

Pragmatism: All or Some?¹

1. Everyday Representation

The conference at which this paper was delivered was unusual for me. If we think of philosophers who emphasize reference, representation, fact, truth, truth-makers, and ontology as conservatives, on the Right, and we think of those who talk instead of expression, discourse, norms and social practices as radicals, on the Left, then I am usually attacked from the Right. My quasi-realist, right-wingers say, pretends to give us what we want by way of facts and truth, but is really only offering us a sham: fools' truth, or fools' facts. He is insufficiently enchanted by truth-makers and ontology and the paradises of metaphysics. But on this occasion I was much more likely to be ambushed by the Left. The quasi-realist, it might be said, plays along with too much of the stock in trade of the right, retaining notions of reference and representation, and even attacking iconic figures of the left for their more wholehearted expulsion of any such notion anywhere and everywhere. The quasi-realist is not a card-carrying revolutionary, they say, but an arrant trimmer. In Huw Price's more sympathetic eyes, I have been a valiant but sad Moses figure, who helped to show the way to the promised land, but could never manage to enter it himself. And as any student of politics knows, the temperature when agitators of different shades of pink air their differences, rises just as high as it does when they rail against those on the Right.

I do not like high temperatures, so I did not want to justify standing in one place or another, or staring at the promised land of pragmatism only from a distance, but to offer a kind of apologia for not knowing where to stand. I find that knowing where to stand requires me knowing where to stand on a lot of other issues, such as Quine versus

¹ This paper is intended to be self-standing, but it owes its existence to the generous, yet critical, work of Huw Price and others. See Huw Price and David Macarthur, 'Pragmatism, Quasi-Realism, and the Global Challenge' in *New Pragmatists*, ed. Cheryl Misak, Oxford: Oxford University press, 2007, Huw Price, 'One Cheer for Representationalism', forthcoming in the Richard Rorty volume of the Library of Living Philosophers series; Huw Price, 'Blackburn and the War on Error' in *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, v. 84, December 2006. An ancestor of this paper was previously given to the philosophy faculty at Murcia, and I owe thanks to Angel Garcia Rodriguez for the invitation and opportunity.

Carnap on the difference between external and internal questions, minimalism in the theory of truth, the best way to tell the kinds of genealogical or anthropological stories that are the stock in trade of the left, or even what to think about things like functionalism, or the external world. So all I could try to do was to sensitize the audience to some of my difficulties, and then, in a cooperative and conversational spirit, ask for guidance.

I can best introduce the issues by referring to a discussion Huw Price gives, of a passage from my book on *Truth*. I had written about Rorty's substitution of a norm of solidarity for a norm of truth:

To many of us, however, the solution looks worse than the problem: language is not there to represent how things stand—how ridiculous! It is as if Rorty has inferred from there being no innocent eye that there is no eye at all. For after all, a wiring diagram represents how things stand inside our electric bell, our fuel gauge represents the amount of petrol left in the tank, and our physics or history tells how things stand physically or historically.

Price quotes this, alongside a similar passage from Frank Jackson, who had expressed astonishment at conferences where people attack representational views of language 'who have in their pockets pieces of paper with writing on them that tell them where the conference dinner is and when the taxis leave for the airport'.² Price takes us as examples illustrating how something called 'anti-representationalism' often meets with something close to incomprehension, and he goes on to quote as an ally Robert Brandom who also talked of the way a representationalist paradigm is 'taken for granted' even in fields outside analytical philosophy

But Brandom probably had other disreputable branches of philosophy and theory in mind, whereas the opinion voiced in my passage, and I think in Frank Jackson's, was not intended as a philosophical defence of a philosophical position called representationalism. It was intended only as a Wittgensteinian reminder that the term representation and its cousins have perfectly good *everyday* uses. A historian may represent the court life of James I in a somewhat lurid light. Captain Cook's charts represented the coast-line of New South Wales with astonishing accuracy. The petrol gauge and the wiring diagram and the menus and timetables can do what they are

² Frank Jackson 'Pragmatism and the Fate of the M-worlds', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume*, 1997.

supposed to do, or fail. These are not philosophers' sayings, but simply parts of the everyday. We mention them not as things that all by themselves demand a particular philosophical approach, but as 'an assemblage of reminders': the data that any such approach must end up respecting. In Moorean vein, I would suppose that any philosophy that ends up denying them is far less likely to be right than they are. My problem with Rorty was that he was not, in my judgment, respecting them, but at any rate in his persona as cultural agitator and prophet, gleefully bent on trampling on them. Of course, this is going to leave a problem of distinguishing the legitimate everyday use of such notions, from anything more philosophical and more suspect. It might even turn out that there is nothing there, no articulate philosophical theory to reject or oppose, but that is for later.

Huw Price and David Macarthur did not present themselves as cultural storm-troopers, bent on excising reference and representation from the everyday. Rather, they say that for the pragmatist the crucial thing is not to answer questions about the function of language in ways that encourage *metaphysics*.³ On this I would like to be at one with them, but want to insist that neither petrol gauges nor timetables, nor in general the Wittgensteinian reminder of the everyday that I offered should encourage metaphysics. Again, however, there may be some difficulty about identifying the enemy. One radical pragmatist, Robert Kraut, has raised the pertinent question whether the reflections that prompt metaphysics are themselves legitimate social and intellectual parts of the culture, so that Rorty's campaign against them is inconsistent with his own tolerant cultural holism. Kraut writes:

The point is not that entrenched practices are unsusceptible to criticism; some concepts and distinctions--despite their prevalence--are surely dangerous (at least, by our lights) and ought to be jettisoned. But Rorty's revisionary desire to drop various distinctions (for example, that between *scientific knowledge* and *cultural bias*) strains at his own culture-holism: he should do more philosophical/interpretive work to understand the role played by such distinctions. Just as we are inclined to ask "What are we DOING when we moralize?" (the refrain commonly prompting noncognitivism of various sorts), we should be equally prepared to ask "What are we DOING when we offer metaphysical hypotheses?" A thoroughgoing pragmatism should earn us the right to moralize, modalize, and--here's the rub--metaphysicalize. That's something we like to do; a good

³ Price and Macarthur, op. cit. p. 95.

anthropological story should say why, and not portray us as dysfunctional imbeciles for scratching ongoing metaphysical itches.⁴

The point is surely correct. Rather than an overarching confidence that there is something bad out there called metaphysics, the right attitude must be much more piecemeal. When we come across a piece of philosophical (reflective) theorising, we ask whether it helps, whether it rings true, takes us somewhere it is valuable to go, or offers a ‘perspicuous representation’ of one of our practices.⁵ And the answers may vary, as may peoples’ standards for perspicuity. For some (‘realists’) the question of what we are doing when we talk of numbers or duties or possible worlds is sufficiently answered by insisting that we are talking of numbers or duties or possible worlds. To others of a more ambitious cast, this is hopelessly flat-footed, and we have to dig deeper. If a Carnapian external question about a piece of discourse is worth asking, some of us think, it is not worth answering with the flat-footed response.

It is easy to stray from the everyday into philosophical theory, or attempts at it. If the ten commandments represent our duties, in the same way as the menu represents the available food, then what is there to oppose in the ‘philosophical’ theory that talks of us responsive to, reflecting, referring to, duties? Doesn’t the ‘theory’ follow seamlessly from the talk? The cross-border traffic works both ways, because it is also easy to move from philosophical theory into the everyday with what to my eye is often an alarming nonchalance. An example is this sentence from Davidson, although it is no worse than many others: ‘There is, then, very good reason to conclude that there is no clear meaning to the idea of comparing our beliefs with reality *or confronting our hypotheses with observations*’.⁶ Here what starts life supposedly as a deep philosophical objection to correspondence theories of truth, instantly metamorphoses into the rejection of a perfectly everyday activity, and one absolutely essential to our lives as rational beings. Davidson here falls over a precipice, but he has only himself to blame, since he often skips carelessly along its edge, as here, talking about the confrontation of beliefs with reality: ‘No such confrontation makes sense, for of course we can’t get outside our skins to find out what

⁴ Personal communication

⁵ The usual translation of Wittgenstein’s goal of an ‘Übersichtliche Darstellung’ of a piece of language.

⁶ Davidson, D. ‘Empirical Content’ in *Truth and Interpretation: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Davidson*, E. LePore ed., Oxford: Blackwell, 1986, p. 324. My italics.

is causing the internal happening of which we are aware'.⁷ Personally I find I can perfectly well confront my complacent belief that there are plenty of eggs in the fridge with the stark reality of there being few or none, certainly without getting outside my skin, and almost always without being aware of any internal happenings, except when gastric rumbles and gurgles are propelling me to the kitchen in the first place.⁸

Perhaps this casual attitude is explained by a Quinean refusal to distinguish Carnap's 'external' questions, about some kind of thing we say, from 'internal' questions that arise within the form of saying itself. The external question is posed, about a piece of language or discourse of some identified kind, when we ask how to explain the fact that we have come to think and talk like that: why do we go in for possible world talk, arithmetical talk, ethical or normative talk, and so on? Carnap himself was fighting 'metaphysical' attempts to answer external questions, although the precise interpretation of his own attitude to them is not entirely clear: a plausible view sees him as embracing a pragmatic, and perhaps expressivist, line according to which one external view or another manifests what is fundamentally a policy decision.⁹ I suspect that Rorty and perhaps other neo-pragmatists were influenced by Quine's rejection of an external/internal boundary, supposing that if representation has no proper use in answering the external-sounding question, since it introduces metaphysics, then it must have no proper use in the internal workings of the discourse itself. But that must surely be a mistake: indeed, relying on the Moorean priority of the everyday, we might just as well reverse it, and say that since 'representation' and its cousins have a respectable place inside discourses, they can freely be used in theorising about them as well. If this is the upshot, then the problem with what I called flat-footed realism is not that it is false, but that it is flat-footed.

It is perhaps worth noticing that any such dissolution of the internal/external distinction would have nothing to do with rejection of the analytic-synthetic distinction,

⁷ Davidson, D. 'A Coherence theory of Truth and Knowledge' reprinted in *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001, p. 144.

⁸ I am not denying that Davidson's essays on the foundations of epistemology are deeply important, nor is it right to take these two sentences as typical. But they illustrate a problem.

⁹ I am indebted to Robert Kraut for alerting me to some of the ambiguities in Carnap's own view. Kraut raises the possibility of what to me would be a very congenial interpretation according to which Carnap himself allows an expressive function to 'metaphysical' sayings.

which at best bears on Carnap's own construction of such a question. There is no trace of the analytic-synthetic distinction, for instance, in Hume's distinction between the anatomist and the painter, in connection with ethics. Nor is there any metaphysics in his own way of tackling the question; as he himself indignantly insists, if you find metaphysics in his account of ethical thinking, 'you need only conclude that your turn of mind is not suited to the moral sciences'.¹⁰

The evident reason Carnapians can maintain the distinction is that simply insisting on the everyday is compatible with offering different *interpretations* of it, such as those offered by expressivists in their various domains. The propriety of everyday talk offers a datum, but it does not offer a self-extracting philosophical 'ism': representationalism, which the propriety of the sayings therefore establishes. It just means that if we set such an 'ism' up either as a good thing or as a target, then we ought to be sure what it is. And if the propriety of the everyday talk is a datum, then pragmatists would do well to ensure that what they attack as 'representationalism' does not encompass the everyday, so that the ordinary human baby gets thrown out with any undesirable bathwater.

2. Practices.

One could, indeed, see Rorty himself as simply offering an interpretation of the everyday use of 'truth', 'description', or 'representation', in spite of his frequently derogatory remarks about them. The interpretation I went on to discuss in the work to which Price and Macarthur refer, was that in offering everyday remarks that allow sayings to be true or to say how things stand, or to represent the way things are, we deploy nothing more than a norm of solidarity with others.¹¹ I argued that this was inadequate for familiar reasons which boil down to this: that justifying ourselves to our peers is often quite different from getting things right, and it only offers even a pale surrogate for truth provided our peers are fully paid-up practitioners of the discipline that matters: fellow historians, if we are doing history; fellow lawyers if we are interpreting law, fellow scientists if a scientific question is on the table. But to achieve *that* status, these peers

¹⁰ David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 2nd edn. ed. Selby-Bigge, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1902, Appendix 1, p. 289.

¹¹ Simon Blackburn, *Truth: A Guide for the Perplexed*, London: Penguin Books, 2005, p. 160ff.

must have mastered techniques and norms of practice that go beyond what is properly comprehended as ‘discursive’ or belonging to discourse. For their opinions to be worth listening to they need to be more than good inference makers, for example. They need to be masters of the sextant or the archive or the laboratory, or at least to be well attuned to the results of those who are masters of these things. They need to be plugged into techniques or practices, and they need to follow the norms that belong to them. It is those that entitle them to a hearing in the *après-truth* coffee lounge where we try to become of one mind about something. We must not gaze at this coffee lounge where the scientists and historians congregate to chat and try to become like-minded about things, without remembering that it is a small oasis surrounded by the laboratories and instruments and libraries with which they work. One could indeed try saying that the laboratories and instruments and libraries are in turn simply parts of a normative discursive practice: their use is the way to find yourself successful where it matters, in the coffee lounge. But that would be like saying that training as a batsman is not done with the purpose of enabling you to cope with the bowling, but in order to garnish applause and solidarity from the team afterwards in the dressing room. It’s an odd opposition to mount, and in fact a false way of looking at the run of sportsmen once it is mounted.¹²

I could put this in Sellarsian terms by saying that Captain Cook, for instance, might literally have had an entry rule for an element of his chart. You do not write a figure indicating a depth unless you have dropped a piece of lead to the bottom and measured the number of marks on the line. Had he not followed many such rules meticulously, his charts would not be revered, as they are, for their representational accuracy. There are also ways to use his chart to navigate the waters around the coast, and rules determining when this is done properly. The chart is useful because there is a harmony between the entry rule, getting the chart to say that there are two fathoms of water in a strait, say, and the exit rule or practice, which gives you success in sailing a boat drawing anything less than two fathoms, but no more, through the strait. But there is no useful contrast here between coping and copying: the chart enables you to cope because it represents correctly the amount of water in the strait. *There is no other explanation of the successes that attend sailors who use it.*

¹² False because vulnerable to the same kinds of argument that Bishop Butler advanced against the similar relocation of human motives in psychological egoism.

Price has wondered how, if I stand as close to Wittgenstein as I have claimed, I yet cast aspersions on Rorty, who represents himself—if we may now be permitted the term—as standing at least equally close. The difference is that my Wittgenstein, trained as an engineer, was far more prone to emphasize norms of *technique* or *practice*, than purely conversational norms. In fact to my there is something rather comical about imagining the aristocratic and misanthropic Wittgenstein paying much attention to conversation at all, unless he was conducting it.

A pragmatist, or anyone else, would be perfectly right to insist at this point that the norms governing investigation are *our* norms. It is we who determine what we want to know, and how to set about finding it out. In one sense this is obviously true, but in another it may be misleading. For it is not simply down to us and our conventions whether any particular investigation is well-adapted to give us results about what we want to know. Finding which do and which do not can be a long and sticky and fallible process. We cannot solve it by decision or convention. It is a matter of making ourselves into good instruments for detecting how things stand, and that is no easier than making a good petrol gauge or a good sextant.

I think that the practices of everyday assertion are sufficient as well to help with one problem Huw Price raises for me. Here he contrasts a *heterological* practice with an *autological* one, introducing the contrast with two kinds of exam. The one asks whether Aristotle was Belgian, in order to test the pupil's knowledge of where Aristotle was born. The other asks in order to find out what the pupil thinks. A sincere answer is all that is required in the second practice; the first deploys another more exacting norm or standard. Price points out, rightly, that for all deflationism tells us about the truth predicate, we could be in either practice. The autological pupil can say 'it is true that Aristotle was Belgian' as easily as saying 'Aristotle was Belgian' and still get the tick. Hence, Price concludes, more remains to be said about norms of assertion than anything deflationism gives us. For in general we are in heterological practices. Sincerity is not enough (I say in general because there are, I think, conversational practices which pretty much approach it. Much vocalization in art galleries, for instance, and especially modern art galleries, is little more than autological. We effuse and compare effusions rather than trying to get something right. The same may be true of religious sayings in general). I have been concerned to defend the heterological parts of ethics, which does not stop with the swapping of responses, but includes a healthy practice of disagreement and doubt and persuasion, at least partly because it is more important for us to be of one

mind and to have a tale about why we are minded as we are, when the topic is whether early term abortion is to be banned, than when the topic is whether Jackson Pollock was a disaster. In the empirical sciences, heterologicality is more visibly a part of the practice, since our responsibility to verification procedures is a firm norm for assertion, and falling short in implementing them is a firm reason for criticism and dissent. In Bernard Williams's terms, we do not merely want the person producing the timetable to be sincere, but to be accurate. The term 'accurate', however, introduces nothing beyond minimalism: we want our informant to say that the plane leaves at 1.00pm if and only if the plane does leave at 1.00pm, and so on in general. An autological practice would look different: we would want our informant to say that the plane leaves at 1.00pm if and only *he believes* that the plane leaves then, and so on, and this is at best a desire that might be appropriate in a psychotherapist, rather than someone bent on catching a plane.

3. A definition of pragmatism.

So much for the everyday. With it firmly in place—although, as I have already said, potentially ripe for further interpretation—what remains of an 'ism' for pragmatism to oppose? Price gives us a great deal of help here, in the kind things he says about my quasi-realist program as a kind of Trojan horse for introducing pragmatism into the representationalist citadel, or as a shining example for the rest of the movement to follow. He has also said some very useful things about the relation between the kind of expressivism that quasi-realism tries to help, and minimalism in semantics. Putting the two sides together, I think we can identify pragmatism in something like the following terms.

You will be a pragmatist about an area of discourse if you pose a Carnapian external question: how does it come about that we go in for this kind of discourse and thought? What is the explanation of this bit of our language game? And then you offer an account of what we are up to in going in for this discourse, and the account eschews any use of the referring expressions of the discourse; any appeal to anything that a Quinean would identify as the values of the bound variables if the discourse is regimented; or any semantic or ontological attempt to 'interpret' the discourse in a domain, to find referents for its terms, or truth makers for its sentences.¹³ Instead the explanation proceeds by talking in different terms of what is *done* by so talking. It offers a

¹³ Price & Macarthur, op. cit. p. 96.

revelatory genealogy or anthropology or even a just-so story about how this mode of talking and thinking and practising might come about, given in terms of the functions it serves. Notice that it does not offer a classical reduction, finding truth-makers in other terms. It finds whatever plurality of functions it can lay its hands upon.

I do not offer this as a prescriptive, defining description of neo-pragmatism. Some thinkers who like the label may reject the whole enterprise of answering a Carnapian external question, rather than giving an answer of a certain shape to it. But it will serve for the moment, and with it in front of us we can now put in place Price's compelling use of minimalism about truth and other semantic notions, as a useful, or indeed vital prop for pragmatism. Minimalism simply assures us that a pragmatist who has completed his explanation need not worry at finding truth, or other semantic notions, woven into the target discourse. By minimalism, they will be serving the same logical purposes, such as enabling generalization to take place, there, as they do anywhere else.

All this is entirely in accord with the approach expressivists such as Gibbard and myself have taken to the ethical, and which can encompass the more general area of the 'normative'; it shows us standing on the same podium as pragmatists, and possibly with a few campaign decorations showing as well.

What then of the fear, voiced by Wright, Boghossian, and others, that minimalism is inconsistent with expressivism, or at least deeply in tension with it? That fear arises only if it is worries about whether ethical terms represent, or ethical sentences can be true, or about what truth makers they have, that motivate us to set out on the explanatory story. For then there is a threat that the minimalism would itself dismiss and dissolve the worries that set the whole enterprise going. Our discourses would wear their own 'perspicuous representation' on their own faces, and this would give encouragement to the flat-footed realist or representationalist.

But we can now see that there are two answers to this charge, which eventually coincide. One would be that it is not *those* worries, or *just* those worries, that motivate the enterprise. But the more interesting reply is that it *is* those worries, but that they can be expressed without the explicitly semantic vocabulary. After all, *minimalism itself forces this possibility upon us*. If there is a legitimate worry somewhere, put by employing a notion of truth, then by minimalism it ought to be capable of expression without it. If we can skip up or down Ramsey's ladder without cost or concern, then equally we must be able to frame genuine problems that arise when we do use the vocabulary, without so doing.

In the moral case, for example, we might start by saying that are worried by the idea of a moral *fact*, but freely move to saying that it wasn't *facts* that were the problem, ready to be dissolved by minimalism, but morality. Thus, suppose we express a discontent with our understanding of ethics, by saying with John Mackie that we do not see how we can credit ourselves with knowledge of moral facts, when we are conscious that a faultless difference, such as being born in another, equally admirable culture, would have led us to an opposite opinion on what those facts are. And suppose someone tries to soothe us with minimalist thoughts about facts. There is no worry, they say, of this kind, since we no longer theorise in terms of facts: minimalism shows us how to dispense with them as thick or robust elements in any theory. Well and good, we should reply, I now express my worry without mentioning facts: I do not see how to claim that I know that p when I am conscious that a faultless difference, such as being born in another, equally admirable culture, would have led me to think that $\neg p$. In general, I continue, I adhere to norms that suggest that I should not maintain knowledge when I also accept that an equally defensible view suggests the negation of what I claim to know. And I can't see how to exempt myself from the accusation that this is what I am doing in the present case.

I do not say that this 'argument from relativism' is particularly compelling—in particular, the admission that the other culture is equally admirable is usually one we do not make, and without it the worry solves itself—but it is just as compelling put without mention of truth or fact as with it.

Or again, suppose Mackie comes out with an argument from queerness, framed in terms of the mysterious magnetic properties of supposed moral facts. Thanks to minimalism we can rephrase this: Mackie fails to see how being convinced that p can by itself involve being motivated to do some related thing, without there being an additional, independent, and contingent component of desire in the agent. Again, we may or may not be impressed, but the new phrasing is on all fours with the old.

In other areas we find the same kind of transformation. If a worry about numbers were put in terms of the difficulty of referring to abstract, non-located, causally inefficacious objects, and deflationism about reference gallops in to help, the worry will relocate itself in the question of how we know about abstract, non-located, causally inefficacious objects. Or, it might tellingly ask why we should be concerned about them. And the philosophy of mathematics again gets a motivation and a foothold. A similar transformation could be offered for puzzles about reference to possible worlds. In each

case, the substantive puzzle can be relocated away from the insubstantial notions of representation and reference.

4. Local or Global?

Returning to the characterization of pragmatism given above, we should now see not a binary opposition, between pragmatism and some competitor called representationalism, but at least a fourfold division of alternatives. We could hold out for pragmatic stories *everywhere*. The opposition would be flat-footed representationalism *somewhere*. Or, we could hold out for pragmatic stories *somewhere*, and the opposition would be flat-footed representationalism *everywhere*. The last of these is, I suppose, the position manifested by those conservative philosophers with whom I started, who automatically react to any pragmatic story by reaching for notions of truth, truth-condition, truth-makers, and their kin, and proclaiming that these lie beyond the pragmatist's grasp. I stand shoulder to shoulder with Price and I hope many others here in finding that attitude reprehensible. Still, all that is needed to oppose it are *local* pragmatisms, for which, of course, I am more than happy to sign up.

On the other hand, I am much less certain about *global* pragmatism, the overall rout of the representationalists apparently promised by Rorty and perhaps by Robert Brandom. The reason is obvious enough. It is what Robert Kraut, investigating similar themes, calls the No Exit problem. It points out, blandly enough, that even genealogical and anthropological stories have to start somewhere. There are things that even pragmatists need to rely upon, as they produce what they regard as their better understandings of the functions of pieces of discourse. This is obvious when we think of the most successful strategies of the pragmatist's kind. A Humean genealogy of justice, for example, talks of human beings with limited capacities, very definite needs, situated in a relatively niggardly environment where it is hard to satisfy those needs, and therefore having to evolve cooperative mechanisms regulating mutually beneficial conduct, restraint, and coordination. A wider Humean genealogy of values in general talks of natural propensities to pain and pleasure, love and hate, and an ability to take up a common point of view with others. It postulates a human nature in which some particle of the dove is kneaded together with the wolf and the serpent, and provides a story of our evaluative practices on that basis. A broadly Fregean genealogical story of arithmetic and then mathematics more generally would start by placing us in a world of kinds of objects with distinct identity conditions, such as tigers and eggs and warriors, and then a

capacity to tally them, with there being an advantage to us in being able to rank pluralities of them by their magnitude: three tigers are more of a problem than one, five eggs are better than three; eighteen warriors coming our way make for a disaster, although we could probably fight off ten. And so on.

Such genealogical stories start with a common-sense background of us, and a world of physical objects, with distinct locations, changing only according to distinct regularities with a distinct speed limit. In the books in which he provides a genealogy of morals, Hume simply takes all that for granted, just as a Fregean account of arithmetic takes the tigers and eggs and warriors for granted. If we ask the Carnapian external question about all *that*, then we face a choice point. It may be that we take an Aristotelian, or perhaps Wittgensteinian, line on the priority of the everyday. There is simply no place for ‘first philosophy’ to stand behind the *endoxa*, the given in our common-sense situation. This attitude would be that of *quietism*, or the rejection altogether of at least some external questions. If we insisted instead on posing the Carnapian external-sounding question: how come that we go in for descriptions of the world in terms of surrounding middle-sized dry goods?—then the answer is only going to be the flat-footed stutter or self-pat on the back: it is because we are indeed surrounded by middle sized dry goods. That answer, obviously, draws on the referential resources of the object language, and according to the account in front of us, amounts to a victory for representationalism over pragmatism. It is because it is no better than a stutter that I call it flat-footed representationalism. A similar fate awaits us, in many peoples’ view, if we pose a Carnapian external-sounding question about at least the coastal waters of science. How come we go in for descriptions of the world in terms of energies and currents? Because we have learned to become sensitive to, measure, predict and control, and describe and refer to, energies and currents. That is science’s own view of how we have got where we are, and there is none better. In these areas we might want to echo another sentiment of Davidson’s: ‘the causal relations between our beliefs and speech and the world also supply the interpretation of our language and our beliefs’.¹⁴ Here there is no further enterprise of going behind the world to ‘interpret’ our sayings and beliefs in yet more perspicuous terms.

5. Rolling pragmatism?

¹⁴ Davidson, ‘Empirical Content’, p. 331.

We may think our spade is not turned so quickly, and that we can dig below our everyday landscape. Hume thought so when he tackled the external world in *Treatise*, I.iv.2, but he never revisited the dig, perhaps because the trench could not be shored up with the materials he had left himself, and collapsed upon him. Berkeley thought our spade was not turned so quickly, and others influenced by Descartes, such as Hobbes, did so too. The aim will be to see reference to everyday objects as an instrument for coping with something else, and the only plausible candidate will be the orderliness of experience, the only 'given' that looks capable of distinguishing experience of a real independent world from a mere 'rhapsody of sensation'. As Peter Strawson so marvellously indicated in *Individuals*, the possibility of spatial organization of the world requires orderliness, stability and repetition, giving rise to the idea of a revisit to the same place, and the reidentification of the same kind of thing, rather than the substitution of a qualitatively identical but different thing. But whether this is a genuinely distinct and satisfying 'genealogy' for the concepts of a public world is, obviously, extremely doubtful, and to many contemporary philosophers it would be complete heresy, facing a battery of objections, from those centred on the impossibility of recognizing orderliness, or effecting reidentifications, in a purely private world (Wittgenstein) to those querying the possibility of even something so basic as awareness of time in such a world (Kant).

It would be very odd if either classical pragmatism in its early American dress, or neo-pragmatism as we have it now, depended on the old Cartesian priority of the Inner against the Outer. And it would be even more odd to see Wittgenstein as any kind of champion of a global pragmatism which is trying to take over the common-sense homeland of representationalism by using materials fashioned from the inner life of consciousness. It would be nearly as odd to take Davidson as a similar champion of the Inner. Instead, neo-pragmatism attempts a genealogy by taking certain *social* facts for granted, including conversation, inference, scorekeeping, and other discursive activities, and constructing its genealogy of reference and everyday ontology on that basis. I see this as an interesting exercise, but I find myself very unclear about the motivation: epistemologically or cognitively I should have thought that what people say is a special case of what things do, and the child's reidentification of its rattle and bricks and its ability to locate itself, comes at around the same time and requires the same cognitive resources (it may require different neural resources) as its similar reidentification of its mummy and daddy and its discernment of structure, pattern, and repetition, in what they are saying to it. Similarly, as someone who thinks that genealogical stories about norms

and values are our best examples of neo-pragmatism in action, I am sceptical about reversals which give the learner's sensitivity to norms priority over its sensitivity to the recurring elements of its environment. Generally speaking, you learn that you must stop at red lights only after you have learned to recognize red lights.

It has been well said that every explanation must start somewhere, but there is no particular place that every explanation has to start. So one could imagine a kind of rolling global pragmatism. Whenever an area of discourse becomes a target for philosophical theory, and we find ourselves worrying about its ontology or the kind of epistemology or the kind of saying about the world that constitute it, step aside to a place which, at least for the moment, seems not so worrisome, and essay a pragmatic story about the utility of the target way of thought and talk, given an environment composed in the other, less demanding way. A rolling pragmatism would differ from a foundational pragmatism in that there would be no objection to patching it together from piecemeal, and together potentially circular, explanatory projects. You might explain our penchant for ethics and normativity taking middle-sized dry goods, and some facts about human nature and human needs for granted. You might explain the way we think about the ongoing identity of human beings in terms of our concern with psychological connectedness, and you might explain our talk of psychology in turn in terms of sensitivity to behaviour. You may talk about our sensitivity to powers and dispositions, and talk of that kind of talk as a way of organizing patterns in the Humean mosaic and reactions to them, as Hume's own theory of causation did. But then thought in terms of a Humean mosaic might in turn be explained as a kind of abstraction out of things presented to us in our everyday lives in the external world. And if the external world is the problem, then rolling pragmatism might equally step aside to construct a genealogy from our exposure to the Humean mosaic. Global pragmatism would be a patchwork of local pragmatisms, living by taking in each others' washing. There never comes a point at which our spade is turned and explanation can go no further, although as the case of the external world suggested, it may often be open to doubt whether the explanations on offer always deserve the title, or always avoid drafts covertly drawn on the kinds of thing talk about which is allegedly being explained. I am not sure that rolling pragmatism would appeal to pragmatism's founding fathers—James, for instance, at least in his later empiricist and neutral monist phase, seems much closer to being a closet foundationalist—but it is the best I can do to sympathize with anything like a global program.

In terms of rolling pragmatism, the flat footed “explanation” of a mode of discourse simply by citing our having cottoned on to an ontology, or the facts, or the truth-makers, would be abandoning the only kind of worthwhile philosophical explanation there could be. It would be announcing that our spade had been turned, and then, amazingly, patting ourselves on the back for this fact.

Although, I think we ought to ask why Rorty, of all people, with his desire to sink philosophy and its explanatory pretensions, should have minded about that. Common sense’s answer to the Carnapian sounding question, from within common sense, and science’s answer from within science, should surely be a model for freedom from philosophy, not a target of contempt. What they model is the vanity of any philosophical ambition to step outside and to do better. It is the rolling global pragmatist who is an addict of new, philosophical, explanatory perspectives. The representationalist, on this account, is the true minimalist, and true quietist, modestly and sometimes admirably shying away from theory. ‘Representationalism’ on this story is what is left when philosophy becomes very, very, boring. But some, such as Wittgenstein, Davidson, and especially Rorty, might say, in at least some areas, none the worse for that.

6. So where are we left?

In its classical form, pragmatism knew that its relationship to realism was fraught:

Realism manifestly is a theory of very great pragmatic value. In ordinary life we all assume that we live in an “external” world, which is “independent” of us, and peopled by other persons as real and as good, or better, than ourselves. And it would be a great calamity if any philosophy should feel it its duty to upset this assumption. For it works splendidly, and the philosophy which attacked it would only hurt itself.¹⁵

Contrary to Dewey, perhaps far from burying it, pragmatism should be seen as vindicating realism. This view has other supporters: it is found in James, and perhaps most famously in Quine. In effect, what is happening here is that Carnap’s external question is allowed, even in the case of the external world. The request for a ‘perspicuous representation’ is not dismissed out of hand as ‘metaphysical’, but instead it is given a (rather sketchy) pragmatic answer. The ‘language’ or mode of thought that embraces

¹⁵ F.C. Schiller, *Studies in Humanism*, London: Macmillan 1907, p. 459.

external, independent, public, objects earns its living. It works, and nothing else of which we have the faintest conception does so. So we are to embrace it.

Theorists who like their pragmatism, or their realism, global rather than local may scent an opening here. If in this way pragmatism vindicates realism about chairs and tables, why not about possible worlds, numbers, rights and duties, selves, the passage of time, and all the other posits of our everyday speech? These parts of thought or language also earn their keep, so should we not accept the inevitable, and announce ourselves as representationalists and realists about them too?

My answer is that we should not, because if we look back at the description of pragmatism that I gave, we find there is a huge asymmetry between the case of common sense and what I called the coastal waters of science, on the one hand, and cases like possible worlds, numbers and rights and duties or the passage of time on the other. For in embracing the common sense scheme, we embrace not only the tables and chairs it posits, but a *distinct view about our relation to them*. We must think of ourselves as causally influenced by them, and sensitive to their multitude of properties: their positions, their creation, their destruction, their appearances and changes. To say that we mirror their doings now becomes a way of summarizing a whole host of facts about our sensitivities that come along with first positing them: that if my chair collapses, I will notice it, that if the table dances around or bursts into flames, I will register that, that were it to grow in size it would have all kinds of other consequences that I could also register and so on and so on. A mirror is quick to reflect the surrounding scene; I am not quite so quick, but I do such a good job that comparing myself to a mirror becomes almost irresistible.

Furthermore nature itself has imprinted its demands upon us. Our visual systems, for example, are hard-wired, and modular in the sense that their output lies outside our control and outside the influence of other cognitive functions. We might know that the conjurer is not producing an egg out of thin air, but we cannot stop seeing the act as if that is exactly what he is doing. Other areas lack this fixity: ethics, for instance, attracts attention partly because while its demands seem so absolute to those of us who were well brought up, we also know that they are interpreted differently, or even invisible to those who were not.

Finally, the doings of the items of common sense are directly witnessed, reflected in experience or what Kant called intuition. Their whole life, as it were, consists in their role as systematizers and explainers of experience. There is therefore no option of embracing the scheme, while holding back on its own explanations of why we do so.

Whereas in the other cases, there is every prospect of bracketing the existence of possible worlds and the rest, and coming to understand why we go in for the mode of thought in question in other terms. In other words, there is every prospect of giving an anthropology or genealogy which is itself free of the commitments in question.

As already touched upon, there is the traditional empiricist option of wrestling the common sense example into the same shape as the others, by going fundamentally private: indeed one might argue that this option is already foreshadowed by Quine with the very idea of a 'posit', since the model is one of a theoretical entity posited in order to help with some independently known phenomenon. But as I have said, this seems not to be the neo-pragmatist intention, taking us back, as it does, to the dark days before Wittgenstein and Sellars. From this point of view, Quine's cheerful assimilation of common sense to basic science was a throwback to the bad old days in Vienna.

A more promising, or at any rate a more up-to-date strategy for a global theory would be to urge that more is involved with the common sense scheme than meets the eye. It is only to a superficial glance, it might be said, that chairs and tables form part of a scheme that can be separated from modality, arithmetic, or normativity. It is here that various arguments against the possibility of 'disentangling' the one part of discourse from the other come into play. I believe that they all fail, and that the natural presumption of difference remains. Even in cases where disentangling is genuinely impossible the different strands making up our thought can be separately identified. There is no understanding that we are confronted by a chair which does not embrace understanding that it has various causal powers, or that various counterfactuals are true. Yet causation and counterfactual thought are ripe for the kind of attempt at perspicuous representation that expressivists have always offered. The good things Hume said about causation do not disappear because causation is so firmly entrenched in our most basic modes of thought. All that follows is that we can discern a plurality of functions more often than we might have expected. But then, it was never more than a pious hope that perspicuity would require simplicity.