

Global expressivism and the flight from metaphysics

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In recent work Huw Price has defended what he calls a *global expressivist* approach to understanding language (and/or thought)¹ and its relation to the physical world (Price 2011; 2013). Global expressivism rejects a *representationalist* picture of the language-world relation and thereby (by intention at least) also a certain metaphysical conception of what are commonly known as *placement problems*: how entities of the everyday, common sense world like mental states, meanings, moral values, modalities and so on fit into the natural world. On this metaphysical conception, the issue is how to construe the relevant entities in terms of underlying natural or physical ones, inviting reductionism, eliminativism or other more nuanced responses, such as non-cognitivism or fictionalism. For Price this metaphysical project depends on representationalism, and lapses once one relinquishes it. Price's alternative to representationalism – global expressivism – upholds the latter's commitment to substantive enquiry into the naturalistic basis of language, but pursues this in a pragmatist or non-representationalist 'key' (as Price often puts it). In that way it is a view that while insulating common sense thinking from answerability to science still sees it as part of the natural world.

I am in broad sympathy with many of Price's arguments and ideas. I find his arguments against representationalism convincing (see Knowles 2014, pp. 201-7 for discussion and defence), and I also think relinquishing representationalism involves

¹ Following Price, I will henceforth gloss over this distinction and proceed with the discussion for the most part in the linguistic mode.

relinquishing a lot of the traditional philosophical concerns that go under the name of ‘metaphysics’ (see Knowles in preparation). Furthermore, though I think getting rid of metaphysics in many of its manifestations in contemporary philosophy would be a good thing, I find Price’s urge also to avoid a soggy, quietist pluralism (see Price 2015) laudable. However, I believe the specific sub-variety of non-representationalism Price develops and defends to this end – global expressivism (henceforth *GE*) – actually fails to deliver the insulation of common sense categories from answerability to those of science that he desires; indeed that its underlying assumptions actually serve to hold the door open to one who seeks such answerability.

To make properly good on this assessment would require development of an alternative non-representationalist picture which secures the goods Price takes *GE* to do; this paper however will restrict itself primarily to arguments against the anti-metaphysical aspirations of *GE*. These have their starting point in the Carnap-Quine debate. Given Price’s view of this, which I endorse – including what he concedes to the different parties – I think it can be made clear that Quine’s view, or something very close to it, presents us with a coherent example of an non-representationalist metaphysical project, i.e. one concerned with tackling placement problems in the traditional way but without construing this project representationalistically. Further, though one might reasonably doubt the rationality of or the motivation for such a view, Price’s own naturalistic assumptions, as these are evinced in his own so-called ‘subject’ naturalism and the global expressivist programme, make that move dialectically unavailable to him.

All this constitutes sections 2 and 3 of the paper, its argumentative core. The first section introduces Price’s views and paves the way for that. The concluding section

sketches briefly the alternative non-representationalist, anti-metaphysical picture that I would favour.

1. Price's argument against object naturalism and for global expressivism

In his 'Naturalism without representationalism' (2004), Price attacks a view he calls 'object naturalism' (something others might call 'metaphysical naturalism'; we will stick with Price's label, abbreviating hereafter to *ON*). He does this by way of a) arguing that *ON* depends on representationalism and b) casting doubt on representationalism, the latter in part by defending an alternative, deflationary view of truth and reference.² I am not concerned with the latter arguments here; they issue in a broad view we can call *non-representationalism about language/meaning* – henceforth *NR* – defending which would take at least another paper. I assume the cogency of *NR* here.³

Our focus then is a): the idea that *ON* depends on representationalism – or, to put it the other way around, that if you reject representationalism (that is, embrace *NR*), *ON* becomes untenable. In what follows I will outline Price's argument for this claim and

² Other papers that cover similar ground are Price (2009a) and Price & Menzies (2009).

³ The expression 'anti-representationalism' has become more widespread than 'non-representationalism' in discussion of these issues in the literature. Though they are essentially just labels, I use the less usual 'non-representationalism' here deliberately to denote a more purely negative view: one that rejects representationalism and embraces instead some form of semantic deflationism – where the latter is understood as denying and the former maintaining that truth and reference are substantive word-world relations that help to explain meaning. As we shall see, especially in relation to the discussion of Quine and Carnap in section 2, semantic deflationism plausibly also has deflationary implications for ontology. Importantly, *NR* is the alternative to representationalism Price is mainly concerned with in his argument against *ON* (that is, he argues that *ON* presupposes representationalism and lapses if one rejects the latter and instead embraces deflationism). I avoid 'anti-representationalism' mainly because it has (perhaps not unreasonably) been connected to Price's more specific elaboration of *NR* in the direction of *GE* – indeed, is often used by him and others as a synonym for the latter. My central gambit will be that there is light between *NR* and *GE* (or, if you like, a fully *anti-representationalist* view) that Price does not see and that accommodates a form of *ON*.

how he sees it as leading to GE, before registering some initial worries about it that set the stage for my Quine-based critique of his position.

ON is the view that all truth or knowledge is fundamentally of natural scientific character; that ultimately ‘all there *is* is the world studied by science’ or, in an epistemological key ‘that all genuine knowledge is scientific knowledge’ (Price 2004, p. 185). The problem for ON according to Price is not so much that it is false, but that it is, or at least is in danger of being, incoherent, or at least somehow irrational or unmotivated.⁴ Price’s attack on ON is thus in fact a more general attack on the idea of a certain kind of metaphysical project, naturalistic or otherwise, that lies behind it, though we will for the most just be considering the naturalistic version of it here.

The argument proceeds via a dilemma: one can understand ON as having either a linguistic (or conceptual) starting point, or a material one; but on neither understanding is ON coherently or rationally motivated, at least clearly. Though the latter understanding might appear more straightforward and indeed what ON as a doctrine involves, it is precisely one of Price’s aims to show that the motivation for ON is in fact not as straightforward as many have assumed. Price considers the linguistic understanding first. He argues that many metaphysical issues start in the linguistic realm as questions about what we mean by this or that term or locution, how we might analyse it and so on. At some point however a supporter of ON who adopts this starting point will have to assume that certain linguistic items *represent* bits of extra-linguistic reality, to take us from language to the world. ON can thus be understood as claiming that all the substantive

⁴ It will be important to make clear exactly what force the objection is meant to have (something Price himself does not do, as far as I can see). I will ultimately be arguing that given Price’s other commitments a form of ON must be conceded to survive the argument even on its weakest construal.

truth makers of our claims are natural truth-makers (in some appropriately demarcated sense of ‘natural’). This understanding of ON corresponds to what Price calls the ‘Canberra plan’, as pursued by people like David Lewis and Frank Jackson (cf. Jackson 1998; Price & Menzies op. cit.). It depends on there being substantive reference and more generally truth-making relations, that is, ones which explain meaning by relating bits of language to bits of the world – that is, on representationalism.⁵ Thus when we say that experiences or values are ultimately physical, we are saying that the referents of terms like ‘pain’, ‘good’ and so on are physical in nature.

Price thinks ON has a clear content when construed on the linguistic model. However, there is a hitch: representationalism is not something you get for free, rather it is a substantial theoretical claim about how language functions.⁶ Thus one needs at least what Price calls a *subject* naturalistic enquiry – one into the underlying nature of human language and thought, construed itself as a scientific project – prior to declaring ON viable. Moreover, representationalism is something he thinks we should be suspicious of as such a theory of language, for a variety of reasons; and that there is a promising alternative to it, semantic deflationism, which avoids the problems that infect

⁵ Representationalism is thus not merely the idea of there *being* truth-makers and truth-making relations. Semantic deflationism can for example accept that moral states of affairs – in some suitably deflationary sense – make moral statements true or false. Rather representationalism assumes that there is some *non-trivial* specification of reference that also allows for non-trivial truth-makers in a way that in turn makes space for ON. This is coordinate with the idea that the Canberra planners’ metaphysical project is itself not meant to be trivial, and indeed one way of understanding Price’s argument is that a non-trivial metaphysics requires a non-trivial notion of representation. Note however that Price therefore does not renounce the idea of representation in precisely the trivial, deflationary sense; this will be important later on.

⁶ Indeed, it is not the only hitch for ON according to Price, for even if one accepts representationalism in principle there may be problems in understanding referential relations determinately enough to allow useful resolution of metaphysical questions; cf. Stich (1990). But we will not pursue that worry here.

representationalism. As noted above, the tenability of these claims is something I am taking for granted here in accepting NR. So, assuming NR, a linguistic understanding of ON, though clear in principle, is in fact ruled out.⁷

But is ON really dependent on the linguistic starting point, and thus on representationalism? Price turns now to the *material* understanding of ON, according to which ‘we do metaphysics without semantic crutches’ (Price 2004, p. 196), i.e. by invoking the referents of our terms directly. Here Price argues there are two fundamental barriers to a vindication of ON. One rests on the idea that a supporter of ON should be able to frame an argument for her position. Such an argument can be mounted through the Canberra planners’ idea that all semantic roles in Ramseyfied versions of the theories for the concepts in question have to be filled by naturalistic occupiers; but this takes us back to the linguistic conception, and the problems with representationalism. Yet without this starting point, it is just not clear how one would frame a general argument for ON, and hence how it can get off the ground (ibid., p. 197). The second problem is that the possibility of a deflationary treatment of discourse shows that ‘the cat is out of the bag’, as Price puts it (ibid., pp. 195 ff.). Given semantic deflationism – that is, given we have rejected representationalism and embraced NR – we do not need to think in terms of any worldly items that our words may correspond to in order to understand their role in our lives; hence, we can rather focus on explaining the talk itself, from a (subject) naturalistic point of view.

⁷ At least, it would seem to be so barring the eventuality that we can *exhaustively analyse* problematic concepts in terms of naturalistic ones – a vindication of ON which Price is in principle open to (pers. comm.), but presumably thinks so unlikely as to be not worth discussing.

It is the latter that forms the project of GE, which Price describes more fully in subsequent work (Price 2011, ch. 1; 2013). GE seeks to explain a discourse by looking at its underlying function, taking as its starting point a view of humans as natural, evolved beings in a natural environment. It is a *global* project because, though different discourses serve different functions, a non-representational, pragmatic explanation applies to each – including our talk about the natural world itself. Lest this latter sound perplexing, Price allows that to explain the function of some vocabularies we will need to make use of their referring terms, while with others this will not be necessary (that is, we will only need to use the referring terms of other discourses).⁸ This distinction is coordinate with another he makes between vocabularies that do and those that do not have an *e-representational* character (ibid., ch. 2). E-representation for Price is a non-semantic relation of something like covariation or causation between the terms of a vocabulary and the items these terms genuinely semantically, albeit deflationistically, refer to in the natural world.⁹ The bet is that in domains like ethics terms will not e-

⁸ Given this distinction, the label *global expressivism* might appear somewhat misleading, as this tends to imply an approach to a vocabulary that does not make use of its (putatively) referring terms to explain its existence and function. Price in fact acknowledges this non-standard usage, gesturing further at how GE's deflationary understanding of truth provides a further, somewhat non-standard way of exemplifying an 'expressivist' approach (2013, pp. 177-8). Perhaps *global pragmatism* – a label he also uses – might thus have been more appropriate. On the other hand, he also thinks expressivist explanations in a more traditional sense can be extended at least a lot further and deeper than is often assumed (see section 3). His main point in any case is that the explanations in question are (uniformly) *not* representational and (hence) *not* metaphysical, but rather based on use and function (see further Williams', 2013, discussion of 'EMU'-specifications of meanings and Price's, 2013, pp. 173 ff., endorsement of this as an interpretation of his view).

⁹ Price uses the term 'i-representation' to characterise this latter, 'language-internal' relation. Neither i-representation nor e-representation correspond to representation in the sense assumed by representationalism; in Price's view, the latter makes the mistake of merging what are in fact two separate notions. See *ibid.* for further discussion.

represent, whereas in, say, that of middle-sized dry goods or science – the domain of the natural, in a certain recognizable sense – they will. The distinction is not meant to be absolute, thus allowing gradations of e-representationality; nor is it given *a priori* which domains will and which will not turn out to be e-representational. But however things exactly pan out, Price’s overall point is that his non-representational enquiry into our different discourses will not leave any significant question unanswered and hence no room for metaphysical quandaries.

I think one could be forgiven for finding the second stage of Price’s argument against ON, from the material starting point – even when embellished in the way I have just indicated – somewhat less than totally transparent. It seems what Price says at most suggests that if we adopt a material starting point for placement questions, we owe some account of why we should prosecute them in a metaphysical way, rather than go in for GE. But this falls short of showing that this project is incoherent or somehow irrational, which it seems is what he would ideally want to show. Furthermore, he does not consider possible motivations other than the Canberra planners’ argument for ON. Another way of putting this is to say that NR does not obviously yield GE: though it may well make ON look an odd view to hold – insofar as the rejection of representationalism undermines the idea that some vocabularies do and some do not latch onto an independently given reality (‘reality-as-it-is-in-itself’) – it is not clear that ON is either completely ruled out or without motivation. Arguing it may not be, and indeed reasonably cannot be for Price, is the theme of the following two sections.¹⁰

¹⁰ Somewhat similar though not identical worries to these are voiced by Horwich (2013), to which Price (2013, pp. 178 ff.) has replied – to my mind effectively, given the details

2. Carnap, Quine and the coherence of non-representationalist object naturalism

For Price, Rudolf Carnap and his distinction between internal and external questions is an important inspiration for GE. For Carnap we can only intelligibly ask ontological questions when working within a framework of linguistic rules that specifies how we use certain terms (see his 1950). It is trivial that, say, numbers exist within the framework of arithmetic, for we make therein referential uses of number terms. Such *internal* ontological questions will be decided by the semantic rules for the relevant framework together with, where relevant, appropriate empirical confirmation. If however we seek to ask an ontological question in a more philosophical mode, of the kind *Do numbers really exist?*, then we have left behind the only arena – the framework of arithmetic – that can give such questions meaning. *External* ontological questions are thus senseless.

For Price this distinction maps on to another, that between use and mention, which in turn can be related to his discussion of representationalism and to GE (cf. Price 2009b). Engaged in arithmetical practice we automatically make referential *usages* of number terms; there is thus a trivial sense in which these terms refer to existing things.

of Horwich's piece. Knowles (forthcoming) discusses the relationship between Horwich's and Price's views on representationalism and metaphysics.

I should perhaps underline at this juncture that what Price calls 'object naturalism' is defined in such a way that it is independent of representationalism. This is clear in his writings (see the citations above), not least his consideration of ON's viability 'without semantic crutches'. Nevertheless, since Price thinks ON is *actually* dependent on representationalism, it is a view that has sometimes been seen and discussed as wedded to representationalism (by Price and others). Furthermore, there are some differences between representationalist and non-representationalist forms of ON in terms of how they understand placement problems (see the following section). As a result, some may think it appropriate to tie 'ON' to 'representationalism'. This however is a purely verbal point and does not affect the substance of what I will argue, namely, that, *contra* Price, rejecting representationalism does not rule out a recognizably metaphysical form of naturalism (and thus I will, for the record, also apply the label 'ON' to such a naturalism, in keeping with Price's original definition).

However, when we step back and ask whether there *really are* numbers, we tacitly change the subject, for we can now only really be asking about the *term* ‘number’ and its relation to other things we are acquainted with. To wring metaphysical conclusions from such an external perspective would require us to see the term as referring in a substantive way to something in the world in a way that determines its meaning: in other words, an assumption of representationalism; but this, as we have seen, is something Price regards as flawed.¹¹ However, interesting external questions can still be asked about how we use terms in different discourses, what function they serve and so on, leading to the project of GE.

I have introduced Carnap in order to appreciate the bearing of the position of his great rival, W.V.O. Quine, on Price’s arguments. Though Quine famously rebelled against many of Carnap’s distinctive theses, his philosophy is also in many ways continuous with Carnap’s, contrary to some common conceptions of Quine as the saviour of metaphysics – something Price himself has been at pains to point out (cf. his 2007, 2009b). Thus Price makes clear that Quine should be seen as a non-representationalist and thus – in one sense at any rate – an anti-metaphysician insofar as he rejects the coherence of a completely external perspective from which we might survey, unmediatedly as it were, the adequacy of our conceptual schemes to reality. As with Carnap, ontology can only for Quine be a reflection of the referential terms of the relevant discourses.¹² However, Quine rejects the distinction between external and

¹¹ In addition to, plausibly, clashing with the ontologically deflationist position Carnap adopts: see note 12.

¹² For an explicit statement of this, see Quine (1986, p. 115). To be clear, I see this commitment as part and parcel of NR. Though the latter is perhaps most recognizably evinced in Quine’s case through his disquotationalism (a form of semantic deflationism;

internal questions that Carnap erects on the grounds that it presupposes the analytic-synthetic distinction, which Quine of course also rejects (Quine 1961, essay 2). For Quine theory and/or language must be viewed holistically, everything being in the same essential business of predicting sensation – with physical science emerging as what is most suited to doing this.

Now Price effectively concedes the untenability of a strict analytic-synthetic divide to Quine (2009b, p. 287), but thinks this has little effect on his own position (and indeed the spirit of Carnap's) on the grounds that all one needs to uphold GE is a *functional* pluralism which stresses the radically different ways in which different discourses function in our lives, in spite of all being apt for expression in truth-conditional terms (ibid., p. 289). The question however from our previous section now again arises: is GE the *only* project one can pursue having embraced NR? In particular: does embracing NR really rule out a placement project that is concerned, not with how we use our concepts, but with the world, thereby allowing one to adopt a metaphysical attitude towards the entities of common sense (numbers, meanings, morals, etc.)? I suggest that the answer is 'no' and that looking at the case of Quine can provide us with an example of precisely this kind of position.

To see this, it is important firstly to emphasise that NR's rejection of the idea of reference and truth playing substantive, meaning-constituting roles in no way implies a rejection of the idea that our talk *has* semantic content: that it involves reference to entities and *saying how things are* – in our ethical, mental and modal discourses as much

cf. Quine 1970), it is very plausible that there are clear connections between semantic deflationism and the kind of ontological deflationism both Carnap and Quine defend. For an explicit argument to this effect see Thomasson (2015a).

as our naturalistic ones. Now Price himself thinks that all the theoretical and explanatory work will be taking place at a different level from this – at the level where we focus on use and function, which is moreover pluralistic. Nevertheless, he cannot and would not deny that all discourses do purport to *say how things are*, and moreover in *a univocal sense* – at the same time of course as different discourses say different things with respect to how things are.¹³

Now let us imagine someone who, for whatever reason, wants to prioritize or (as I will say) *valorize* our scientific talk over all other talk – our scientific account of *how things are* over all other accounts of *how things are* – and to seek to give an account of the latter exclusively in terms of the former. Let us also assume that such a naturalist rejects representationalism, i.e. embraces NR. Now Price wants to say that this person's commitment to something like ON must lapse as incoherent, irrational or at least unmotivated; but can that be right? As regards coherence, it can seem not simply because the position just outlined is at least very close to that of Quine's, and presumably Quine's philosophical pedigree suggests his view is at least coherent. A possible difference from Quine is that the different vocabularies in the imagined scenario are not being understood as concerned with *predicting sensation* – this would presumably be inappropriate for at least, say, moral talk, and would thus perhaps suggest a principled way of rejecting the envisaged imperialistic project. But assuming this verificationist aspect of Quine can be dropped – just indeed as Price, in coopting Carnap, drops *his* verificationism – and is

¹³ Price commits himself to truth-conditional content both explicitly (see his 2013, p. 40) and implicitly in view of his use of Brandom's inferential semantics (*ibid.*, p. 34), which precisely seeks to ground the notion of content in more basic normative practices. Cf. also Shapiro (2014) for a study of the various ways content inevitably figures in Price's system. (A couple of lines of possible resistance to this point or its significance that might be mounted by Price are considered below – see note 15 and section 3 – but rejected.)

replaced by the idea of different vocabularies simply saying different things by way of how things are, the position, it seems, remains open – as well as remaining distinctively Quinean in spirit. Quinean pedigree aside, I submit this position is at least coherent, and that in any event nothing Price says suggests otherwise. (In section 3 I turn to the question of its rationality and motivation.)

I do not want here (even if I had space) to go into detailed Quine exegesis. For all I need is the idea of a position, recognizably Quinean, which a) accepts NR; b) accepts naturalism or (as it is in Quine's case, and as I shall tend to say in the following) physicalism;¹⁴ and c) rejects the analytic-synthetic distinction (in an absolute sense), and hence similarly also the external-internal question divide. Along with the assumption about content outlined two paragraphs back, we can now show quite simply I think that this position is also one that can coherently commit to ON and a metaphysical conception of placement problems.¹⁵

¹⁴ It is of course often said that Quine rejected physicalism insofar as he acknowledged quantification over sets as unavoidable in science (cf. Quine 1961, essay 1). On the other hand, one might argue that doing this just enunciates a non-materialistic conception of physics. Though there is much to discuss here, I cannot see that it has any direct implications for my argument: Quine plausibly remained a physicalist in a recognizable sense, and even if he didn't, it seems clear such a position otherwise identical to Quine's remains viable. I will thus for simplicity's sake ignore this complication in the following.

¹⁵ Perhaps Price would at this point put up resistance to my invocation of truth conditional content in the service of a non-representationalist form of ON. Thus at one point he argues for a quietist position about reference and truth, claiming that one needn't deny 'in one's theoretical voice' semantic properties, only not assert their existence, and not make use of them (2004, pp. 191-2). However, from the position of one involved in the relevant discourses it stands fast that there are ethical truths, say, as well as physical ones, *and in the same sense*, however deflationary this sense may be – and that is all my Quinean position will require to motivate ON. Indeed, one might put further pressure on Price at this juncture if one adopted the idea that there is a significant distinction between formal and material terms of language, i.e. between referring terms and logical, non-referring terms, as Amie Thomasson does in defending her own neo-Carnapian view against Ted Sider's claim that it implicitly denies logical structure in the world (cf.

Carnap and Price seem to think that any such position would have to involve adopting an illegitimate external standpoint, given its commitment to NR. However, why should it not instead simply take the form of someone bringing the scientific picture of the world to our attention, and demanding allegiance to what it says: either the categories of the everyday have to be reconstrued in terms of physical ones, or they have to be seen as at least less than literally capturing how things are? To this Carnap would no doubt reply that such a reconstrual would be quite meaningless; the criteria of entity identity in different discourses are wildly incommensurable, as enshrined in the rules that respectively regulate them. It makes no sense, for example, to suppose goodness could be some physical property given these rules. But then the Quinean would retort that what is meaningful (analytically permissible) versus what is true (synthetic) does not mark an absolute distinction; and so if one is, as he is, sufficiently convinced of the fecundity of the physical description, we will just have to do our best to sensibly retain whatever we can of other, non-physical categories, letting the rest go by the board.

Price himself might retort at this point that the Quinean will still be running roughshod over important functional differences between our vocabularies – ethical and scientific assertions do not play the same roles in our lives; they are not doing the same kinds of job – and that we can only understand these differences by studying their function in our lives as natural creatures. The question however arises as to why neglecting these differences – which needn't involve denying them – should show that

Thomasson 2015b, pp. 312 ff.) – a line it seems would be conducive to Price's own view. For then, however much functional pluralism there is within the material category, its distinctiveness as a *category* is clearly acknowledged, which then presumably is enough to make coherent the idea of anyone valorizing a particular vocabulary in the way my Quinean does.

the Quinean project is suspect in any way. If one develops NR in the direction of GE, considered as an overall approach to placement problems, then one will of course see this kind of explanatory project and not a metaphysical one as central. But simply given NR it is, again, just not clear why the metaphysical project isn't equally viable. As noted above, Price thinks the *spirit* of Carnap's distinction between external and internal questions can be found in his own functional pluralism. However, functional pluralism does not *formally* reinstantiate the external-internal divide. Therefore it remains unclear how it could undermine a Quinean critique of, say, the ethical from the perspective of natural science, and generally the aim of giving an account of what there and what is true in terms of natural scientific ontology and truth.

Now of course doing all this will itself be thoroughly pragmatic affair, as Quine himself would stress. The very adoption of physics as the vocabulary that 'limn[s] the true and ultimate structure of reality' is itself pragmatic for him, steered by considerations of simplicity and elegance.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the programme is not *just* pragmatic, nor pragmatic in the way Price's GE is; for there is also a commitment to physical *truth*, and moreover as a standard for all other truths. Someone might object here that Quine's position is still not metaphysical in the sense relevant to ON, for his physicalism is ultimately warranted simply insofar as physics will be the best overall theory that accords with the tribunal of experience, or (as we might non-verificationistically put it) our best prior theoretical commitments. That Quine does view physics as our simplest overall

¹⁶ The quote is from Quine (1960, p. 221). Quine's realism has perplexed a number of commentators insofar as he also thinks we have no conception of how things are except through our particular, pragmatically derived theoretical schemes (see e.g. Keskinen 2014). However there is really no puzzle here once one bears in mind that there is no perspective external to such schemes from which one can measure their correspondence of lack thereof. See also below.

linguistic/theoretical framework cannot be contested. However, saying this does not mean, for him, that one can question whether it also tells us how things are (as far as we know). Further, a commitment to ON is fully in line with his *epistemological* naturalism and the notion of *mutual containment* (cf. Quine 1969): a physical conception of the world is both what the evolving web of belief consists in, and also the assumed overarching framework *in terms of which* this evolution occurs. I should also stress that the particular conception of physical science that Quine adopts, along with the plausibility of the particular physicalist proposals he makes, are not what is at issue here, but rather the coherence of these things, as well as the coherence of the kind of relationship between discourses they exemplify.

I think the coherence of a non-representationalist, Quinean form of ON should thus be clear. In closing this section, I want to drive the point home by indicating how the kinds of metaphysical strategy characteristic of more standard forms of ON can legitimately arise within it too – and without any backsliding into representationalism. We can take as our point of departure the basic structure of Quinean naturalistic enquiry: the regimentation of our various vocabularies into quantificational form with the aim of arriving at a body of claims in which only physical or at least naturalistic categories figure. An important part of this process for someone like Quine will be the method of *explication*, whereby a concept's role in the theory is taken over by some other, not through conceptual analysis, but merely in virtue of the latter being an in some way more theoretically adequate concept (e.g. *heat*'s role was taken over by that of *temperature*).¹⁷ The various possible upshots of such (no doubt, in many cases, iteratively applied)

¹⁷ The notion of explication is originally due to Carnap; it is discussed by Quine in his (1960, pp. 258 ff.).

explication would seem to be describable in terms of the familiar metaphysical tropes. To start with, we may end up with a concept that is so remote from the original that we simply drop the latter, i.e. *eliminate* it from our world picture, saying it refers to nothing. Alternatively we may want to say that the term's referent does exist because in being explicable as *so-and-so* (where 'so-and-so' abbreviates some suitably naturalistic description) we preserve the original structure of its use, or at least enough of it to keep using it. This would be *reductive* position because the phenomenon in question is seen as really – i.e. in naturalistic terms – something else. And then again, we might want to say that the original talk in question is not to be understood literally, but rather involves a useful *fiction*, or perhaps plays a purely *expressive* role.¹⁸ From the perspective of the science itself it may be not so important what we say, but it seems clear – or at least it does for all Price says – that a metaphysician could legitimately seek to gloss the upshot of such naturalistic enquiry in these different ways.¹⁹ Moreover, none of this need involve any assumption of representationalism – that there exist substantial referential relations between our words and a designated 'reality'. Deciding that a discourse is uniformly false or merely fictional clearly need involve no such thing, but even reduction on this line is

¹⁸ I am thinking here of expressivism as a local and non-cognitivist position, not the kind of view which is involved in Price's global expressivism. Whether such a local expressivism is coherent given NR is not important for me to establish here (Macarthur & Price, 2007, argue that semantic deflationism rules out local expressivism; Kukla & Winsberg, 2015, argue that it does not). What is important is that at least the classical options of eliminativism, reductionism or fictionalism are available (I take it that NR must and can unproblematically allow for fictional claims to be false, in spite of, in some sense, their assertibility).

¹⁹ Quine himself is sometimes sceptical about the value of metaphysical discussion – see e.g. Quine (1960, p. 265) – though in truth he seems to vacillate with respect to the extent of his 'placement' metaphysical interests. For some representative discussions, apart from *Word and Object*, see Quine (1953); (1995, essay 8) (on mental entities), Quine (1961, essay 4) (on enduring substances), and (Quine (1981, ch. 6) (on morality).

just a matter of finding that we can say roughly what we always said in other terms that are *ex hypothesi* more kosher.

This conception of metaphysics may not be exactly what the Canberra planners have in mind in talking of placement – but then why need or should it be? The underlying point is that the natural world is functioning as a constraint on our ontological theorizing, and that something like the traditional options are visible in this process; and that is surely enough to be in the realm of ON and placement metaphysics. In conclusion, then, I maintain there is nothing in Price’s critique that shows there is a principled barrier to ON once one adopts NR.

3. Is Quinean object naturalism irrational or unmotivated?

If I am right about the above, then there is a coherent metaphysical placement project – a form of ON – that can be embraced consistently with NR, at least insofar as the combination of a)-c) above is coherent (something I won’t question here, not least since the context is a debate with Price, who himself, at least in some sense, holds all three).²⁰ Of course, this coherence does not show that this project is one we should adopt, is rational to attempt to carry through, or is well-motivated. I should also note that, though Quine is of course an enormously influential philosopher, there are not perhaps many philosophers today who could properly be said to follow Quine in all respects of his

²⁰ Exactly in what sense Price is a naturalist will be an important theme of the current section. I also note that Thomasson (2015b) defends a neo-Carnapian position similar to Price’s, but sees it as dependent on upholding the analytic-synthetic distinction. In accord with Quine’s broader epistemological naturalism, I think we should do without the latter. However, defending this view or investigating Thomasson’s alternative, though clearly of interest in relation to understanding the relationship between NR and metaphysics, is beyond the scope of the present paper.

philosophy – in particular, his commitment to NR *and* a form of ON is arguably idiosyncratic. One might indeed think, with all due respect to Quine, that this is in fact *such* a strange or even irrational position that it is hardly worth taking seriously. After all, if one is a clear-sighted non-representationalist, why *would* one seek to impose the truths or ontology of one discourse onto that of all others?

I think this is a good question; as I indicated at the end of section 1, NR does sit slightly awkwardly with the kind of imperialistic project Quine engages in. Nevertheless, it is not totally obvious that no answers to it might be forthcoming; for example, it might be the case that the discourse of science itself involves precisely an imperialistic self-conception, so that a good practitioner of science is *eo ipso* someone like our Quinean object naturalist. If that were true, the project would not be (at least obviously) irrational.

As we shall see in the conclusion, I do not think this is true. Nothing Price says suggests it isn't however; moreover, in a dispute with Price, it strikes me that a defender of Quinean ON could also offer a *tu quoque* response were Price to accuse him of irrational or unmotivated imperialism. For though Price is of course a subject and not an object naturalist, he is in a sense a strong naturalist nevertheless – insofar as there are only certain, naturalistically kosher materials available for answering the expressivist-cum-pragmatist questions GE is concerned with. The question thus arises: if we can in this way *demarcate* the materials available for doing expressivist work, then why shouldn't we do something similar for metaphysical work? What is good for the goose is good for the gander, as they say.

I can imagine Price replying to this that his position is not as fundamentalistically naturalist or physicalist as Quine's is, and is therefore more defensible. To start with, he

might stress that his valorization of science or the natural world (however precisely circumscribed) for explanatory purposes is only perspectival. As he puts it at one point:

Science is only one of the games we play with language. Each game privileges its own ontology, no doubt, but the privilege is merely perspectival. Science is privileged ‘by its own lights,’ but to mistake this for an absolute ontological priority would be to mistake science for metaphysics, or first philosophy. (2011, p. 31)

However, as I have noted, the Quinean metaphysician does not see his own valorizing of science as issuing from first philosophy – there being no such thing for him. He is precisely perspective-bound; he just thinks, for whatever pragmatic reason, that physics or natural science should exhaust our perspective when it comes to performing a certain theoretical task – for him, saying how things are and what exists, thereby opening for certain, characteristically metaphysical, questions. The same is true of Price’s GE except the theoretical task is non-metaphysical. GE and the Quinean metaphysician seem to be in the same boat here.

Perhaps Price might accept the perspective-relativity of the Quinean metaphysician, but still maintain that there is an important difference between what this perspective-relativity amounts to for the respective views. Thus, in a recent discussion comparing his own view to that of Wilfred Sellars, he points out a kind of ambiguity in the notion of fact or truth that Sellars operates with. On the one hand, there is an inclusive notion, applying to anything ‘semantically assertible’, as Sellars put it, including things like the claims of ethics; on the other hand, there is an exclusive notion, applying only to the claims of science or ‘natural facts’ (cf. Price 2015, pp. 317-18). Price goes on:

Read one way the claim that the facts of natural science are all the facts that exist is trivially false; read the other, it is trivially true. And on neither side is there scope for a significant argument for bare naturalism. (Ibid., p. 318).

By ‘bare naturalism’ he here means the same as ‘object naturalism.’ So it might seem that he is saying his own GE – which is meant to map fairly closely onto the reading of Sellars’ overall view he is pushing above – though naturalistic is not so in a substantive sense, as Quine’s presumably is. It is not *promoting* naturalistic vocabulary as that vocabulary in terms of which to understand all others; it is simply registering that when it comes to doing substantive explanatory work, we *ipso facto* operate with facts in the second, naturalistic sense. That is why, Price might say, we can pin a charge of irrationality on the Quinean view, but not on GE. (Indeed, this response could be seen as a way of stymieing my suggestion for an non-representationalist metaphysical programme at the first stage of its development – that in which I noted all discourses *say how things are* in a univocal way; for now it seems to turn out that there is after all an important difference in the ‘how things are’, the facts, of science, on the one hand, and those of ethics and the rest on the other.)

However, whatever one says of Sellars, Price himself surely cannot be countenancing the idea of two kinds of fact or truth in the sense of these being *two distinguishable semantic species of one overarching genus* – for this is tantamount to giving up on NR and re-embracing, in unreconstructed form, the so-called *bifurcation thesis*.²¹ Yet it seems nothing less than such a distinction would be needed for the above point to be effective. We have of course seen that for Price some vocabularies are more e-

²¹ Price explicitly abjures the bifurcation thesis in Macarthur & Price (op. cit.), in which *local* forms of expressivism that nevertheless aim to make use of a deflationary notion of truth are argued to be unstable.

representational than others; moreover, he relates e-representation to the above distinction between different kinds of fact, or at least ‘worlds’ (Price 2013, pp. 55-6). Now there need be nothing problematic for Price about saying that there are different kinds of fact, for example, that some facts are ‘e-representational’ and some not (where to be an ‘e-representational fact’ would be being the truth-maker of a claim containing e-representational vocabulary). This could however for non-representationalist only correspond to something like dividing up the animals into, say, those that can climb and those that can’t. For the distinction to carry the weight Price wants it to it would have to be seen as analogous to (using an outdated but hopefully illustrative example) dividing the animals into those that can think – i.e. human beings – and those that cannot, i.e. as introducing a whole new species of the relevant genus. But this is just what his commitment to NR rules out, in the semantic case. So he just cannot claim there is anything intrinsic to natural or scientific *facts* that makes them fit to doing the explanatory work in question. Indeed, at an intuitive level, there would seem nothing incoherent about choosing a discourse other than the natural in terms of which to make sense of all the others, be it metaphysically or expressivistically.²²

²² Price in fact explicitly concedes this (cf. his 2007, p. 401). Perhaps he might finesse the problem here by saying that the kind of explanation he has in mind requires the vocabulary in question to pick out at least *causally efficacious features* of the world. However, there are at least two problems with this suggestion. Firstly Price himself thinks we should be able to understand causal talk itself expressivistically, i.e. in terms of more basic naturalistic facts that are not themselves causal in nature (cf. Price & Menzies 1993, and below). Secondly, it is in any case very unclear how one could motivate the idea that expressivist explanation would have to be causal *in some substantive, naturalistic sense* without begging the question against a view that denied this. For example, it seems we can make quite good sense of the idea of someone, say, coming to realise an act was kind *because*, at least in part, the act was kind. Admittedly the issues here are complicated – a fuller discussion might consider what Crispin Wright has called ‘wide cosmological role’ (cf. Wright 1992, and for critique Rosen 1994) – but I think it is clear there is no easy

Perspectivalness is thus of no help to Price in fending off metaphysics. However, perhaps his naturalism is more qualified in some other way that renders it anodyne. One possibility here is that he is less monistic, i.e. physicalistic, within science than Quine. However, I take it this is just a question of demarcating *which* entities should fall under the label ‘natural’: as long as Price admits such a demarcation, a metaphysician can also make use of it. A more interesting response is that Price has hopes of expressivist accounts – *in the traditional sense* – applying within science itself, to categories like modality, causation and time (cf. Price 2013, p. 46; and for details on the last two examples, Price & Menzies op. cit. and Price 1997). Now some think that this feature of GE leads to a problematic regress (cf. Blackburn 2013 on the ‘no exit’ problem and the possibility of a ‘rolling pragmatism’). Price himself provides a different kind of response to the ‘no exit’ problem, based (in part) on the idea of e-representation (Price 2013, pp. 157-160). At the same time however, he wants to say that science itself, at least as we have it today, is not likely an ultimate description of physical reality, as is borne witness to by the aforementioned expressivist treatments of causal and related notions; as well as – indeed, most fundamentally – by the lessons to be drawn from Wittgenstein’s reflections on rule-following (Price 2013, pp. 60-63).

These are intriguing issues; however we do not need to get into them here. To start with, if the rule-following considerations place principled limits on a realist understanding of science, I take it they do this for any domain; so they are not relevant to our current discussion. Moreover, as long as Price remains committed to a kind of demarcational naturalism, then – even if this distinction is relative to a given stage in the

route to seeing scientific discourse as having some kind of *de jure* privileged status in explaining everything else.

development of our knowledge or to a target of investigation – surely the Quinean can embrace that same demarcation and use it to metaphysical ends. Maybe our search for the ultimate naturalistic vocabulary will never be completed; but for all that, adopting what we have at any one time as our temporary ‘bedrock’ for doing placement metaphysics would presumably be just as tenable as adopting it as our temporary ‘bedrock’ for doing expressivist work.

We have already seen that placement metaphysics – ON – cannot be ruled out as incoherent once divorced from representationalism. The conclusion of this section is that there is no reason to see such a position as irrational or unmotivated either, at least that would not also be a reason to see GE as such.

Conclusion

For Price, the demise of placement metaphysics is meant to follow on from that of representationalism. Though I think the latter does put pressure on metaphysics in a broad sense, and does perhaps make ON look an odd position to hold, I have argued it does not rule it out; indeed, that assumptions underlying GE precisely hold the door open to it.

Having said that, I am convinced of NR and I do think that it can, given the right context, be developed into a view that cogently rebuts ON and placement metaphysics (indeed, much else that goes under the name of ‘metaphysics’ in contemporary philosophy, though that is a larger issue). Further, I think this view can involve something like Price’s subject naturalism, in the sense of a scientific study of structures underlying our different vocabularies. Two main components of it can be mentioned here. The first is what I call *radical anti-reductionism*, something I associate primarily with

Noam Chomsky (see e.g. his 2000), though which has also been defended in different forms by other thinkers (e.g. Dupré, 1994; Ladyman & Don Ross et al., 2007). On this line there is no basic scientific level, even *pro tem*, and though *unification* is a genuine goal of science, it involves adjustments at both levels that are to be unified. Further, and relatedly, common sense categories are not eliminated or vindicated through scientific discoveries, but simply left behind *as part of science* – a view John Collins calls, again invoking Chomsky’s views, *meta-scientific eliminativism* (Collins 2007). In this way, radical anti-reductionism yields a position which, like Price’s though for different reasons, renounces placement metaphysics. Moreover, when defended as a form of NR, I believe it can be shown to have particular plausibility.

The second component prevents my picture leading into a soggy quietism – that is, a position which sees no way of connecting our different discourses to one another but simply notes (*inter alia*) ‘the obvious fact that ethical, and more generally evaluative thinking, is not science’ (McDowell 1998, p. viii) – something we have seen Price is also keen to avoid (cf. his 2015). For we can, scientifically, turn our gaze upon ourselves and examine the underlying bases of our various different discourses, both genealogically, and from a more cognitive science perspective, examining innate prerequisites of our thought capacities. This is of course very similar to what Price’s GE seeks to do. But the kind of NR I am proposing sees a different significance in these studies. On my view what anthropological and/or psychological studies can suggest is how, say, moral discourse in being underpinned by motivational states of particular kinds is unlikely to become a systematic, scientific discipline – by contrast with other vocabularies which have no such motivational underpinnings but are as far as we can see more purely

‘conceptual’. Although such study is not metaphysically relevant, it stands to enrich, explain and possibly partially correct our common sense conceptions of what possibilities for systematic theorizing exist.

I hope to develop these ideas more fully in future work, but I briefly outline them here to stress how close I think Price is to getting a coherent anti-metaphysical view in place. My main conclusion for now is that, though he is onto much that is fruitful and correct, his own development of NR fails to rule out ON and placement metaphysics.²³

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²³ Versions of the is paper have been presented at the Centre for the Study of Mind in Nature colloquium (Oslo, March 2014), the conference *Perspectives on Intentionality* (Fefor, Norway, September 2014) and the Cambridge Philosophy of Science seminar (‘CAMPOS’) (February 2015). I thank audiences for their questions and comments on those occasions. Thanks also to two anonymous reviewers, whose comments substantially improved the final product. Finally, special thanks to Huw Price for inspiration and discussion over the years.

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