Two Readings of Representationalism

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1   The matching game

Imagine a child's puzzle book, designed like this. On the left side of the page are some peel-off stickers – perhaps the Opera House, the Harbour Bridge, the koala. The aim of the game is to match each of these stickers to the corresponding object in a picture on the right hand side of the page. The game is successfully completed when every sticker has been placed in its correct location.

Now think of the right hand side as the world, and the stickers as statements we take to be true of the world. For each statement, it seems natural to ask what *makes* it true – what fact in the world has precisely the "shape" required to do the job. Matching true statements to the world seems a lot like matching stickers to the picture ... and many problems in philosophy seem much like the problems the child faces, when some of the stickers are hard to place.

In both cases, the problem stems from restrictions on the options available on the right hand side of the game. In the first case, the child has to work within the constraints of the picture provided. If she's allowed to draw her own outlines, one for each sticker, the task is easy – engrossing, perhaps, at a certain age, but essentially trivial. But in a pre-assigned picture the outlines can be concealed or absent altogether, and hence the puzzle can be difficult or impossible to complete.

In the philosophical case, similarly, the game is trivial – not even engrossing, to most temperaments – if for any true statement 'P' at all, we're allowed to say that 'P' is made true by the fact that P. It becomes non-trivial when we impose limitations on the facts on the right – restrictions on the available "truthmakers" for the statements on the left.

There are various motivations for playing the philosophical game with restrictions of this kind, but by far the most influential, in contemporary philosophy, is the one I discussed in the previous lecture. It rests on two intuitions, or implicit assumptions. The first is a kind of proto-theory about language, in the light of which the game seems to provide a useful informal model of the relation

of language to the world. This proto-theory accords a key role to the idea that the function of statements is to "represent" worldly states of affairs, and that true statements succeed in doing so.[1]

I'll call this first assumption (big-R) *Representationalism.* Given Representationalism, the second motivation for the popular version of the game is the thought that if this proto-theory is to be incorporated into a mature scientific theory of human language, then the matching model needs to fit within the scope of a broadly scientific investigation of ourselves, and of the world we inhabit. After all, as we consider the world as scientists, we see ourselves and our language as one small but rather significant part of it. If the proto-theory is to be incorporated into a scientific perspective, the perspective itself seems to dictate the shape of the available facts and truthmakers. Roughly, the available shapes are the kinds of outlines recognised by natural science.

Notoriously, it turns out that there are many true statements – or *apparently* true statements ("apparently" qualifying either term) – that don't seem to line up neatly with facts of the kind uncovered by natural science.[2] There's a striking mismatch between the rich world of ordinary discourse and the sparse world apparently described by science. Much work in modern philosophy amounts to attempts to deal with some aspect or other of this mismatch. The project is often called simply *naturalism.* In the last lecture I called it *object naturalism,* reserving the generic term for a more basic view – with which, as I argued, object naturalism itself may well turn out to conflict.

The object naturalist's mantra is that there are no facts but the kind of facts recognised by natural science. But it isn't this mantra alone which commits object naturalists to their restrictive version of the matching game. In principle, one could endorse the mantra without thinking that the matching game provides a useful model of the relation of language to the world.[3] The puzzle stems from combining the mantra with Representationalism: with the proto-*theory* for which the matching game offers a metaphor. The proto-theory says that our statements "represent" aspects of the world. Object naturalists combine this proto-theory with the mantra's restriction on the available truthmakers, and it is the combina-

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[1]It may seem inappropriate to call this assumption a proto-theory. The label "theory" may seem too grand for such an obvious truth, or the label "proto" too tentative for such a well-established canon of philosophy of language. Nothing hangs on the label, however. For the moment, the important thing is the role that this assumption – trivial truth, proto-theory, or mature canon – plays in giving rise to the most taxing form of the philosophical version of the matching game.

[2]The problem cases are not just the classic misfits, such as the (apparent) truths of aesthetics, morality, and other normative matters, or those of consciousness. Arguably, at least, they include matters much closer to a scientist's heart, such as probability, causation, possibility and necessity, and conditional facts of various kinds. (More on this in the next lecture.)

[3]Quine provides an example, perhaps, at least under some interpretations.

tion that leads to the puzzles.

As we saw, the role of the proto-theory reveals an interesting vulnerability in the object naturalist's own position. By her own lights, the proto-theory counts as an hypothesis about what it is appropriate to say about language itself, from a scientific standpoint. If it turns out to be a bad hypothesis – if good science shows that the proto-theory is a bad theory – then the motivation for the object naturalist's version of the matching game is undermined. But it is undermined from *within* a scientific view of language and its place in the world. In that sense, the undermining wouldn't be an anti-naturalist conclusion – on the contrary, it would depend on convicting some self-styled naturalists of bad science. A good naturalistic account of our own linguistic practice might defeat Representationalism – might reveal it to be a poor theory about the relation between language and the world. The result would be naturalism – subject naturalism, as I put it – without (big-R) Representationalism.

In the previous lecture I outlined three reasons for thinking that this threat is a serious one. The first appealed to the attractions of semantic minimalism, which threatens to deprive Representationalism of its theoretical foundations; the second to the kind of challenges Stephen Stich raises to the project of grounding metaphysics on a semantic basis; and the third to concerns about circularity, if the semantically-grounded approach[4] is applied to the semantic notions themselves. I argued that these are all reasons for a (small-n) naturalist to question Representationalism – to doubt whether the matching game turns out to be a good analogy for the task that confronts a philosophical account of the place of language in the natural world.

But what alternative is there? In this lecture and the next I want to propose a way forward. It depends, of course, on giving up (big-R) Representationalism. In one sense, this is a familiar proposal. There are famous critics of Representationalism in modern philosophy, such as Dewey, Wittgenstein and Rorty. But although I'm sympathetic to these criticisms – much more so than most people in contemporary analytic philosophy – I'm also inclined to try to cast them in a less iconclastic form. I agree with these writers about the location of the Promised Land, at least in outline; but I'm less pessimistic than they are that analytic philosophy might reach it, starting from where it is now.

One ground for optimism, in my view, is that although this non-Representationalist utopia isn't well marked on the maps in contemporary analytic philosophy, it is surprisingly close to positions that are now well marked. The position I want to recommend is now accessible from familiar places, and even from comparatively popular places. The remaining work is mainly a matter of marking

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[4]That is, in our present terminology, the matching model.

some trails: of visiting various familiar locations which actually lie close by, and calling attention to the paths that lead in the right direction. That kind of work – trail-marking, much more than trail-blazing – is what I'm trying to do in this lecture.

The trickiest part involves some unfamiliar and hazardous territory around the notion of representation, but I'll approach that, too, from firmer and familiar ground. Some of the positions I want to use as stepping stones, or anchors, are associated with various familiar approaches to the puzzle of the matching game – to the problem that we seem to have a lot more true statements than naturalistically-respectable truthmakers. The best way to get a sense of where my alternative fits in is to begin there, with a sketch of the usual suspects.

2   Placement strategies

The problem is that of "placing" various kinds of truths in a natural world. We seem to have more truths than truthmakers – more stickers than places to put them. Given the nature of the problem – an apparent mismatch between the cardinality of two different sets – it comes as no surprise that there are three basic kinds of solution. One argues that the two sets can be matched, just as they are; that there's some non-obvious isomorphism that does the trick. The second maintains that the problem arises because we've under-counted on the right, and that there are more truthmakers available than we thought. And the third argues that we've over-counted on the left, and that there are fewer statements in need of truthmakers than we thought.

2.1   Isomorphism after all

The first option is *reductionism,* which seeks to convince us of the existence of some non-obvious isomorphism between the crowded tiers of true statements on the left, and the sparse natural facts on the right. A noteworthy recent version of this approach is the one due to Frank Jackson, now commonly called the Canberra Plan.[5] And a noteworthy technique for finding sufficient natural facts – not wholly new, but recently popular under the name *response-dependence* – is to appeal to the diversity of human responses to the world, and to argue that problem cases may

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[5]I contrast my approach to Jackson's in 'Naturalism and the Fate of the M-Worlds', and 'The Semantic Foundations of Metaphysics'. In the latter, especially, I try to exhibit the way in which Jackson's program depends on substantial assumptions about language – assumptions closely related to what we are presently calling the Matching Model – and to argue that this is problematic for Jackson's view, in various ways.

have relational truthmakers, involving such responses.[6]

2.2 Grow the pie on the right

The second option tries to adjust the imbalance by adding facts on the right. It is usually held to comprise two sub-options. The first accepts the constraint imposed by Naturalism, but argues that there are more facts within the scope of natural science than we thought (e.g., Chalmers on consciousness). The second argues that the constraint itself is at fault, and that we need to recognise that there are non-natural facts (e.g., Moore, as standardly interpreted, on moral facts). It is debatable whether the distinction between these two sub-options is more than terminological – an issue as to what we call science – but we needn't discuss that here. What's relevant is what the sub-options have in common, viz., that they attribute the original puzzle to excessive parsimony in our initial assessment of the available truthmakers on the right hand side of the model.

2.3 Shrink the pie on the left

The third option is to try to reduce the size of the set on the left – i.e., to try to reduce the number of statements we take to require truthmakers. In this case, there are several sub-options:

2.3.1 Eliminativism

Recall that the stickers are supposed to represent true statements. An eliminativist deals with the excess – i.e., with the embarrassing residue, after all the obvious candidates are assigned to their naturalistically-respectable places on the right – by saying that we're victims of large scale error. Large subclasses of the statements we take to be true are actually systematically false.

2.3.2 Fictionalism

A similar view offers the same diagnosis of the apparent mismatch between statements and truthmakers, but with an irenic conclusion. The eliminativist compares the false statements in question to the claims of discarded scientific theories, and recommends a similar fate. Fictionalists are mellow about falsehood. They embrace the idea of "useful fictions" – language games in which false claims serve some useful purpose. The practices of making moral or modal claims might be beneficial in some way, for example, despite that fact that the claims concerned

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[6]I discuss this approach in 'Two Paths to Pragmatism'.

aren't literally true. If so, we don't need to find truthmakers, but nor do we need to reject the language games in question.

2.4 Expressivism

The same lesson – that the point of some of the statements on our initial list is not to match worldly facts – is carried a stage further by expressivists.[7] Expressivists maintain that some of the utterances we take to be statements aren't genuine statements at all, but have some other point or function. The hope is that once these pseudo-statements are pruned away, the apparent imbalance between true statements and truthmakers will be eliminated, or at least reduced.

Note an important difference between fictionalism and expressivism – e.g., in the moral case. A fictionalist thinks that moral claims have both an everyday use and a literal use. Taken literally (and interpreted as a moral claim), the statement "Torture is indefensible" is *false.* Literally speaking, there are no moral facts to make it true. Taken in its everyday sense, however – within the fiction in which we all participate – it may be said to be true. By contrast, an expressivist doesn't have to admit that there is any sense in which such a statement is literally false. On the contrary, says the expressivist, taking it to be literally false is making a mistake about what kind of speech act it is. It isn't the kind of speech act that *has* a literal truth-value, in the sense that the fictionalist intends.

Thus an expressivist might hope to agree with everyday moral claims, without having to take anything back – without having to admit (even if only in private, as it were, with her professional colleagues) that all such claims are literally false. She agrees full voice with the everyday folk, and argues that the attempt to raise further issues – Are there *really* any such facts? – rests on a mistake about language. Once we see that moral claims are not genuinely descriptive, the expressivist assures us, we see that such metaphysical issues rest on a category mistake. See things properly and you see that they simply don't arise.

However, it might seem that the advantage of not having to say that our moral claims are *false* comes with a countervailing disadvantage. Doesn't the expressivist have to give up on the idea that there could be some everyday sense in which such a claim is *true*? Indeed, how is the expressivist going to account for the fact that we *call* such claims true and false, if they are not really in the business of making claims about how things are?

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[7]This is not to suggest that expressivism is a descendant of fictionalism. It might be more accurate to say that fictionalists are proto-expressivists, who haven't yet realised that language needn't wear its logical form on its face.

3 Quasi-realism and the threat of globalisation

These issues are best addressed in the version of expressivism called *quasi-realism,* championed over many years by Simon Blackburn. The quasi-realist's project is to begin where expressivism begins, with the thought that the primary function of certain of our (apparent) statements is not that of describing how things are, and yet to show how, nevertheless, such expressions might earn a right to all or most of the trappings of descriptive 'statementhood' – in particular, the right to be treated as capable of being true and false.

As Blackburn emphasises, the appeal of quasi-realism is to provide a way of dealing with placement problems, without resorting either to implausible metaphysics or the error theory. If successful, quasi-realism explains why the folk practice of making moral claims is in order just as it is, *and* explains why further any metaphysical enquiry about whether there are *really* moral facts is inevitably missing the point (in being premissed on a mistaken view of what we are doing with moral language).

Quasi-realism is important, in the present context, because the view I'm trying to put on the map can be thought of – in most respects – as a generalised or "global" version of quasi-realism; a position just further down the same path. To understand how the generalisation proceeds, note first that what expressivism does is to remove some (apparent) commitments from the matching game – to say that the matching model is a bad model of the relation of those commitments to the world. (What quasi-realism in particular adds is an account of why, on the surface, it "looks as if" the matching model is applicable.) In place of the matching model, presumably, expressivism offers some positive account of the use of the parts of language in question – some account compatible with the basic ("subject naturalist") premise that the creatures employing the language in question are simply natural creatures, in a natural environment.

Typically, of course, expressivists do all of this *locally.* They think that some of our claims are genuinely factual, or descriptive (and hence, presumably, characterisable in terms of the matching model, in so far as it works at all). And they think that for any of our claims or commitments, there's a genuine issue whether it is really factual, or descriptive. In other words, they take for granted what Rorty calls the **Bifurcation Thesis** – the doctrine that there is a line to be drawn in language, between descriptive and non-descriptive uses.[8] With this thesis in place, expressivism is taken to be needed when the answer is held to be "No" – when something that looks superficially like a factual claim is held to fall on the non-descriptive side of the line.

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[8]Usually non-indicatives are regarded as non-descriptive by default, and the interesting question is thought to be whether there are non-descriptive indicatives, too.

However – this is a crucial point – the Bifurcation Thesis, and in particular the belief that some claims are genuinely descriptive, play *no role at all* in the positive story, in the case of the commitments the expressivist regards as not genuinely descriptive. In other words, the expressivist's positive alternative to the matching model doesn't depend on the claim that the matching model is *ever* a useful model of the relation between natural language and the natural world. So there's no evident barrier to abandoning the matching model altogether, and endorsing *global* expressivism. This is the view that I want to recommend.

A quasi-realist of a more conventional stripe, who does want to hold onto the Bifurcation Thesis, is committed to a kind of two-tier view of the landscape, with respect to a whole range of notions that we associate with the business of making claims and assertions. In effect, he must think that there are both *loose* and *strict* answers to questions such as: 'What is to be a *belief,* an *assertion,* a *statement,* a *judgement,* a *proposition* (even a *fact*)?' The loose answer is supposed to tell us what descriptive and quasi-descriptive uses of language have in common, the strict answer what separates the real cases from the merely quasi-cases. The loose answer characterises all the passengers on the flight, as it were, the strict answer just those who are travelling first class.

I think that a quasi-realist who devotes his energy to arguing that economy class passengers are entitled to first class service – that commoners are entitled to cake, or at least some decent simulation of cake – is in danger of missing some larger questions on either side. What, if anything, entitles the "real" first class passengers to this kind of treatment? And what does it take to get on the plane in the first place – what is it that the first and economy class passengers have in common? In different ways, both of these questions abstract from the quasi-realist's *local* concerns – that of arguing that a particular vocabulary is entitled to an upgrade, or at least to most of the advantages that would follow from an upgrade – to a more general question: How do we understand the genuinely descriptive claims (so called)? And what is it that all claims have in common, whether "genuinely descriptive" or not?

Quasi-realism's commitment to the Bifurcation Thesis may thus have hampered the enterprise of developing an adequate general theory of judgement and assertion (whether strict or loose). If nothing else, I think, it has tended to muddy the waters, by disassociating the issue as to why moral claims (say) take the "declarative" form that they do, from the deeper question as to why *any* speech acts take such a form (strictly or loosely).

For the loose version of these broader questions, the quasi-realist is going to be looking for answers that don't simply presuppose Representationalism. The whole point is supposed to be that something can properly be an assertion (or a statement, a belief, a proposition, or whatever) in the loose sense, without being

in the business of (big-R) Representing anything. What the quasi-realist needs, in other words, is an approach to issues such as "What is an assertion?" which doesn't presuppose the kind of theoretical underpinnings that properly belong, if anywhere, only to the strict cases.

Where are we to find such a thing? It seems to me that there is one pre-eminent candidate in contemporary philosophy, namely, Brandom's *inferentialism*. Brandom's approach not only offers us an answer to questions such as "What is an assertion?" – telling us that it is a certain move in a particular game of giving and asking for reasons – but also, crucially, and as Brandom emphasises, gives us an answer that rests on expressivist foundations. So it doesn't presuppose any of those (big-R) Representationalist notions on which a quasi-realist can't afford to be relying at this point.

4   What gives stickers their propositional shape?

Thus I'm attempting to recruit Brandom's inferentialist account of assertion, to answer a question I think Blackburn's quasi-realist should have been asking a little more loudly: What is it that all declarative claims have in common (*quasi* and *really* descriptive claims alike, if such a bifurcation there be)? I'm not sure how either party feels about being roped to the other in this way, but in my view the combination has much more going for it than might appear at first sight. I want to try to convince you that Blackburn and Brandom are climbing the same mountain, even if they come to the bottom of it from different directions. (I also want to try to convince you that the Promised Land is in sight at the top, but more of that later.)

Reverting for a moment to the metaphor with which we began, the question what all declarative claims have in common can be thought of as the question is what gives our sentential "stickers" their distinctive assertoric or "propositional" shape? What makes something the kind of thing that properly figures – or at least, looks as if it properly figures – on the left side of the game of matching statements to the world? As I say, I think we find a powerful and plausible answer to this question in Brandom's inferentialism – in the idea that most fundamentally, assertions are to be construed as moves in a linguistic game of "giving and asking for reasons".

Brandom doesn't claim that making assertions is the only game we can play with language, of course, but he does claim that the assertoric game is both central and indispensable. Contrasting his own view to Wittgenstein's, he explains that his view requires that language "has a downtown" – that *assertion* is a fundamental linguistic activity, on which others depend:

> By contrast to Wittgenstein, the inferential identification of the conceptual claims that language ... has a *center;* it is not a motley. Inferential practices of producing and consuming *reasons* are *downtown* in the region of linguistic practice. Suburban linguistic practices utilize and depend on the conceptual contents forged in the game of giving and asking for reasons, are parasitic on it. (2000: 14)

4.1 A challenge to functional pluralism?

I mention this because at first sight, it might seem that Brandom's view thus challenges Blackburn, too. After all, Blackburn interprets Wittgenstein as a kind of proto quasi-realist. (When once or twice Blackburn flirts with global quasi-realism, he offers Wittgenstein as an example of someone who might be seen as moving in that direction.) Where Blackburn's expressivist wants to see a variety of superficially assertoric language games, differently related to various functions and psychological states, doesn't Brandom show us a single practice of making commitments, offering entitlements, giving and asking for reasons? For Brandom, surely, it isn't an option to throw the notion of assertion "into the minimalist pot" (as Blackburn notes that Wittgenstein might himself do). On the contrary, assertion is *the* fundamental language game, for Brandom, and the core of his expressivism is an investigation of the nature of this fundamental game.

In my view, however, there's actually no conflict here – quite the contrary, in fact. After all, even Wittgenstein acknowledges the common 'clothing', which makes different language games superficially similar (and thereby misleads us into thinking that they are all doing the same job). It is open to us to say that the key similarity is precisely that various of the different language games all avail themselves of the same inferential machinery. This is thoroughly compatible with underlying pluralism, so long as we also maintain that the various different kinds of commitments answer to different needs and purposes – have different origins in our complex natures and relations to our physical and social environments. It is open to us to say this as long as we reject what is otherwise a competing account of the significance of assertions, viz., that they exhibit a common relation to pre-existing conceptual contents (which puts the basic pluralism at the level of differences of content, rather than differences of function).

Thus I think we can follow Brandom here – agree that language has a downtown – without abandoning the pluralist aspect of Blackburn's expressivism. (It's another question whether the Bifurcation Thesis survives, but we'll come to that.) To preserve the pluralism, what we need is the idea that although assertion is indeed a fundamental language game, it is a game with multiple functionally-

distinct applications—a multi-function tool, in effect.[9] So long as the right way to theorise about these applications is in the expressivist's use-based vocabulary, the position is compatible with the kind of functional pluralism of Blackburn's version of Wittgenstein.

Indeed, Brandom's project seems not only compatible with this kind of functional pluralism, but thoroughly committed to it. Brandom characterises his project as follows:

> Starting with an account of what one is *doing* in making a claim, it seeks to elaborate from it an account of what is said, the content or proposition— something that can be thought of in terms of truth conditions—to which one commits oneself by making a speech act. (2000: 12)

> Pragmatism about the conceptual seeks to understand what it is explicitly to *say* or *think that* something is the case in terms of what one must implicitly know *how* (be able) to *do.* (2000: 18)

Thus Brandom aims to show how conceptual content arises from pragmatic function, and this could only fail to involve some sort of pragmatic functional pluralism if Brandom were to offer us the *same* functional story for every sort of content. That is obviously not what he intends, however. On the contrary, Brandom's project is to link different kinds of vocabulary to different kinds of practices and pragmatic tasks.[10]

So while Brandom's account may impose a degree of uniformity on language that some Wittgensteinian pluralists might wish to reject – offering us a uniform account of the way in which Wittgenstein's common linguistic 'clothing' is held together, so to speak – it not only allows but actually *requires* that this uniformity co-exist with an underlying functional diversity of the kind that expressivists such as Blackburn and Gibbard require. It not only allows but insists that different pieces of linguistic clothing do different things, even though there is an important sense in which they are all put together in the same way, and all belong to the same assertoric game.

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[9]Brandom warns us against misuse of the idea that language is a tool—that language has a *purpose*—but nothing I say here treads on controversial ground in this respect. (On the contrary, as I'm about to explain, the functional pluralism I have in mind here is of a kind that Brandom himself wants to highlight.)

[10]Indeed, it *couldn't be* what he intends, on pain of falling back into his opponent's camp. If Brandom were to say that we were *doing* the same thing, in the relevant sense, in making any assertion whatsoever, then he would merely have offered us a pragmatic account of assertoric *force*— by coarse-graining to this extreme, his account would simply fail to connect with what *varies* from assertion to assertion, and hence would have nothing to say about *content* (or the dimension of variability it represents).

4.2   What happened to the class system?

But is Blackburn out of the woods, by Brandom's lights? If we follow Brandom in characterising assertions as moves in a game of giving and asking for reasons, what happens to the idea that some *apparent* assertions – e.g., moral claims – are not genuine, first class assertions? Moral claims certainly seem to count as assertions by these standards, so how can a quasi-realist take them to be less than first class assertions (except by challenging the inferentialist account itself).[11]

There are actually two issues here, I think. One is the question whether admitting that moral claims (say) are genuine assertions *in the inferentialist sense* would be at all in tension with what expressivists had in mind, when they denied that such claims are assertions. I think the right answer to this question is a resounding "no". What expressivists took themselves to be denying was that the primary function of moral claims was that of "tracking" some distinctive moral feature of reality. This would only be in tension with the thesis that moral claims are assertions in the inferentialist sense, if the inferentialist notion were also a "world-tracking" notion – and this seems strikingly not the case (more on this in a moment). On the contrary, and as above, the inferentialist notion has the same expressivist bloodlines as Blackburn's quasi-realism, and any conflict at this point is superficial and terminological.[12]

The second issue is trickier. Does Brandom's view of assertion leave any room for a Bifurcation Thesis, of the kind (and in a place) that Blackburn's local version of quasi-realism requires? Or does it necessarily recommend a more global version of expressivism? My money is on the latter option, but I'm not going to try to make a case for it here (I'll return to it in the third lecture). Instead, I want to finish by taking up the theme I just mentioned in connection with the first issue – a distinction between the "world-tracking" kind of representation that expressivists such as Blackburn and Gibbard have traditionally been in the business of denying (to moral claims and to their other target vocabularies), and what I think is a quite distinct notion of representation that emerges from inferentialism. I think there's a distinction that needs to be clearly drawn here, which has been overlooked, or at least insufficiently remarked, by almost everyone in these debates. I'll call it the **New Bifurcation Thesis**.

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[11]This objection is like the familiar claim that deflationism about truth and reference defeats non-cognitivism, by making it the case that moral claims come out as truth-apt, by the only standards – rather undemanding standards – that deflationism allows.

[12]Though there's room for argument about where Brandom wants to leave us in this respect, I think. Sometimes he writes as if his project is that of rebuilding Representationalism on pragmatist foundations. On this matter, see my 'One Cheer for Representationalism'. Here, I'm taking for granted that whatever his own intentions in the matter, his approach doesn't in fact yield any kind of (big-R) Representationalism. More on this below.

5   The new Bifurcation Thesis

Let's step back a moment from the issues we have been considering – expressivism, inferentialism, placement problems, and so on – and think about notions of representation as they occur in what (in the nicest sense) we might call more naive, or less "meta", regions of philosophy and the cognitive sciences. Imagine a survey of notions of representation in play in these fields. Here's a hunch about some neglected structure, that I think such a survey would reveal. I think it would reveal that there are (at least) two distinct focii, or conceptual nodes, around which various uses of representational notions tend to cluster.

'e-Representation' [13]

> On the one hand we have the *environment-tracking* paradigm of representation, dependent on such notions as covariation and (what Field calls) indicator-relations – think of examples like the position of the needle in the fuel gauge and the level of fuel in the tank, the barometer reading and air pressure, and so on. In these cases, the crucial idea is that some feature of the representing system either does, or is (in some sense) 'intended to', vary in parallel with some feature of the represented system. (Usually, but perhaps not always, the covariation in question has a causal basis.) In biological cases, for example, this notion gives priority to the idea that the function of a representation is to co-vary with some (typically) *external* environmental condition: it puts the system–world link on the front foot.[14]

'i-Representation' [15]

> On the other hand we have a notion that gives priority to the *internal* functional role of the representation: something counts as a representation in virtue of its position or role in some cognitive or inferential architecture. Here it is an *internal* role of some kind – perhaps causal–functional, perhaps logico-inferential – that takes the lead.

Of course, it is usually taken for granted that these two notions will fit together in some intimate way. Typically a view which gives initial priority to the latter will then want to read it as a sophisticated version of the former – such is the grip of Representationalism. But my point is that this assumption isn't compulsory. It is open to us to maintain – and to offer as a remedy for some some of our

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[13] "e" for *environmental* or *externalist.*

[14] Even if the relevant piece of the world is sometimes something within the skin, as it were, as in the case of pain or thirst.

[15] "i" for *internalist* or *inferential.*

present difficulties – that these two notions of representation should properly be kept apart, not pushed together.

It takes some effort to see that the two notions of representation might float free of one other, but I think it is an effort worth making – all the more so when the systemic-functional notion in question is a rich, normative, linguistic notion of Brandom's kind, rather than some sparer causal–functional notion of mental representation. The vista that opens up is the possibility that representation in the systemic sense is a much richer, more flexible and more multipurpose tool than the naive view assumes.[16]

Once the distinction between these two notions of representation is on the table, it is open to us to regard the two notions as having different applications, for various theoretical purposes. In particular, it is open to us to take the view that at least by the time we get to language, there isn't any useful external notion, *of a semantic kind* – in other words, no useful, general, notion of relations that words and sentences bear to the external world, that we might identify with truth and reference.[17]

5.1   Two notions of external constraint

True, we need to explain how the two notions are so easily run together, but for an expressivist, used to the idea that language plays tricks on us, this seems no huge challenge. The key, in my view, is to recognise a systematic confusion between **two notions of external constraint.** The first of these is the kind of "in-game externality" provided by the norms of the game of giving and asking for reasons – the fact that *within the game,* players bind themselves, in principle, to standards beyond themselves. This is a theme I've explored elsewhere. In my view, the most illuminating route to a pragmatic theory of truth is to see it as associated with this kind of in-game externality – as a normative constraint, external to any individual speaker, to which speakers necessarily take themselves to be subject, in playing the game of giving and asking for reasons. It is an "in-game" notion in precisely the sense that winning itself is an in-game notion, in a game such as chess: you don't understand the notion of winning unless you understand what it is to play the game.

The second notion of external constraint goes with that of covariance – and hence 'normal', 'intended' or 'proper function' covariance – between a tokening

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[16]Once again, quasi-realism provides a useful stepping-stone. The quasi-realist is already committed to the idea that something can behave for all intents and purposes like a "genuine" belief, even though it has is origins at some "non-cognitive" level.

[17]Note that this is a conclusion that semantic minimalists have already come to (directly, as it were).

of a representation and an element of an external environment. In this sense, a token fails the constraint if it is a counter-example to the general or intended pattern – a 'false positive', or a 'false negative'. As these terms themselves indicate, it is easy to run this notion together with the in-game norms of truth and falsity (thus confusing *in-game* answerability for *environmental* answerability), but this is a mistake.[18] The two notions have their origins in two distinct notions of representation. The former belongs in a particular (normative, inferentialist) version of the systemic-functional notion, which characterises representations in terms of their roles in networks of various kinds. The latter belongs with notions of representation as environmental covariance. My New Bifurcation Thesis claims that these are not two competing accounts of a single species of representation, but two distinct species; and that this fact, not the old Bifurcation Thesis, is the key distinction that expressivists need, to make their project run smoothly.

6   The big picture

The view I'm challenging can be thought of as a loosely articulated combination of two fundamental assumptions about language and thought. The first assumption (call it the *Content Assumption*) is that language is a medium for encoding and passing around sentence-sized packets of factual information – the *contents* of beliefs and assertions. The second assumption (the *Correspondence Assumption*) is that these packets of information are all 'about' some aspect of the external world, in much the same way. For each sentence, and each associated packet of information, there's an appropriately 'shaped' aspect of the way the world is, or could be – viz., the state of affairs, or fact, that needs to obtain for the sentence to be true. The orthodox view bundles these two assumptions together (not recognising that they are distinct). Once both are in place, it is natural to regard language and thought as a medium for mirroring, or representing, these sentence-sized aspects of the external environment, and passing around the corresponding packets of information from head to head.

My proposal rests on pulling the two assumptions apart, foregrounding the Content Assumption but sidelining the Correspondence Assumption, replacing it with richer, practical and more pluralistic understanding of the role of various kinds of linguistic information in our complex interaction with our environment. The key is inferentialism, which frees the Content Assumption from the Correspondence Assumption. According to an inferentialist, the internal logical ma-

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[18]As I'll explain in the next lecture, one source of the confusion seems to be that the in-game notion has the character of faithfulness to a external realm of facts; which can make it seem like the second notion, if we fail to notice that the realm of facts in question is itself a product of the game.

chinery of language creates packets of information, or contents, but these may be associated with many different functional relationships, in the complex interaction between language users and their physical environment.

From the inside – as ordinary language users – we don't notice these differences between one sort of content and another. We talk about 'facts' of many different kinds – e.g., about tastes and colours, or right and wrong, as easily as about shape and position. The differences are only visible from a theoretical perspective, by asking about the different roles that commitments about these various matters play, in the lives of creatures like us. (Facts thus become a kind of projection of informational structures made possible by language, echoing Strawson's famous remark that 'if you prise the statements off the world you prise the facts off it too' (Strawson 1950); and there is plurality in the resulting realm of facts, reflecting the underlying plurality of functions of kinds of assertoric commitments.)

The most interesting part of the project is then to explain *how there come to be* statements with particular contents, by thinking about the practical role of the particular instantiation of the assertion game that produces tokens with such content. There is a new dimension of variability at this point, corresponding to the plurality of available functional roles – again, more on this in the next lecture. The general advantage of this pragmatic direction of explanation is that it is easier to account for the distinctive practical role of the concepts in question – e.g., moral or probabilistic concepts – if we *begin* with that role, than if we begin elsewhere and try to work our way to the use.[19] Once again, traditional expressivists saw this advantage locally. My project seeks to institute it globally. My aim is thus to have all the advantages of traditional expressivism, without the big disadvantage: the need to make good the bifurcation thesis – to find a radical divide in language, where usage marks none.

To get a sense of the big picture, let's go back to the sticker analogy. Think of the systemic, inferential, notion of representation as offering an account of what gives a sticker its 'propositional' form in the first place. The placement problems arose from the fact there there are a lot more stickers given form by their systemic inferential roles than truthmakers on the right-hand side of the game, in the world as seen by natural science.

My recommendation is that we deal with this problem by *playing a different game.* In place of the old project of matching stickers to shapes in the natural world, I recommend the project of explaining (in naturalistic terms) how stickers *obtain* their characteristics shapes. Freed of the requirement that they must bear semantic relations to the natural world, stickers – or representations in the systemic,

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[19]In the moral case, the problem in question is what Michael Smith calls the moral problem; for probability, it is the problem of justifying something like Lewis's Principal Principle; and so on.

in-game sense – can now occupy a new dimension of their own in the model, orthogonal to the natural world. Like the figures in a pop-up book, they stand up from their bases in the natural world, without being constrained to match or resemble anything found there.

Of course, a pop-up book does all the work for us, as we open the page. For a more illuminating metaphor, let's make the construction into a puzzle – a kind of three-dimensional jigsaw puzzle. We begin with a large collection of shapes or pieces, each of them a statement we take to be true, and a large board or playing surface, depicting the natural world (in such a way as to give prominence to our own situation, as creatures with certain attributes and situation, within that world). In effect, our task is then to solve two kinds of puzzle simultaneously. We need to arrange subsets of the pieces into clusters, fitting them together so that (as in an ordinary jigsaw puzzle) the shape of each is defined by its conceptual relations to its neighbours (and eventually, perhaps, to the super-cluster of all the pieces). And we need to position each of the resulting clusters in the correct place on the board as a whole, so that its edges bear the right relations to particular features of the situation of the speakers (ourselves, in this case) who are depicted on the board.

For example, the pieces representing probabilistic statements need to bear certain internal relations to one another, corresponding to the inferential or functional links that define internal representations and their conceptual components. But they also need to bear the right functional relations to the decision behaviour depicted on the underlying board, to count as *probabilistic* statements at all. Thus, at least very roughly, the first stage of the puzzle is concerned with what makes a piece of the puzzle a *statement* at all; the second stage, with pragmatic factors about its use which may play a crucial role in determining *what* statement it is. (Missing altogether is the idea that the latter fact is determined by some matching to a shape already discernible in the natural world.)

Thus we have a model in which there is a substantial *internal* notion of representation – a substantial theory as to what gives a piece or a pop-up figure its propositional shape – but no substantial *external* notion of representation. As the model illustrates, moreover, internal notions of representation are not constrained by the cardinality of the natural world. So long as we find roles for pieces which are not that of matching outlines in the natural world, we can happily allow that there are many more pieces than available outlines. In effect, this is the original pluralist insight of expressivism and quasi-realism, here given a more attractive home, in a version of the picture in which external representation disappears altogether, *for theoretical purposes.*[20]

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[20]The model still allows for a deflationary view of the matching relation. More on this next time.

As we've seen, the view thus combines plurality at one level with unity at another, resolving the tension that plagues other forms of expressivism and pragmatism. But it shares with conventional forms of expressivism an important philosophical moral: it warns us that what looks like a problem about the nature of some part of reality – e.g., about colours, or moral properties, or numbers – may be better addressed as a question about the role of certain kinds of vocabulary in the lives of creatures like us. The moral is that philosophy's debt to science is properly repaid not by looking for these things within the scientific world, but by explaining in scientific terms how natural creatures like us come to think and speak in these ways.

7   Conclusions

- Brandom, on the one hand, and expressivists such as Blackburn and Gibbard, on the other, are working two sides of the same street.

- To be clear about where the street leads, we need the new Bifurcation Thesis – we need to recognise that there are two distinct notions of representation in play, liable to be systematically confused.

- The right 'ism' for representation: not *nihilism* but *dualism*.