uncontroversial, this general kind of naturalistic view is not what most contemporary naturalists and their opponents take themselves to be arguing over. This view he calls ‘object naturalism’, which claims that all there is is the world studied by science, or that all knowledge is scientific knowledge. This can sound a bit like my scientific naturalism, but for several reasons we should resist any identification. Firstly, SN does not talk first and foremost in the material mode, that is, about what exists and what is true, but about what we know and how different bodies of knowledge relate to one another. Moreover, SN’s commitment is only to the *fundamentality* of natural scientific knowledge – in something like the sense of what is explanatorily most basic.

There is a further, I think related difference, discussion of which will also allow us to introduce Price’s alternative to object naturalism: subject naturalism. Object naturalism (or ON) is deeply concerned with what Price and others call *placement problems*: problems of how to fit certain phenomena into the world as described by science, phenomena such as morality, modality, consciousness and so on. The general idea, familiar now from several decades of so-called ‘naturalistic philosophy’, is that certain phenomena appear to be both very important to us human

beings – they are ones we routinely invoke in talking about and explaining the world – and yet also to map in a (to put it mildly) less than wholly perspicacious manner onto the fundamental entities posited by physics. For many naturalists this set up is all we need to get on with serious metaphysical work.

Price, on the other hand, thinks we should think clearly about what these kind of placement problems really amount to – what they presuppose about language, thought and their relation to the world.<sup>4</sup> Thus for Price object naturalism cannot be taken for granted, but is in thrall to another enquiry into what exactly placement problems are and what they presuppose – an enquiry which for Price is itself naturalistic, that is, in a broad sense, scientific, insofar as it concerns a study of the human species and one of its central features, namely the use of language. These ideas articulate the perspective of Price's subject naturalism (or SuN).

Though a full subject naturalistic enquiry is not something Price would pretend to have undertaken, he avers that there are at least certain strong indications that it will lead to a view of object naturalism as committed to a certain kind of picture of how thought and/or language relate to reality. Further, there are strong indications that this kind of picture is itself rather dubious. The upshot is that ON may well be ripe for fall, and that SuN is in fact all the naturalism we are likely to get. This upshot would lead further to a rather unexpected view – albeit not an unwelcome one, as Price sees things – about the relationship between language and reality: a kind of global or generalised expressivism (Price forthcoming). Though necessarily somewhat speculative and less obviously empirically based than the critical dimension of SuN, this view is one Price has also expended a deal of energy in articulating and defending, and is I take it also ultimately meant to be a broadly

<sup>4</sup> The move is somewhat reminiscent of that starting point of Kant's critical philosophy, a view elaborated upon by XX. Some further possible parallels between Price and Kant will be discussed below.

scientific one. (Sections 2 and 3 provide more details of Price's critique of ON and of SuN.)

Returning now finally to the relationship between SN and ON, what I want to stress is that SN does not at all clearly trade in placement problems any more than SuN. Or rather it would do so only if these were part of science, but there is no clear reason for thinking is the case, at least when it comes to the standard examples. Take a well-known example of a placement problem discussed by Jackson (1996: XX), that of solidity. According to Jackson, metaphysics of the kind involved in ON should tell us whether, in spite of the fact that (according to modern science) tables and chairs are not really solid in the way we used to understand this notion, they nevertheless can be said to be solid – whether solid things still exist or not. From the perspective of SN it is doubtful whether there is any significant issue here, since it seems highly unlikely that science has any use for the question about whether ordinary objects, in spite of what we now know about their material structure, still can be said to *be* solid, or not. Our fundamental knowledge of the world will not trade in talk of solidity; whether we in our everyday life continue to do so is another matter entirely.

With these differences clearly in mind, let us now turn to the view I call metaphysical naturalism.

## 2. Metaphysical naturalism (MN)

MN it seems fair to say is still quite wide-spread in contemporary analytical philosophy, and what most traditional naturalists seem to cleave to – a kind of default naturalism, if you like. It is not however anodyne by any means, but aims to offer

precisely a metaphysically and epistemologically coherent conception of reality and our place within it that does justice and indeed to a large extent employs the results of natural science. At the philosophical level, it effectively combines two different ideas: *physicalism* on the one hand, and *metaphysical realism* on the other. The first part of this constellation is physicalism: all that most fundamentally exists are the entities and properties of basic physics, on which all other real objects and properties supervene – perhaps they even reduce to this base in some sense of the word. The second part of the constellation is what I call metaphysical realism (MR hereafter), which I take to be closely related to the view Price calls *representationalism* (Price 2003). I understand MR here as the idea that true thought or assertion is, at least roughly speaking, adequately modelled by the metaphor of the mirror, i.e. in terms of the correct representation, in thought and/or language, of completely thought or language-independent bits of reality. I will also take this to cover what is essential to Price's representationalism.

The issues of metaphysical realism and physicalism are of course distinct. To start with, being a metaphysical realist doesn't seem to depend on being a physicalist (at least I'm not going to argue that here; note also that metaphysical realism doesn't seem to have any very direct connection with immanent realism, as discussed in the previous section). The question of physicalism also depends on many issues unrelated to metaphysical realism, such as whether there is any good reason to think the physical realm comprises a causally (or some other way) closed system – whether we need anything more than that fundamental forces to explain all phenomena, say. Nancy Cartwright is well-known for her view to the contrary (or at least the view that physicalism has not proven itself on this point cf. Cartwright 1999). If she is right, I take it physicalism is in trouble. However, even if she isn't, it isn't obvious that

physicalism in the sense relevant to MN follows.<sup>5</sup>

Partly though my own thinking on the matter and partly though Price's discussions I have become convinced that physicalism of the kind usually associated with MN is also in thrall to MR. To start with, one has to remember that physicalism is a metaphysical idea, not – plausibly – something that actual science itself gives us adequate reason to hold, let alone a part of science. Secondly – and it is here Price's contribution comes to the fore – it is a metaphysical project that seems to make most sense when launched from the perspective of a certain view of how language relates to the world – the perspective of MR. Using Price's metaphor, physicalistic metaphysics conceives of its project along the lines of a matching game in a child's book, seeking to link patterns on one page of a book – bits of language – together with patterns on the facing page – bits of the world (Price forthcoming). Achieving the correspondence is highly non-trivial but also highly significant insofar as we see our resources in terms of a sparse, physicalistic ontology on the right-hand page (so to speak): talk initially suggestive of something much richer and stranger turns out, under philosophical tutelage, to be talk of something in fact much less problematic. However, if one drops the idea of representation or matching it becomes hard to see what the point or even meaning of physicalistic reduction can be.

Price considers this latter possibility in his discussion of object naturalism as having a material starting point, rather than a linguistic one (Price 2003 – note then that ON *per se* is not committed to representationalism). Now causation has often been suggested as that which ultimately cuts nature at its joints, and this might suggest that there is a way of understanding physicalistic reduction that does not start with language. Instead of looking at what things are posited in language, can we not

<sup>5</sup> There would seem to be interesting connections between Cartwright's dappled picture of the world and the possibility of the kind of pluralism discussed in relation to immanent realism in section 1, but I won't pursue those here.

just look and see what does the work and adapt our conception of best theory to that? On this line physicalism (or ON) would be the view that since the only real causes turn out to be physical ones, the only real things are physical. But Price, if I understand him aright, sees at least two problems with this way of understanding physicalism. Firstly, physicalism is a doctrine about what is real and what exists, but using causation as a criterion for what exists seems arbitrarily to assume that only causally efficacious properties and entities exist (Price 2006). Secondly, and more fundamentally, the notion of ‘doing work’ – in effect, causation itself – is such an unclear concept that we need to treat it in the same, standard way as other notions we want to want to identify as real or not – that is, as something first identified through linguistic use, and then related to reality (Price 2003). So we don’t get around the linguistic starting point after all.

In this way, ON essentially merges with MN: though ON initially is formulated to be neutral on whether we start with the world or with language, it turns out that the idea of placement makes sense only on a linguistic starting point of the kind MN simply assumes.

There is no doubt more to be said about all this, but there is not space to take it up here. What I want to record instead is that I am further convinced, again with Price, that there is something inherently fishy about MN’s representationalist commitments. Price uses several different strategies here, but at least one central idea is that there is something suspect about the idea of a theory of the representation relation of a kind that would be needed to vindicate this kind of project, at least from the naturalistic perspective it itself recommends. Since any theory of how our words represent will also apply to the concept of representation itself, it seems to turn out that different and apparently conflicting theories will *all* be correct by their own

lights. But that just seems to show that there is no question of a correct theory in this case. (Cf. Price 2003.)

This is one kind of reflexivity problem, generated by MN's commitment to something like Quine's reciprocal containment thesis: what we in previous eras might have taken to be a foundational, first-philosophical theory of reference must, to be consistently naturalistic, be viewed as just another empirical theory. I think problems of reflexivity also infect the naturalist's metaphysical realism in a different way. Note first that the standard modern conception of the mind's relation to the world, such as we find the work of Descartes or Locke, is also metaphysically realistic, but in their case non-naturalistic: the mind or subject is placed *outside* of the natural order it represents. For a naturalist, by contrast, the mind is part the world it represents, in line with reciprocal containment. But if one combines this idea with metaphysical realism one seems condemned to incoherence: if the mind is in the world, but the world is known by means (at least *inter alia*) of representation in the mind, then it seems mind and world in some more or less literal sense must mutually contain each other. But one thing cannot contain another which itself contains the first thing; that is just incoherent.

So much for metaphysical naturalism (and object naturalism). I turn now to Price's anti-metaphysical, pragmatist alternative: subject naturalism.

### 3. Subject naturalism and global expressivism

The scrutiny of object naturalism and the critique of metaphysical naturalism offered above are for Price parts of a subject naturalistic enquiry. They are in a broad sense part of a scientific project aimed at understanding how thought and language relate to reality. But SuN doesn't for Price stop there, but rather leads to a whole new positive theory of how language relates to the world, which turns out to be characterizable as a



kind of global or generalised expressivism (Price forthcoming). (I will henceforth use ‘SuN’ to denote this global expressivism along with its natural scientific motivation and derivation.)

What exactly does this global expressivist view amount to? To start with, it offers a view of how the predicates of truth and reference function that makes no use of the representationalist paradigm – this being discredited and hence simply abandoned, at a theoretical, explanatory level. This is essentially a minimalist or deflationist theory, according to which talk about something in a way automatically guarantees an ontological niche for that thing insofar as we are prepared seriously to countenance the things we say. Thus, if we are prepared to assert that bombing Gaza was a narrow-minded act of savagery, then we will also be prepared to assert that ‘bombing Gaza was a narrow-minded act of savagery’ is true, and that the ideas of narrow-mindedness and savagery get to refer to things in the world. There is nothing substantial about these relationships, but since there is nothing more substantial to be had, we can talk freely of truth and reference in these cases as much as in science. This aspect of SuN thus marks a sharp divergence from metaphysical or object naturalism, which would not countenance such things as basic in its ontology.

In an earlier critique of SuN (Knowles forthcoming), I saw this as also enunciating a divergence from SN, at least in principle, for from the perspective of SuN I took it there could be nothing inherently less fundamental about knowledge of, say, moral facts than about what we claim to know from science. However, as Price explained in his reply (Price forthcoming a – albeit perhaps not exactly in these terms), even for subject naturalism there may be a sense of ‘fundamental’ in which the property of narrow-mindedness is less basic than that of spin in quarks, say. I think in fact there is more to say on this issue, as we shall see, but for present

purposes it is important to remember that in the first instance what distinguishes SN from SuN is what the former doesn't say – namely, it doesn't offer a general account of how thought and language relate to the world in the way SuN does.

This leads us directly to the second, more full-blooded component of SuN, that which in effect makes it expressivist. Importantly for Price, at least as I understand him, giving such an account is also something which is integral to making the view as a whole naturalistic, in that it considers our linguistic practices from a side-ways on perspective, as it were, and tries to explain them. The minimally representational role that deflationism ensures for language outlined above is thus to be supplemented by an explanatory account of why and how we use language as we do, including the ontologically committing role it has for us. Price's basic idea here is that what assertions fundamentally do is to give expression to a certain psychological reactions we have to things in the world, rather than passively mirroring how bits of the world stand in and of themselves. These reactions are constitutive of the *concepts* we deploy to talk about the world, not of the world, so the position is not idealistic, but rather precisely a kind of expressivism reminiscent of some interpretations of Hume and, most directly, the quasi-realism developed by Simon Blackburn in ethics. The reactions in question are seen as varying with the discourse in question – modal, mental, ethical and so on. Such a view inherits a burden of explaining why the various different reactions we have to the world nevertheless all find expression in the linguistic, assertional form we do in fact deploy, as well as how notions of truth become apt to for this practice. Price thinks something like Brandom's account of assertion, together with his own twist on the deflationary theory of truth, will work the trick here. I won't go into this side of Price's view explicitly here, but this connection brings out how the theory is also clearly pragmatist (or at least neo-

pragmatist): our linguistic practices are to be explained not in terms of relations of representation or mirroring to something independently given, but rather by seeing them as tools for coping with the world, such that our conception of the latter comes to reflect our characteristically human natures and needs.

Price acknowledges his debt to predecessors on much of this, in particular Blackburn's quasi-realism, as noted. Where he crucially differs is in the globality or generality of the expressivism. For many – Blackburn included – the quasi-realistic strategy in relation to ethics is seen by way of contrast with other, non-expressivist discourses. For Price this kind of restriction is a mistake. Thus the path to global expressivism opens up – a path on which, crucially, scientific discourse itself will be modelled by the same set of concepts.

It is here that Price's theory begins to get really interesting. For Blackburn, much of science is seen as a kind of background theory on the basis of which quasi-realist proposals are to be formulated. Moral judgments have quasi-realistic truth conditions because they reflect, fundamentally, certain reactions we have to a world seen as in and of itself devoid of moral facts. But when it comes to the latter description – that concerning the world devoid of moral facts – it seems Blackburn would say the expressivist model does not apply. (I should note that the relevant contrast class for him is in fact certain *kinds* of science, as well as common sense, but for the purposes of this essay, I will abstract away from this complication here.)

Price wants to avoid this kind of compromise in his expressivism since it is precisely meant to be a globalised version of that position. Towards this end he notes first that the substantive account of truth and assertion employed by quasi-realists is not parasitic on a representationalist account of these notions for other discourses. Though it has to some seemed natural to characterise moral quasi-realism in terms of

a contrast between two kinds of truth conditions for the relevant bits of language – one representational, one not – one was always going to need a positive account of assertion and truth for the quasi-realistic tracts anyway. In the eyes of some commentators, embracing deflationism about truth and rejecting the representationalist paradigm – as Blackburn himself has done – undercuts the significance and content of expressivism or quasi-realism. But for Price, the situation is rather the opposite: deflationism is tailor-made for a theory of language that makes no theoretical or explanatory use of the concept of representation, which is precisely what expressivism promises to do.

A further problem remains however concerning the status of science and the expressivist picture itself. (The latter is meant to be a scientific picture, remember, in line with its place as part of SuN.) If expressivism is perfectly general, then it seems science and indeed everything within it must also be understood expressivistically. Can Price coherently maintain this? To be a good naturalist, and embrace the ideals of reciprocal containment, he surely must. In the following I will nevertheless also consider in what ways some qualified retraction from the demands of naturalism might be plausible.

Price's own comments on this issue are varied and piecemeal rather than systematic. In the first instance he argues that many of the categories of science precisely are 'secondary qualities', as it were, and thus pass perfectly in with the generalised expressivist picture. One category he himself has worked with in this connection is that of cause. It would take us too far afield to assess the plausibility of this and related views in themselves, so let us simply grant them for the sake of argument. Assuming the tenability of this strategy generally, Price's position seems to be that science is pretty much in the same boat as any other discourse when it comes

to delineating the true and the real. It is only when doing science we can talk of what structures, entities or causes there are and what is true, just as it is only when doing morals that we can say what is good and is truly right. This is not an indictment on science, but rather a condition of its possibility.

One might object that that science still aspires to a kind of *globality* in its explanatory ambit in a way that other discourses do not, in particular as manifested in Price's global expressivism. Indeed I have objected this way in previous work (Knowles forthcoming). However, as Price indicated in reply (Price forthcoming a), this globality in explanatory scope is not in any way in tension with expressivism itself. Price is precisely concerned to be a thoroughgoing scientific naturalist in some sense, that is, to explain everything scientifically. Science itself shows us that it itself is just one discourse amongst many, albeit of a special character, and thereby also that its claims to *ontological* and *epistemological* fundamentality are misguided.

This still leaves me unsatisfied, however, not least in the light of subsequent writings of Price since our last exchange. Now, on the basis of the above one might gain the impression that for Price we cannot speak meaningfully of reality as it in itself, or see science as aiming to characterise this. For some this might be counter-intuitive, perhaps not so for others: whatever one's take on that question, however, the suggested implication is in fact resisted by Price. The fact that science is perspectival no more invalidates the idea of a 'view from nowhere' than it renders the science inadequate, he says. By understanding the perspective-dependent nature of a certain mode of understanding, say causal, one gains an insight into the world in itself, looking to us in certain way from a certain perspective:

The perspectivity of (some aspects of) current scientific practice turns out to

be entirely appropriate given its role in the lives of creatures in our situation.

[...] In appreciating this perspectivity however we get a new insight into the nature of the non-perspectival world (forthcoming: 33)

For Price then it seems the very idea of *things in themselves* – ‘the non-perspectival world’ – makes sense. *But how exactly?*, one feels impelled to ask. In particular does or can science *tell us* about things in themselves – does perhaps our current fundamental physics of time and space do just that, or at least could it in some suitably refined version? If so, it seems Price’s expressivism cannot after all be totally global, for it would not then apply to this level of science: we would not be being told (merely) how ‘certain things look from here [i.e. from our perspective]’, but how they are in themselves: we would be in touch with things which reveal themselves to us irrespective of our needs and natures.

Perhaps ultimately Price will want to take this line (though his remarks on the rule-following considerations suggest otherwise – I will not be considering these here). If he did take it, his position would not be without a deal of potential significance insofar as it suggests that an explanatory model initially developed for ethical talk should also have a much wider application, notably to discourses we today think of as thoroughly ‘objective’ and non-perspectival. However, I do contend that the view would not have the kind of significance Price takes his SuN to have. In the cases for which expressivism applied, we would be describing our relationship to the world *given*, ultimately, a prior, more basic conception of how this world is, our cognitive relation to which we simply take for granted – or else have to explain in some other way. Moreover, the knowledge we have through this prior conception would have to be seen as more fundamental than any we acquire through our ethical

or causal practices, since our explanation and understanding of the working's of the latter would be via this prior conception, which itself would either remain unexplained or be given some further explanation. Such a view remains clearly naturalistic, but it is not fundamentally a *subject* naturalism, in Price's sense. In the absence of any further ideas, and assuming metaphysical naturalism is discredited, the default line would have to be that we have here simply lapsed into scientific naturalism.

Price might reply here that I am setting up a false opposition between 'things in themselves' and 'how they seem from here'. Perhaps for some very special kinds of discourses he would say that how things seem through those discourses is how they are in themselves. Thus it is not that we have to find some other way of thinking about thought and reality, rather, the unadorned view is simply what you get when the contribution from our side reaches zero. But surely that is just what global expressivism denies not merely the actuality but, in virtue its general explanatory structure, in some sense the very possibility of. Indeed, in the end, it can seem that there is an internal tension in the whole structure of global expressivism, insofar as it both requires but cannot have the idea of things in themselves – requires in order to make sense of its explanatory structure, but cannot have because this explanation also requires an unadorned conception of things. (I will consider below the possibility that expressivism, contrary to Price's suggestions, can manage without the idea of things in themselves.)

A tempting alternative here perhaps is to see Price's expressivist position as a kind of Kantianism, in which all theoretical understanding is made sense of in terms of operations of the mind imposing itself on an in-and-of-itself unknowable noumenal realm. If that is where subject naturalism leads us, however, then surely we have left

behind naturalism, and are back with some kind of first philosophy (note in particular how Kant's realism here – his idea that there is a noumenal reality independent of thought and language – is not motivated by discoveries of science). Moreover, transcendental idealism seems to be a view that is hard to sustain – what sense after all can be made of 'things in themselves' when they are thoroughly and necessarily beyond our ken?

Is the idea of the noumenal something like a formal concept – or perhaps a Kantian regulative idea, that our thinking about the thought and the world has to conform to? This doesn't seem to be at all what Price has in mind in putting forward his global expressivism. But I think that even if we accept it, the whole apparatus of expressivism ends up being a mere instrument or model rather than a real explanation of anything.

We can see more clearly what the problem is here by considering a different line that Price I think might be more sympathetic to, but which ends up in essentially the same bind. On this line, we overlook Price's remarks about things in themselves; instead of rendering global expressivism in terms of these, we simply apply the model in relation to the realities furnished by particular discourses. That is, we turn our backs on the idea of fully detached science or reality as it in itself, and instead seek to understand whatever discourse we have to hand by relating it to another. Blackburn (XX) has called this view 'rolling pragmatism' and in the following I will do the same.

There are at least two problems with rolling pragmatism. The first is that its naturalistic status seems problematic. Now it may turn out that expressivist theories of the concepts we wish to understand do make use of fairly fundamental scientific conceptions of the world with which to frame their account of these concepts as



reactions to ‘the world’. But if ultimately there is no *necessity* about using the scientific conception in the logic of expressivist explanation – if it is not backed up by some privileged account of what it is we are reacting to – then it seems an expressivist account might just as well give an explanation of a certain concepts in terms of a reaction to some thoroughly non-scientific reality, such as the realm of moral values. Perhaps this kind of contingency is something Price is willing to live with, and will even see as part of a healthy, non-foundational naturalism. However, it becomes very unclear what the naturalism really amounts to here, for science itself has no necessarily privileged role as the most global perspective, as it does officially for Price, and presumably should for a naturalist.

The second and I think ultimately deeper problem concerns what sense we can give to rolling pragmatism as expressivist when ‘unanchored’ in this way. One way of bringing out the problem here is to ask how we can understand global expressivism itself expressivistically – as surely we must if there is no anchoring of this account in some prior conception of reality as it in itself. There seems, in fact, no clear way of doing this: expressivism seems to involve and presuppose at least two given metaphysical categories, the thinker or language user, and the world. To understand *this* view expressivistically, we have to have a new thinker or language user – someone other than us – and the world. That is difficult to make any sense of, in addition to enunciating what sounds like a very unedifying regress.

If that is right, then expressivism can on this current interpretation only be a kind of philosophical model. In effect, the ideas of ‘reality’ and ‘mind’ are formal or regulative ideas, as avered above, without ontological commitments themselves (even understood in a deflationary way). This seems to fit badly with expressivism as a scientific theory of the kind Price was concerned to give. In any case expressivism

becomes on this line simply a philosophical meta-discourse we employ to ‘understand’ other discourses – any one in relation to some other. Expressivism would then be not a discourse that is mandated by anything about the first-order discourses themselves. Moral discourse concerns our moral lives, causal discourse the control of our environment – whilst the expressivist discourse would simply be a model for thinking about how these discourses relate to one another. Well, if such a philosophy is useful in some relevant sense then we can maybe embrace it. But we would not then be giving ‘expressivist accounts’ of these other discourses in any ontologically committing sense (even deflationary), but merely relating some structure in one ‘discourse’ or ‘theory’ to that in another ‘discourse’ or ‘theory’ by way of a third ‘discourse’ or ‘theory’.

As noted, this doesn’t sound very much like what Price would want, even if it were considered somehow satisfactory. But I think in any case there are reasons to be dissatisfied with it. To start with, since expressivism on the above understanding it itself just a discourse, then all it can ultimately achieve is the interlocking of different discourses; but that kind of structural interlocking can be surely a central element of straightforward scientific naturalism – one doesn’t need expressivism. Secondly, even if one felt one needed an account of how interlocking occurs, there is nothing on the present view which makes it clear why particularly expressivism is needed – why we should not also consider other philosophical models. One of these might thus be transcendental idealism, understood here not as a metaphysical but as a kind of formal or regulative idea. Representationalist reductionism might be another, a model that again could divide into an a priori or an a posteriori version. Alleged problems with these models when seen as genuine theories would not be pressing on the present line, for their point would not be to be true, but rather to be useful in certain ways. What all

this shows I think is that without the metaphysical interpretation of these various theories we have no clear sense of the point of any philosophical theory of mind-world relations, including expressivism.

### *Conclusion*

There are then it seems problems not just with MN but with an initially plausible rival to it, SuN. Though other kinds of naturalism substantially different from these two cannot be ruled out, this result in itself gives some plausibility to the idea that the naturalist should not extend her commitments beyond those of SN.

But the question of course arises whether SN itself is a stable position. Surely to retain the very idea of scientific knowledge, we seem committed to idea that this is something we get by observing and reasoning about our surroundings, probing ever deeper into nature's secrets. If this process itself is to be understood naturalistically, as SN maintains in accord with reciprocal containment, then how can we without pure and utter arbitrariness draw a line here and say we shall not and cannot offer any account? Wouldn't anything that attempted to offer such an account willy nilly count as science? And wouldn't then SN itself have to embrace one or other of the accounts considered here – along with its incoherence, if I am right? In a word, how can *any* kind of naturalism avoid undoing itself?

There are three things I want to say in response to this. The first – which I do not lay a great deal of store by but that I want to mention for the sake of completeness – is that drawing a line at this kind of general account of the relationship between mind and world, though it may appear arbitrary to us, may in fact not be. There may be facts about our cognitive constitution that disable us in understanding precisely this issue, even though we have no way of understanding why this should be so.

Chomsky and others he has inspired have avered that we may be incapable of understanding all sorts of things like language use, scientific reasoning and consciousness. It has always struck me that these thinkers have too sharp a grasp on what they claim not to understand for this view to be plausible in relation to precisely these issues, but the idea that we are cognitively bounded is not for that reason undone. Indeed, if we are cognitively bounded, and if in addition we can have no idea of in what way we are, then the fact that the line appears arbitrary need be no reason to think it isn't real.

A second and I think more satisfying reason for drawing a line here is that the accounts offered in this piece all seem insist on taking what John McDowell has called a 'sideways-on' view of the relation between thought and reality. On this line we start with some conception of ourselves as embedded in a world which is somehow there anyway and of which we and our thoughts are a part – an idea not wholly dissimilar from that involved in immanent realism discussed in section 1. But insofar as immanent realism is not built into naturalism, it is not at all clear why particular scientific theories need to accept a sideways-on starting point of our place in nature, or why naturalism generally is committed to it. SN holds simply that science is our unique source of fundamental knowledge. As a consequence of this, both scientific and other knowledge will be studiable by recognizably and acknowledged scientific methods. There may also – in accord with the kinds of considerations of cognitive boundedness just adumbrated – be limits to the extent we can complete such an inquiry given the kinds of beings we are. I see nothing in this that commits one to anything like a sideways-on view of the kind McDowell warns against, and which is what seems pushes the naturalist towards giving the kinds of general account of the relationship between thought and language that create

problems.

I would like to close by pushing a little further this ambivalence about immanent realism, first raised in section 1. There I argued that this should not be viewed as criterial for anything wanting to call itself naturalism. But if, moreover, our scientific conception of mind in fact turns out to be one we simply have to place ‘alongside’, as it were, that of physical nature, then such a sideways-on picture could not be not merely demurred at, but also definitively rejected on empirical grounds. It would take too much space and time here to go into details here, but the idea that the mind from a scientific perspective defines a partially autonomous realm in this way is one that is beginning to win greater currency in our most recent cognitive science. It is not just that thought as internal representation is losing ground, but moreover that the scientific study of conscious experience and ‘being-in-the-world’ are beginning to be taken seriously as autonomous inputs to any fully satisfactory conception of the mind. My idea in a nutshell then is that such science will be concerned to *account* for the subject-object nature of our ordinary thinking, thus rendering the sideways-on picture, rather than the necessary starting point for, instead a datum to be explained by mind science.

## References