

Pluralism, Representationalism and Foundationalism

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Introduction

Huw Price's Main Thesis in *Naturalism without Mirrors*

Once we reject representationalism and accept pluralism about linguistic functions, we will be able to dissolve issues concerning the 'placement problems' in contemporary metaphysics without giving up scientific naturalism.

- Placement Problems: How can we properly place apparently 'non-natural' facts such as mathematical, modal, meaning, mental, and moral facts within the naturalistic framework of ontology?

Introduction

Outline of My Presentation

1. Price's functional pluralism is committed to a version of *linguistic foundationalism*, according to which the linguistic framework of natural science and ultimately of physics plays a certain *privileged* role.
2. Price's linguistic foundationalism then commits him to a weak form of *ontological foundationalism*, according to which all properties and facts posited by any legitimate linguistic framework are *supervenient* on the properties and facts posited by the framework of natural science.
3. But ontological foundationalism, even in this weak form, gives rise to the following two problems:
 - (1) Placement problems will not go away.
 - (2) It seems inconsistent with Price's functional pluralism.
4. But Price cannot reject the weak form of ontological foundationalism unless he gives up scientific naturalism.
5. Therefore, Price falls into a dilemma: he must either
 - (i) embrace ontological foundationalism and thereby admit that there are genuine placement problems, or
 - (ii) reject ontological foundationalism and thereby give up scientific naturalism.

1. Price's Functional Pluralism and Linguistic Foundationalism

Distinctive Feature of Price's Naturalism

- It combines a *deflationary* approach to placement problems with a *scientific* naturalism.
 - (1) Unlike most contemporary metaphysicians, Price holds the Wittgensteinian (and Carnapian) view that issues concerning how to place apparently 'non-natural' facts within the naturalistic framework are not genuine problems. These issues must be *dissolved* rather than solved.
 - (2) However, while typical Wittgensteinian philosophers reject scientific naturalism and embrace more 'liberal' naturalism (e.g. Rorty, McDowell), Price remains firmly committed to scientific naturalism.
- Regarding (1): Price defends a deflationary approach to placement problems due to his functional pluralism.
- Regarding (2): In my understanding, Price's commitment to scientific naturalism is based on what I will call his 'linguistic foundationalism'.

1. Price's Functional Pluralism and Linguistic Foundationalism

Price's 'Dissolution' of Placement Problems through Functional Pluralism

- Step 1: The placement problem arises from the approach of *object naturalism*, according to which all there exists is in some important sense the world studied by sciences.
- Step 2: But object naturalism presupposes *representationalism*, according to which the linguistic expressions about the entities which give rise to various placement problems are all functioning in the *same* way, namely by representing those entities.
- Step 3: In contrast with the approach of object naturalism, there is another naturalistic approach which may be called *subject naturalism*. According to subject naturalism, we must study human beings as *natural* creatures who can perform various linguistic behaviors in a natural environment.
- Step 4: From the viewpoint of subject naturalism, there may be a good scientific reason to deny representationalism, for there may be a good scientific reason to think that we human beings use linguistic expressions to perform a *multiplicity* of functions which are *irreducible* to one another. [→ Functional Pluralism]

1. Price's Functional Pluralism and Linguistic Foundationalism

Price's 'Dissolution' of Placement Problems through Functional Pluralism (Continued)

- Step 5: If linguistic expressions have a multiplicity of functions which are irreducible to one another, the so-called 'placement problems' turn out to be committed to a kind of *category mistakes* and accordingly do not even make sense.
- Step 6: In our naturalistic approach, we must give theoretical priority to the approach of subject naturalism, for the approach of object naturalism presupposes the unproven premise of representationalism which may be undermined by the approach from subject naturalism.
- Step 7: Therefore, there may be a good reason to think that placement problems are pseudo-problems from the very perspective of scientific naturalism.

1. Price's Functional Pluralism and Linguistic Foundationalism

Price's Scientific Naturalism Based on Linguistic Foundationalism

- With the rejection of representationalism, Price rejects (along with Carnap and Quine) the popular view that natural science is completely non-perspectival and provides the genuine representation of what the world is 'really' like. [→ Rejection of *Metaphysical* Realism]
- But Price nevertheless insists on a version of *scientific* naturalism. As I understand, this is because he takes it that the linguistic framework of natural science (and ultimately of physics) has a *privileged* status in that it is this framework from which we must investigate all other frameworks. [→ Linguistic Foundationalism]

“In my view, the explanation [for the primacy of science] lies in the fact that as functional pluralists, we speak from *within* the scientific framework, but *about* other frameworks. This gives the scientific framework a kind of *perspectival primacy*. Our viewpoint is internal to science, but external to morality, for example. It is a viewpoint which allows us to refer directly to the objects and properties countenanced by science, but not – given the Carnap thesis – to the objects countenanced by the moral stance.” (*NWM*, p.142; italics added).

2. Supervenience Thesis and Price's Ontological Foundationalism

Question about Price's Linguistic Foundationalism

- As Price himself makes it clear, if we reject representationalism then it makes no sense to suppose that the framework of natural science provides the 'genuine' representation of what the world is 'really' like.
- But then *why* must we accept that the framework of natural science has even a perspectival privilege? Given anti-representationalism, why can't we think that *every* linguistic framework has a perspectival privilege *from its own perspective*? It seems that Price gives a kind of *absolute* perspectival privilege to the framework of natural science, namely that it is supposedly the *only* framework from which we can legitimately investigate all other linguistic frameworks.

A Possible Answer: Quine's Appeal to Supervenience

- As we will see later, Quine's answer to the above challenge is as follows: Although we cannot suppose that the framework of natural science provides the completely non-perspectival and genuine representation of the world, we are still justified in giving a privileged role to this framework as long as we accept the Supervenience Thesis.

2. Supervenience Thesis and Price's Ontological Foundationalism

Supervenience Thesis

- All properties and facts posited by any legitimate linguistic framework are supervenient on the properties and facts posited by the framework of natural science (and ultimately of physics). That is, for any legitimate linguistic framework, there can be no changes in the properties and facts posited by that framework unless there are changes in the properties and facts posited by the framework of natural science (and ultimately of physics).

Price's Endorsement of the Supervenience Thesis

- It seems that Price does not deny the Supervenience Thesis. In fact, he seems to endorse it.

“It is natural to wonder whether there is a real distinction between discourse pluralism[=functional pluralism] and additive monism. . . . A first thought might be that supervenience will do the trick. However, a little reflection shows that this won't do the job. . . . [I]t is far from clear that a pluralist need deny supervenience. . . .it seems that supervenience is independent of the issue between discourse pluralism and additive monism.” (*NWM*, p.41-2)

“[. . .] I think a pluralist can account for the supervenience intuitions, without allowing the identity claim.” (*NWM*, p.146)

2. Supervenience Thesis and Price's Ontological Foundationalism

Price's Commitment to Ontological Foundationalism via the Supervenience Thesis

- If the Supervenience Thesis is correct and accordingly the linguistic framework of natural science (and ultimately of physics) is the *only* framework on which properties and facts of all other frameworks supervene, then there is a sense in which properties and facts posited by the framework of natural science provide an *ontological foundation* for those posited by all the other frameworks. In this sense, then, Price is committed to ontological foundationalism.

Varieties of Supervenience: Weak, Strong, and Global

- *M*-properties *weakly supervene* on *P*-properties iff for any possible world w and any individuals x and y in w , if x and y are indiscernible in *P*-properties then they are indiscernible in *M*-properties.
 - *M*-properties *strongly supervene* on *P*-properties iff for any possible worlds w_1 and w_2 and any individuals x in w_1 and y in w_2 , if x and y are indiscernible in *P*-properties then they are indiscernible in *M*-properties.
 - *M*-properties *globally supervene* on *P*-properties iff for any possible worlds w_1 and w_2 , if w_1 and w_2 are indiscernible in *P*-properties then w_1 and w_2 are indiscernible in *M*-properties.
- In this presentation, I will mean by 'supervenience' the global supervenience.

2. Supervenience Thesis and Price's Ontological Foundationalism

Supervenience, Identity, Reduction, and Dependence

- Supervenience is ontologically a *very weak* relation. When *M*-properties supervene on *P*-properties, all it guarantees is that *M*-properties cannot change without changes in *P*-properties; in other words, all it guarantees is that *M*-properties must *co-vary* with *P*-properties. But it is widely agreed that such co-variance does *not* imply that *M*-properties are identical with, or reducible to, or even dependent on *P*-properties.

Price on the Compatibility of the Supervenience Thesis with Functional Pluralism

- Price seems to think as follows: Since supervenience is a very weak ontological relation, the acceptance of the Supervenience Thesis will *not* pose any real threat for his functional pluralism.

“ . . . [T]he attempt to extract reduction from supervenience is blocked by functional difference: the reduction does not go through, despite supervenience in the acknowledged sense, because the function of the supervening discourse is different from that of science (the subvening discourse). And this implies that the point works equally for a functional pluralist, even if he affirms that the supervening discourse is descriptive, so long as there is a deeper sense in which the supervening and subvening discourses differ in function.” (*NWM*, p.146)

- However, I think that the acceptance of the Supervenience Thesis does pose some real threats for Price's functional pluralism!

3. Supervenience Thesis and the Persistence of Placement Problems

Supervenience and the Persistence of Placement Problems

- Although supervenience is a very weak relation, it does provide the following ontological restriction: those who accept the Supervenience Thesis *cannot* admit the existence of the properties and facts which do not (globally) supervene on physical properties and facts. If there are such properties and facts, then, the relevant placement problems will inevitably arise.
- But are there properties and facts which may not (globally) supervene on physical properties and facts? → Yes!
 - (1) According to Quine, facts about *meaning* and *intentional mental states* do not supervene on physical facts.
 - (2) According to many philosophers, it is at least metaphysically possible that facts about *qualia* do not supervene on physical facts.

3. Supervenience Thesis and the Persistence of Placement Problems

Quine on the Failure of Supervenience between Meaning Facts and Physical Facts

- As Quine himself emphasizes, his celebrated thesis of the ‘indeterminacy of translation’ is *not* an epistemological thesis, namely the thesis that we cannot know which of the two conflicting translation manuals is correct. Rather, the thesis is an ontological one, namely that there is simply no ‘fact of the matter’ concerning which manual is correct. And Quine’s argument for this thesis is precisely based on the alleged failure of supervenience between facts about meaning and physical facts.

“I have argued that two conflicting manuals of translation can both do justice to all dispositions to behavior, and that, in such a case, there is no fact of the matter of which manual is right. The intended notion of matter of fact is not transcendental or yet epistemological, not even a question of evidence; *it is ontological, a question of reality, and to be taken naturalistically within our scientific theory of the world.* Thus suppose, to make things vivid, that we are settling still for a physics of elementary particles and recognizing a dozen or so basic states and relations in which they may stand. Then when I say there is no fact of the matter, as regards, say, the two rival manuals of translation, what I mean is that *both manuals are compatible with all the same distributions of states and relations over elementary particles.*”

(“Things and Their Place in Theories”, p.23; my italics)

4. Is Functional Pluralism Consistent with the Supervenience Thesis?

Supervenience Thesis and Functional Pluralism: Carnap, Quine, and Price

- Apart from the difficulty that the Supervenience Thesis leads to the persistence of placement problems, it seems that Price's functional pluralism is ultimately inconsistent with it.
- The best way of seeing this problem is by comparing Price's view with those of Carnap and Quine. If I am right, Carnap may be able to consistently deny the Supervenience Thesis and Quine may be able to consistently accept it. But Price may not be able to consistently accept the Supervenience Thesis.

4. Is Functional Pluralism Consistent with the Supervenience Thesis?

Carnap on Ontological Questions

- (C1) Among ontological questions, we can make a sharp distinction between internal questions and external questions.
- (C2) Internal questions are genuinely *cognitive* questions but can be raised only *within* the relevant linguistic framework.
- (C3) All *legitimate* external questions are purely *pragmatic* questions concerning whether or not to adopt the relevant linguistic framework. There are no genuinely cognitive external questions, and accordingly there are no genuinely inter-framework ontological questions.

Carnap and the Supervenience Thesis

- Since questions about supervenience are not pragmatic questions about the adoption of linguistic frameworks but belong to the category of inter-framework ontological questions, Carnap would conclude that they are not genuine questions.
- Therefore, Carnap would reject the Supervenience Thesis, claiming that it is one of those 'meaningless' metaphysical statements.

4. Is Functional Pluralism Consistent with the Supervenience Thesis?

Quine on Ontological Questions

- (Q1) Contrary to Carnap's claim, we cannot make a sharp distinction between internal questions and external questions, for there is no sharp distinction between 'genuinely cognitive' questions and 'merely pragmatic' ones. What Carnap takes to be internal questions are *as pragmatic* as what he takes to be legitimate external questions. [→ Quine's Pragmatism]
- (Q2) Carnap is right that we cannot ask such questions as "Are there 'really' sets?" or "Are there 'really' meanings?". But this is *not* because they are inter-framework questions, but simply because they are supposedly *framework-independent*(=metaphysical, *a priori*) questions. There are no such questions. [→ Quine's Metaphysical Quietism]
- (Q3) However, given the *fundamental* status of natural science from the very perspective of natural science, it is still *scientifically* legitimate to ask some of Carnap's supposedly meaningless inter-framework ontological questions from that perspective. For example, it is scientifically legitimate to ask questions such as "Are there sets from the perspective of natural science?" or "Are there meanings from the perspective of natural science?"
[→ Quine's Scientific Foundationalism]

4. Is Functional Pluralism Consistent with the Supervenience Thesis?

Quine and the Supervenience Thesis

- Quine would have no problem accepting the Supervenience Thesis, as long as it can be understood as a *scientific* hypothesis on a par with, say, the hypothesis that the temperature of gas is reducible to the average kinetic energy of the gas particles.
- Indeed, the following quote suggests that Quine does accept the Supervenience Thesis as a scientific hypothesis which has been well-confirmed and is implicitly adopted in all scientific inquiries.

“Why, Goodman asks, this special deference to physical theory? This is a good question, and part of its merit is that it admits of a good answer. . .*[N]othing happens in the world, not the flutter of an eyelid, not the flicker of a thought, without some redistribution of microphysical states. . .Full coverage in this sense is the very business of physics, and only of physics . . . Anyone who will say, “Physics is all very well in its place” – and who will not? – is then already committed to a physicalism of at least the nonreductive, nontranslational sort stated above. Hence my special deference to physical theory as a world vision, and to the physical world as the world.*” (“Goodman’s *Ways of Worldmaking*”, p.98; my italics)

4. Is Functional Pluralism Consistent with the Supervenience Thesis?

Two Further Comments on Quine

- Comment 1

Some philosophers suggest that there is an internal tension between Quine's metaphysical quietism and his physicalism. But as long as the former is *metaphysical* quietism while the latter comes from his *scientific* foundationalism based on the Supervenience Thesis, I do not see any tension here.

- Comment 2

That said, I do have a reservation about Quine's apparent supposition that the Supervenience Thesis is merely a scientific hypothesis. For I think that it is in fact a substantial metaphysical thesis (if I am right, then, Quine is after all *not* a metaphysical quietist, despite his aspiration to be so!). The question whether properties and facts posited by the frameworks of various natural sciences are supervenient upon those posited by the framework of physics is surely a scientific question. On the other hand, however, I doubt that it is a scientific question to ask whether properties and facts posited by *non-scientific* frameworks are supervenient upon those posited by the framework of physics. So although I think that Quine's view is consistent, I have a doubt about its truth.

4. Is Functional Pluralism Consistent with the Supervenience Thesis?

Price on Ontological Questions

- (P1) Carnap is right in maintaining the sharp distinction between internal questions and external questions, although he is wrong to think that it is based on the distinction between ‘genuinely cognitive’ questions and ‘merely pragmatic’ ones. Quine is right that internal and external questions are ultimately all pragmatic questions. [→ Price’s Pragmatism]
- (P2) Carnap is right that the distinction between internal questions and external questions depends on the distinction between *intra*-framework questions and *inter*-framework questions. And the latter distinction depends on irreducible *functional* differences among different frameworks. [→ Price’s Functional Pluralism]
- (P3) All legitimate inter-framework questions are questions about the differences in linguistic functions among the relevant frameworks and the roles of these different functions in our cognitive and practical lives. On the other hand, there are *no* genuinely inter-framework *ontological* questions, even from the perspective of natural science. [→ Price’s Ontological Quietism]
- (P4) Quine is right, though, that the framework of natural science and ultimately of physics occupies a privileged status among all linguistic frameworks. [→ Price’s Scientific Naturalism]

4. Is Functional Pluralism Consistent with the Supervenience Thesis?

Can Price accept the Supervenience Thesis consistently with Functional Pluralism?

- It seems that Price must accept the Supervenience Thesis in order to justify (P4).
- On the other hand, however, it follows from Price's functional pluralism that all *inter-framework ontological* questions are illegitimate ones. For example, identity questions across (functionally) different frameworks are all pseudo-questions for Price, as is illustrated in the following quote:

“To ask whether an entity referred to in one framework is *identical* to an entity referred to in another framework seems to presuppose a *framework-independent* stance, from which the question can be raised. If we reject the idea of such a stance, the upshot seems to be that identity claims such as “Karl Marx is the father of Groucho Marx” and “Karl Marx is the number 3” go wrong in quite different ways. The first is false, from within the framework in which we talk about persons. The second is “not even false”: it simply involves a *category mistake*.”
(MWN, p.146; my italics).

- Problem

But aren't the issues about supervenience exactly *inter-framework ontological* questions?

If so, how could Price maintain that questions about identity are not legitimate ones but that questions about supervenience are legitimate? Clearly, supervenience questions presuppose at least as much framework-independent stance as identity questions do!

5. Scientific Naturalism, Supervenience and ‘Liberal’ Naturalism

Summing Up

- Given Price’s acceptance of the Supervenience Thesis, he is committed to (a weak form of) ontological foundationalism. But not only this commitment fails to dissolve all placement problems, it seems inconsistent with Price’s functional pluralism.

Rejection of the Supervenience Thesis?

- Can Price reject the Supervenience Thesis? He cannot do so unless he gives up scientific naturalism.
- Argument
Given his scientific naturalism, Price cannot simply assume scientific naturalism without any scientific ground. He must provide a *scientific reason* for what allows us to legitimately investigate every linguistic framework from the framework of natural science but not vice versa. Given Price’s rejection of representationalism, however, the only way he can do this is by committing himself to some form of ontological foundationalism in a scientific version (à la Quine). But the acceptance of the Supervenience Thesis is arguably the *weakest* form of ontological foundationalism (whether in scientific or in metaphysical version), such that one cannot accept any form of ontological foundationalism unless one accepts the Supervenience Thesis. Therefore, Price cannot reject the Supervenience Thesis unless he is willing to give up scientific naturalism.

5. Scientific Naturalism, Supervenience and 'Liberal' Naturalism

Conclusion: A Dilemma for Price's Naturalism

Therefore, Price is in a dilemma. He must either

- (i) embrace the Supervenience Thesis, which then implies that he will face some genuine placement problems and also have a difficulty developing his functional pluralism in a consistent way; or
- (ii) reject the Supervenience Thesis and hence reject all forms of ontological foundationalism, which then implies that he must give up scientific naturalism, even in the form of subject naturalism.

5. Scientific Naturalism, Supervenience and ‘Liberal’ Naturalism

Further Concluding Remarks

- If what I have argued in Section 3 is right, it shows that (*pace* Price) anti-representationalism alone cannot dissolve placement problems. It must be combined with *anti-foundationalism*, which requires the rejection of the Supervenience Thesis.

□ Rorty: “Quietists think that no kind of thing is more fundamental than any other kind of thing.”]

- Indeed, I think that Price had better reject the Supervenience Thesis and thereby embrace anti-foundationalism in order to make his pluralistic naturalism more consistent.
- But this means that Price should take the second horn of the dilemma I formulated. That is to say, he should give up scientific naturalism, even in the form of subject naturalism, and accept more ‘liberal’ naturalism.