

Naturalism Without Mirrors – Key Themes

1 ‘Maximising minimalism’

The project of exploring the consequences of semantic deflationism. What does philosophy look like, without substantial notions of reference and truth?

2 Metaphysics

The earliest paper in the collection – ‘Metaphysical pluralism’, c. 1989 – is about the effects of minimalism on metaphysical debates, arguing that minimalism makes it hard to distinguish *metaphysical* pluralists, or nonnaturalists, from Wittgensteinian *linguistic* pluralists ... and that this is compatible with expressivism/quasirealism about the various vocabularies.

Sociological background Australian metaphysical realism, whose proponents tended (a) to be blasé about adding metaphysical ‘primitives’, as the need arose, and (b) to appeal to ‘truth-making’, and other apparently semantic notions.

Affinity Minimal realism *à la* Blackburn.

Source of support Metaphysical/ontological deflationism of Carnap and Quine.

Strategy Always to try to put the onus on my opponents, to differentiate themselves from this minimal realism. (Two options for them: resist *semantic* deflationism or resist *ontological* deflationism.)

Advocating genealogy I claim that the interesting philosophical story takes place on the side of *genealogy*, in a vocabulary neither *semantic* nor *metaphysical*.

Demystifying pluralism The genealogy includes a story about the plurality, depriving the naturalistic reductionist program of its motivation – no need for tidiness, if plurality is unmysterious (merely a plurality of ‘forms of life’). Hence undermines one sort of pressure towards naturalism.

2.1 Criticism of contemporary programs in metaphysics (esp. naturalist metaphysics)

‘Naturalism Without Representationalism’ and ‘The Semantic Foundations of Metaphysics’ focus on the role of representationalist presuppositions in popular contemporary programs in metaphysics, and the consequences of making these presuppositions explicit.

Two forms of naturalism ‘Object naturalism’ *v.* ‘subject naturalism’.

Two conceptions of where metaphysics starts The *linguistic conception* and the *material conception*.

First argument *If* we begin at the **linguistic** level then metaphysics depends on substantial semantics – which, among other things, means that object naturalism is hostage to the deliverances of subject naturalism, and problematic for Stich and Boghossian-style reasons (e.g., the circularity of resting the metaphysics of semantics on semantic assumptions).

Second argument The alternative – beginning at the **material** level – (i) turns a blind eye to expressivism, and (ii) deprives the object naturalist of the best prospect of a general argument for naturalism, on Ramsey–Lewis–Jackson lines (because the general form of this argument requires that semantics play the role originally played by causation).

3 Philosophy of language

The nature of assertion If assertion is not to be understood *representationally* – if we have deflated the notion of truth in that of ‘claiming *true*’ – then how are we understand it? PROPOSAL: We should think of it as a game for aligning behavioural commitments or stances, where these are thought of in practical, non-representational terms. (Link to a story about role of normative truth.)

Minimalism, expressivism and the Frege-Geach problem Another of the early papers – ‘Semantic Minimalism and the Frege Point’ (some of this dates from my PhD thesis!) – argues that the Frege-Geach problem is an artifact of the bifurcation thesis, and undermined by semantic minimalism. Given minimalism, the issues are much the same for everyone. This doesn’t mean that no problems remain (e.g., about explaining logical rules), but merely that it is a level playing field, if a class of non-minimalist semantic answers is ruled out of court.

The pressure to global expressivism This answer has been missed by *local* expressivists, because they grant to their representationalist opponents that the latter’s theoretical framework is appropriate, in some vocabularies. But minimalism challenges this bifurcation from the outside, and the success of quasirealism threatens it from the inside. (‘Pragmatism, quasirealism and the global challenge.’)

How globalism unites the expressivists Brandom offers an explicitly non-representational account of assertion in general, which is exactly the kind of thing that local expressivists such as Blackburn and Gibbard need, if they are to ‘go global’. I think that the two programs fit together well, if we curb Brandom’s lingering attachment to metaphysics, and Blackburn’s and Gibbard’s lingering attachment to representationalism.

4 Global expressivism *and* bifurcation?

4.1 A two-storey pragmatism

1. **The global level** A very *uniform* story about the nature and functions of assertoric speech acts (or judgements, if we want to put psychology before language in this respect), told in *non-representational* terms – e.g., a story about how assertions enable social creatures to express, revise and align behavioural commitments of various kinds. **Precursors?** Blackburn, suitably generalised, or Brandom’s account of ‘the game of giving and asking for reasons’.

2. **The local level** A very *diverse* story about the various functions of the many kinds of commitments which are capable of participating in this uniform ‘assertion game’ – e.g., that they are associated with affective and epistemic states of distinctive kinds, playing characteristic roles in our agentic lives. So long as none of these local, Level 2, functions are themselves characterised the old semantic terms, this level, too, is entirely ‘expressive’.

4.1.1 A niggling bifurcationist voice

Aren’t some of these sub-vocabularies more in the business of ‘tracking the world’ than others?

4.2 Two notions of representation

Proposal Distinguish two (clusters of) notions in play in contemporary theory – two different kinds of answers to questions such as: What does it take to *be* a representation? Or to *be* the kind of thing that has *content*?

i-representation Emphasises a token’s position in an appropriate inferential or functional network; and allows (via ‘the third norm’) an ‘in-game,’ speech-community-constituted notion of a speaker’s answerability to a standard external to herself.

e-representation Emphasises environment tracking, or causal co-variation; with answerability to how things are *in* the external environment.

With this distinction in play, we can be **bifurcationists** in *e-representational* terms, while being **global pragmatists** in *i-representational* terms (i.e., no semantic word–world relations in the picture, at that level). In other words, we can say not only (at Level 1) that all declarative utterances are *i-representations* (this itself being a pragmatic or expressive notion, at least if explicated following Brandom or a generalised quasirealist); but also (at Level 2) that some but not all declarative utterances are *e-representations*.