Pragmatism, Metaphysical Quietism & The Problem of Normativity

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There has always existed in the world, and there will always continue to exist, some kind of metaphysics, and with it the dialectic that is natural to pure reason. It is therefore the first and most important task of philosophy to deprive metaphysics, once and for all, of its injurious influence, by attacking its errors at their source.
- Kant CPR:B xxxi

Introduction

Philosophy, the [Wittgensteinian] quietists concluded, has no *distinctive* methods and philosophy can solve no problems; philosophy becomes a kind of *therapy*, dissolving philosophical problems rather than solving them… The naturalists (largely) agree with the Wittgensteinians that philosophers have no distinctive methods that suffice for solving problems, but (unlike the Wittgensteinians) the naturalists believe that the problems that have worried philosophers (about the nature of the mind, knowledge, action, reality, morality, and so on) are indeed real. For the naturalists, the key is for philosophers either to adopt and emulate the methods of the successful sciences, or for philosophers to operate *in tandem* with the sciences, as their abstract and reflective branch. In the latter role, philosophy analyses *only* those concepts that figure in successful empirical theories and tries to develop philosophical answers that win support from, or are entailed by, scientific evidence. (2004, 2-3)

So remarks Brian Leiter in a recent volume titled *The Future of Philosophy*.

According to Leiter, contemporary analytic philosophers divide into two broad camps "Wittgensteinian quietists" and "naturalists" depending upon the approach they take to the central problems of the subject, including what we might call *location problems*. For naturalists who "adopt and emulate the methods of the successful sciences" the scientific image of the world provides a complete and exhaustive account of the world. The problem then arises how to 'locate' such things as morality, mathematics or intentional states in the world, viz. the scientific image. That there is a serious problem here depends on the claim that the scientific image is a good deal more restricted than the manifest image of the world so that various items that are indispensable to our lives appear in the latter but not, or not obviously or explicitly, in the former.

Jaegwon Kim provides a good example of this conception of the major problems of contemporary metaphysics, asking "where in the physical world our mind fits?" Since the "physical world," on this picture, is understood as nothing but "bits of matter and structures aggregated out of bits of matter, all behaving in accordance with the laws of physics" (2004, 129) prima facie it does not include any mental states or events. Since we cannot do without our thought and talk about the mind, the question of how to 'locate' the mind in this scientific conception of the world becomes acute. It is in this context that proposals for identifying the mind with some uncontroversial item in the physical world (say, the brain) are made (e.g., Armstrong (1968)).

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Location problems are prime examples of "the new wave of 'old-fashioned' metaphysics" (22) that Leiter's volume celebrates. One difference from traditional metaphysics, however, is that these problems are often conducted in a semantic key, as Frank Jackson explains:[1]

> an increasingly popular view is that well-founded claims framed in one or more of the languages of the physical sciences give a complete, as near as is now possible, account of what our world is like, and that what is said in the languages of psychology and morality, for example, is either talk about the very same entities and properties… in different words (reductionism, on one understanding of that contested term), or else is false talk (eliminativism), or else is not talk at all in the sense of claims about how things are (noncognitivism). (1997, 269)

As this passage makes clear, projects of naturalization are typically conceived as involving attempts to reductively analyze certain problematic concepts that have application in the manifest image in terms of naturalistically respectable concepts that are applicable in the scientific image. Theoretical options include reductionism, eliminativism, and nonfactualism.[2] Important areas of discourse that are seen to give rise to location problems include psychology, morality, modality, mathematics and aesthetics. If the concepts in question are indispensable, as is usually the case, then the problem becomes particularly pressing. For a start,

[1] This is so even despite there being a countermovement against the linguistic turn. See Williamson in Leiter (2004).
[2] There is also instrumentalism, which holds that false talk need not be eliminated in so far as it serves some useful function.

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eliminativism is not an option. And if deflationary notions of truth and fact are applicable within the discourse, nonfactualism, too, is unavailable. If instrumentalism is deemed unacceptably revisionary then it seems a way *must* be found to reductively analyze the concepts in question (say, concepts of belief and desire, or goodness, or number) in naturalistic terms.

A lesson from the recent history of philosophy is that the most significant location problem is the problem of how to locate rational (or conceptual) normativity in the natural-scientific world. Otherwise put, how do we reconcile the irreducibly normative and the natural, on a naturalistic conception of the natural which identifies it with the scientific image. This problem has found expression in both analytic and continental traditions of philosophy and is closely connected to fundamental questions about the possibility or scope for theorizing about human beings in scientific terms. It subsumes location problems arising from discourses which are normative on their face (e.g. the psychological, the moral) as well as location problems arising from irreducible normative concepts of truth, reason and value. Let us call this general class of problems *the problem of normativity*.

In Leiter's characterization the attitude of analytic philosophy to location problems divides into two primary camps:

1) **Naturalists** believe location problems (like traditional metaphysical

   problems in general) are real and so, ultimately answerable[3]; and

2) **Quietists** think location problems are unreal, and so, potentially dissolvable.

But this neat way of carving up the discipline into two opposing camps – naturalist metaphysicians and non-naturalistic quietists – overlooks an important possibility: namely, the pragmatist position that agrees with quietists about the unreality of metaphysics but *also* agrees with naturalists when it comes to emulating scientific methods in philosophy. The pragmatist, in this characterization, is a *naturalistic quietist*.

In this paper I want to explore the form of pragmatism that contests Leiter's either/or. Pragmatism, so understood, is an important theoretical option in contemporary philosophy but, as Leiter's division of the subject makes clear, one easily overlooked. Its importance is, in no small part, a matter of its providing a more fruitful approach to the normativity problem than orthodox forms of naturalism and non-naturalism make available.[4] As we will see this depends on reconceiving the normativity problem not as an issue in metaphysics (say, ontology) but one of genealogy: trying to understand how our social practices institute norms

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[3] Leiter makes clear his commitment to the naturalist camp and notes, with obvious satisfaction, that "quietism has been the minority response among English-speaking philosophers" (2004, 2).
[4] An example of orthodox non-naturalism is Plantinga (1993) who argues that our epistemological commitments require a theological grounding.

or normative statuses; and trying to understand what functions our normative talk

serves. Pragmatism does not automatically solve the normativity problem but it

does provide a more fruitful vantage from which it is, at least, tractable.

Furthermore, as a version of metaphysical quietism,[5] pragmatism ought to

be included in discussions of the future of philosophy since it has some claim to be

a leading player in that future, at least on a vision of philosophy that sees the battle

over metaphysics – concerning *its* nature and reality – as internal to philosophy.

Quietism, on this account, is not summarily dismissive of metaphysics but sees its

diagnosis and reconception of metaphysics as *internal* to the discovery of

philosophical clarity and understanding.

A caution regarding the title "pragmatism": as everyone knows, the term

"pragmatism" has been applied to many different programs in philosophy. I feel at

liberty, then, to appropriate the term for the position articulated in this paper on the

grounds that it overlaps with what some call "neo-pragmatism" and because it

follows the spirit (if not the letter) of at least one classical pragmatist, John Dewey.

But I want to make it clear that pragmatism as defined here is not to be understood

in terms of classical pragmatism since, for one thing, neither James nor Peirce

would count as metaphysical quietists.[6] It is represented best in contemporary

philosophy by the work of Robert Brandom, Huw Price and Richard Rorty;

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[5] I use the term "metaphysical quietism" instead of "Wittgensteinian quietism" since it captures what is central to Leiter's characterization of the latter without involving a commitment to the global quietism that Wittgenstein espouses. More on this in section 1.
[6] James held the metaphysical doctrine of radical empiricism and Peirce believed in metaphysical necessitites ("thirdness").

although, plausibly, it also includes others not ordinarily thought of in these terms

such as John Rawls and Thomas Scanlon.[7]

As a preliminary to discussing the advantages of the pragmatist approach to

the problem of normativity, I want to fill out the rough sketch of pragmatism that I

have so far provided. I shall first consider the quietist dimension of pragmatism.

This will put us in a position to appreciate why the pragmatist is committed to

methodological as opposed to metaphysical naturalism. It is from the perspective of

methodological naturalism that the problem of normativity is transformed from a

problem of ontology to a problem about how best to philosophise about our

normative practices. Of the various options available at this point I shall discuss

only two, Brandom's "normative pragmatics" and Price's "subject naturalism".

1. Quietism: Global & Local

Quietism, at a minimum, refers to a non-constructive mode of philosophizing, one

that has no ambition to formulate a general philosophical theory nor to provide a

straight answer to a philosophical problem. The aim of the quietist, in the region of

philosophical thought to which it applies, is not to embrace philosophical doctrines

or theories but to *earn* the right to live without them.

In the context of contemporary philosophy, Wittgenstein is the most radical

and unflinching quietist. In the *Tractatus*, he writes, "Philosophy is not a body of

doctrine but an activity. A philosophical work consists essentially in elucidations."

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[7] See Rawls (1971, ch 1, #9) and Scanlon (2003).

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(4.112) And in the *Investigations* we find many remarks espousing the same non-doctrinal stance, e.g.: "we may not advance any kind of theory… the problems are solved, not by giving new information, but by arranging what we have always known." (#109).

Unfortunately, the association between quietism and Wittgenstein and the general lack of sympathy toward Wittgenstein's methodological remarks has led to misconceptions about the viability and fruitfulness of quietism.[8] Given his radicality there is a sense in which Wittgenstein is not a particularly good representative for quietism. He is a *global* quietist, one who abjures *any* theoretical or constructive ambitions within philosophy. That this is a very difficult stance to successfully sustain and communicate is apparent from the widespread tendency to attribute theses to Wittgenstein, early and late, even in spite of his repeated insistence that he has none. The early Wittgenstein has standardly been read as committed to the picture theory of meaning and a mystical doctrine of unsayable truths, whilst the later Wittgenstein has been interpreted as a radical conventionalist (Dummett), a quasi-realist (Blackburn), a meaning-skeptic (Kripke), and as having a use theory of meaning (Horwich), to name only the most familiar examples of the widespread tendency not to take Wittgenstein's quietism seriously.

Another well-known example of global quietism in the history of philosophy is Pyrrhonian scepticism. Pyrrhonians cultivated dialectical skills in order to avoid

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[8] Quietism is often treated as a perjorative term by those hostile to what they take to be, often misguidedly, Wittgenstein's philosophy. Leiter is no exception in this regard.

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making any unqualified assertions at all about what is true and what not.[9] The aim,

which itself had to be hoped for rather than expected, was to arrive at a detached

state of mind termed "ataraxia" on all matters of reflection including, but not

limited to, metaphysical doctrines and theories. From its inception it, too, had great

difficulties in convincing other philosophers of its non-doctrinal character. Perhaps

the most common misunderstanding it invites is that it must be committed to a form

of negative dogmatism. As Aristocles put it,

> in admonishing us to have no opinion, they [the Pyrrhonian skeptics] at the
> same time bid us to form an opinion, and in saying that men ought to make
> no statement they make a statement themselves: and though they require
> you to agree with no one, they command you to believe themselves (2001,
> 14.18).[10]

But whatever the prospects of these fully global versions of quietism – and

they are a good deal better than is often supposed[11] – it should not be imagined that

they exhaust the field. What tends to be overlooked is that there are *local* versions

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[9] Pyrrhonists shed themselves of reason-based "dogmas" but not natural beliefs which they took to be acquired unreflectively without deliberation or argument.

[10] It is worth noticing that many misreadings of Wittgenstein and Sextus Empiricus, the most famous Pyrrhonian writer, can be put down to mistaken assumptions about the kind of text they have produced and what its relation to the reader is. Both writers go to great lengths to avoid being understood as propounding theses, employing many literary devices and techniques (e.g. deliberate textual discontinuities that leave many issues hanging, the use of multiple voices no one of which is final or definitive, an interplay between context-bound remarks and generalizations) and producing striking methodological remarks and warnings to the reader.

[11] I cannot defend this claim in the present paper.

of quietism that combine quietism in one or more areas with constructive or explanatory ambitions elsewhere. Since these versions are not paradoxical in the manner of the global versions it is best to understand quietism, in the first instance at least, as topic- or discourse-specific.

Like other philosophical 'isms' quietism can be thought of as coming in different versions differentiated by their targets. Thus, one can be a quietist about a specific issue (e.g. external world scepticism), a concept (e.g. Truth[12]) or a discourse (e.g. the realism-antirealism debate). For example, a quietist about Evil refuses to think that the concept of evil plays any substantial role in a metaphysical theory: that is, he refuses to accept that Evil exists or that it does not exist. To deny the existence of Evil, of course, would be to make a metaphysical claim albeit a negative one and the quietist is not in the business of making *any* metaphysical claims. We might put this by saying that for the purposes of philosophical theory he refuses to employ the concept of evil at all. It might be that he drops using the term altogether. Or he may continue to use the term in its ordinary (non-philosophical) sense(s) only avoiding the employment of the concept in the context of metaphysical theorizing.

It is important to emphasize that when quietism is understood in this topic-specific way it makes perfectly good sense to combine quietism in one area with constructive problem-solving and theorizing in another. Kant is a famous example, combining quietism about speculative metaphysics with a constructive theoretical

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[12] I shall capitalize terms or concepts being employed for metaphysical purposes.

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attitude towards critical metaphysics (and much else besides). Simon Blackburn, to give a more recent example, combines quietism about truth with a representationalist semantics which posits metaphysically substantial word-world relations in some areas, paradigmatically, in the discourses of the natural sciences.[13]

2. Metaphysical Quietism

Arguably, the most interesting and important form of quietism is quietism about metaphysics. Call it *metaphysical quietism*, although for convenience I shall henceforth simply refer to it as quietism. Precedents include Kant (at least his attitude to traditional or speculative metaphysics), Hume, Compte, Carnap, Wittgenstein and, at least in his early period, Dewey.[14] Since the target of this form of quietism is metaphysics an immediate question is what counts as metaphysics? This is a difficult matter. In this paper I can do no more than sketch a response.

Metaphysics is an attempt to explain phenomena or the appearances of things in terms of some conception of what is *really* basic, fundamental or real. Of course, there is notoriously little agreement among metaphysicians about what to include in the appearances and what counts as really real. A paradigmatic metaphysical question asks, in Socratic fashion, "What is X?" where X is a term

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[13] See (Macarthur & Price, 2007) for an argument that Blackburn's quasi-realist program is unstable and ought to be globalized.

[14] Taken as a whole, Dewey's career wavers uncomfortably between metaphysical quietism and a metaphysics of experience. Cf. Rorty in Chan (1997). A good expression of Dewey's early commitment to quietism is his (1920).

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such as 'goodness', 'knowledge', 'time', 'justice' and so forth. The paradigmatic answer takes the form of an a priori specification of 'essence' or 'nature', features something *must* have to be the thing that it is rather than features it just happens to have. In modern philosophy the search for essences often takes the linguistic form of a search for necessary and sufficient conditions for the application of the concept in question (e.g. tripartite analyses of knowledge).

Nonetheless, metaphysics extends beyond the search for essences. Famous examples of other metaphysical realities that have figured prominently in the history of philosophy are Platonic Forms, God, Substances, and Universals. Characteristic features of metaphysical claims involving such items are: that they are neither confirmed nor disconfirmed by empirical means; that they are supposed to hold once and for all; and that the concepts employed in their expression are treated as unrevisable and irreplaceable. Familiar examples include "There is an omnipotent God", "A human being consists of both material and immaterial substances," "Attributes inhere in an underlying substratum," "There are causally isolated possible worlds" and "The world consists of nothing but the posits of physics".

Any term, concept, sentence or theory can be put to a metaphysical use in so far as it is employed as part of a metaphysical system or with the explanatory intentions characteristic of metaphysics. To give a famous example consider Descartes' use of "doubt" in his rehearsal of scepticism e.g. "I doubt that '2 + 2 = 4'". This does not count as an ordinary use of the term nor can it be easily

explained as an extension of ordinary uses of the term in the past. To explain *this* usage he must appeal to the metaphysical idea of God-like powers that could, supposedly, lead us into error even about things which we cannot imagine being otherwise. Descartes is well aware that this is a metaphysical doubt. But it is not always easy to tell whether a particular concept is being used with metaphysical intentions. Is Moore's use of the term "know" in "I know I have two hands" a metaphysical use, as Wittgenstein (1969) suspects? Or, to give an example from contemporary physics, is string theory a plausible hypothesis or metaphysics in disguise as some scientists think?

3. The Two 'Moments' of Quietism

One of the common misconceptions about quietism is that the quietist simply turns his back on metaphysical problems, an attitude that rightly strikes many metaphysicians as dogmatic and dismissive. It is worth observing that anti-dogmatism is a key pragmatist virtue so charitable interpretation demands that the pragmatist ought not to be seen in this light if at all possible. Rorty's anti-metaphysical rhetoric often strikes one as adopting just this dismissive attitude but this is not his considered position. In order to explain this point it is worth noting that quietism has two moments: a diagnostic moment and a moment of reconception, which singly or in combination provide the basis upon which the quietist can earn the right not to have to answer the metaphysical problem in question. Let me explain.

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A) The Diagnostic Moment

The diagnostic moment is concerned with uncovering what has gone wrong with the metaphysical problem itself. This may involve uncovering the problem's sources, motivations and underlying assumptions – something Wittgenstein (1953) developed into a high art[15]-- with a view to asking whether the problem is as inevitable or unavoidable as it may be imagined to be. This work is aimed at challenging our sense that one *must* answer this problem.[16]

Or it can also involve attempting to demonstrate why the problem is more questionable, less coherent, than the metaphysician supposes. The aim in this case it to elucidate the problem and its implications in such a way that its implicit incoherence becomes manifest. In this regard Wittgenstein writes: "My aim is: to teach you to pass from a piece of disguised nonsense to something that is patent nonsense" (1953, #464). This stronger form of diagnosis, if successful, shows that the answer, if one can call it that, is that there is no question to answer.

B) The Moment of Reconceptualization

The second aspect of trying to earn the right not to have to answer metaphysical questions is to reconceive or reformulate the questions in order to provide some genuinely fruitful explanation of the problematic phenomenon that generated the metaphysical question in the first place. Wittgenstein (1972, 1) provides a good

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[15] Warren Goldfarb, in unpublished lectures on the *Investigations*, calls this "Wittgensteinian scrutiny".
[16] In this regard McDowell (1994, 146) speaks of "the illusory intellectual obligations of traditional philosophy."

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example of this strategy arguing that since we are stymied by the metaphysical question "What is meaning?" we do well to ask, in place of that, "What is the grammar [function, use] of the word "meaning"?" Wittgenstein's suggestion seems to be that in answering the latter question we can "cure" ourselves of the temptation to ask the former question.

Seeing that quietism has these two moments helps to explain why the Rortian version of quietism (and so, the neo-pragmatism that is associated with it) is often found so unsatisfying (cf. McDowell (1994, 146-55). Rorty, with some notable exceptions,[17] concentrates most of his attention on reconception. Oftentimes, his diagnostic claim is simply that centuries or millennia of attempting to answer some metaphysical problem have proven fruitless (e.g. Rorty (1982, Intro.) and, on that ground alone, we ought to drop it. This, however, will inevitably fail to convince without the painstaking diagnostic work of showing *why* this is so. Rorty's strength lies, rather, in offering a reconception of metaphysical problems in *political* terms, characteristically some version of the idea that human beings must be responsible to themselves and not to God or "the nature of reality" or some such non-human thing. Unfortunately, this genealogical move, interesting as it is, will strike many philosophers as simply changing the question and Rorty does not spend enough time assuaging this impression.

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[17] E.g., Rorty's powerful diagnostic work in his (1980) on the idea of the mind as a mirror of nature.

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4. Naturalism: Metaphysical vs Methodological

The quietist aspect of pragmatism has an important bearing on the way we conceive the pragmatist's commitment to naturalism. As Leiter notes, orthodox naturalism is a *metaphysical* position. Since the pragmatist is committed to metaphysical quietism he must distance himself from this interpretation of it. Consequently, his version of naturalism is primarily *methodological*. Let me explain the difference between these interpretations of naturalism.

In contemporary philosophy, naturalism is often distinguished into distinct epistemological and ontological claims:[18]

1) **Epistemological claim**: knowledge (or understanding) acquired by way of scientific methods of inquiry is all the knowledge (or understanding) there is[19]; and

2) **Ontological claim**: the scientific image of the world is a complete inventory of all that there is in the world.[20]

However, it is the second or ontological dimension that is paramount in orthodox naturalism today. This is clear from the fact that projects of naturalization simply take it for granted that the *only* concepts that are prima facie naturalistically respectable are those that figure in the scientific image of the world. Of course, agreement about this point is compatible with disagreement about the scope of

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[18] See (De Caro & Macarthur, 2004, Intro.) for further discussion of the definition of naturalism.

[19] For present purposes, "knowledge" need not be interpreted very stringently. It can do duty, for example, for what Quine calls well-entrenched beliefs.

[20] These dimensions of naturalism are logically distinct but tend to be held in tandem.

legitimate and irreducible science, and so, about the extent of the mismatch between scientific and manifest images. And this has a direct bearing on what is required for a successful naturalization.[21]

The epistemological dimension is more controversial. Quine famously argued that a naturalist must completely abandon the a priori as outmoded first philosophy. But, despite this, most orthodox naturalists retain some conception of a priori truth and justification.[22] This fits well with the interpretation of naturalism as a form of metaphysics but it is more surprising and more questionable than is often realized. How can a naturalist, of all people, continue to think that there is a non-empirical form of acquiring knowledge? Or with what right can a naturalist continue to appeal to an a priori mode of acquiring knowledge? I shall leave this prima facie difficulty aside since it is the ontological claim I want to focus attention on.

Whether the problem of inconsistency can be addressed in the epistemological domain, it also arises in another form for naturalists who endorse the ontological thesis. Leiter shows rare insight in seeing that the ontological claims of naturalism constitute a new form of old-fashioned metaphysics. But he fails to appreciate how paradoxical this interpretation of naturalism is. Surely one of the chief motivations for the rise of naturalism in contemporary thought has been the casting aside of supernaturalism, in particular, the philosophical appeal to a God

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[21] And naturalists do disagree about whether to include in the scientific image only the natural sciences or, in addition to those, the human and social sciences.
[22] E.g. Jackson (1998). This is not true of all naturalists, of course. Some few follow Quine in denying the legitimacy of any notion of a priori truth (e.g. Devitt (2005)).

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beyond space and time having various supernatural powers (e.g. omnipotence, omniscience). That is to say, naturalism has its roots in an *anti-metaphysical* movement which aimed to free philosophy from its theistic underpinnings as well as such explanatorily mystifying notions as mental substance. The return of metaphysics within orthodox naturalism, therefore, goes decidedly against its original anti-metaphysical inspiration.

But many orthodox naturalists will contest that they hold a metaphysical doctrine. The matter is subtle and turns on one's explanatory intentions. Consider these characteristic naturalist claims:

i)   The scientific image of the world is *complete*.

ii)   Science investigates what is, ultimately, *a single* causal order.[23]

iii)   Only the natural sciences contribute to the scientific image. The human sciences have no independent ontological weight.

What makes these claims metaphysical is the supposition that they are being treated as statements about how things *must* be. Of course, they can also be taken as empirical hypotheses, to be tested by their explanatory successes, in which case they are beyond reproach although, on this understanding, open to revision. This suggests a way of telling whether orthodox naturalism is a metaphysical doctrine. Does the naturalist treat i) and ii) as fixed ontological assumptions? If so, naturalism is decidedly a metaphysics. If not, then it is, perhaps, an empirical hypothesis.

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[23] Taken metaphysically, we might call this "causal fundamentalism". Arguably, it has become the *sine qua non* of orthodox naturalism today. See, e.g., Papineau (2008).

Another important question: Is the naturalist division between the human and natural sciences based on our actual explanatory practices or on an a priori assumption that genuine sciences must yield natural laws? If the latter then, again, it is a metaphysics.

In general, the question to ask is whether i), ii) or iii) are treated in an experimental spirit as mere hypotheses or whether, as seems to be the case for the majority of orthodox naturalists, they are fixed ideological assumptions that function as question-begging philosophical "musts". What experiments or observations would lead a naturalist to give up these claims? Is causal pluralism, for example, a live option or simply ruled out by fiat?[24]

5. The Question of Scientific Method

I have been arguing that the difference between metaphysical and methodological interpretations of naturalism is fundamentally a matter of one's attitude to explanation.[25] Let us now turn to consider naturalism as a methodological doctrine, one committed to pursuing knowledge and understanding by way of the scientific method. This is the second dimension of pragmatism and it raises an immediate

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[24] See Price (2007) and Menzies (2007) for an articulation and defence of causal pluralism as a more plausible account of what is implicit in actual scientific practice.

[25] Peter Railton's (1989) distinction between "hegemonic" and "non-hegemonic" naturalism tracks the distinction I am making between metaphysical and methodological interpretations of naturalism. The metaphysical character of the hegemonic naturalist is clear from the fact that he decides "in advance" which discourses are genuine and which not. Non-hegemonic naturalism, alternatively, adopts an experimental attitude by trying to see how far we can go in understanding a domain of judgment by empirical methods of inquiry.

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difficulty. Why should we suppose there is such a thing as *the* scientific method? Hilary Putnam, among others, has plausibly argued that "there is no set of 'essential' properties that all sciences have in common" (1994, 472). If there is no common element to unify the sciences, then there is no single method or set of methods that we can treat as constituting *the* scientific method. But from the pragmatist perspective this problem is artificial.

Following Dewey, we can treat talk of "the scientific method" as shorthand for a loose set of quasi-moral virtues of inquiry together with a fallibilist, experimental attitude to knowledge and understanding. The relevant virtues include acknowledging the need for critical dialogue with others, tolerance of alternative opinions, openness to criticism and the possibility of re-thinking one's position on the basis of it – in short, a kind of open-minded democratic ethics of inquiry. It may be that the resulting *democratic experimentalism* is not best called "the scientific method" since it is just as serviceable in art criticism and ethical reflection as in biology and anthropology. Nonetheless, Dewey defends the title on the grounds that democratic experimentalism finds its best expression in the modern sciences. He saw it not as a criticism but as a major advantage that this method could be applied to non-scientific subjects (such as ethics and politics) no less than to scientific matters.

In order to appreciate the power of this methodological re-conception of naturalism it is important to see how it bears on the ontological dimension of naturalism. Here it is important to see that the idea of *having an ontology* is

ambiguous between endorsing an ontological theory (Ontology) and having such

and such ontological commitments. Pragmatic naturalists will not endorse any

metaphysical theory, including Ontology, since they are good quietists. But they

will, of course, have what philosophers call ontological commitments in the sense

of beliefs about what there is. These will simply reflect best explanatory practice: if

our best explanations call for commitment to certain entities then so be it. For the

pragmatist, method not metaphysics is in the driver's seat. An immediate

consequence of this way of thinking is that in so far as explanations in the human

sciences pull their weight by generating explanatory generalizations (which need

not be laws or law-like) they can be taken with full ontological seriousness.[26]

Another way to put this point is to consider Quine's famous Indispensability

Principle: if one's best scientific explanations indispensably posit a certain sort of

entity then we are committed to it.[27] On this ground Quine is quite happy to accept

the existence of non-causal entities such as numbers or sets into his account of the

physical world nature. If we liberalize this principle beyond the confines of *natural*

scientific explanation, it states that in so far as we find it indispensable to our best

explanatory practices *uberhaupt* to acknowledge or posit some item, then we are

committed to its existence.

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[26] Cf. Woodward (2000) for a defence of non-nomological explanations in the
social sciences.
[27] Quine's test of ontological commitment, to be is to be the value of a variable, is
not to be confused with Ontology. It is a way of saying what entities we are
committed to from *within* scientific practice. Quine denies that there is any first-
philosophical (or external) vantage from which to discern what *really* exists.

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6. The Normativity Problem Revisited

Now this pluralist approach to ontology might seem to promise a straightforward dissolution of the normativity problem along the following lines. In so far as the human sciences posit irreducible values and reasons, then these normative items will appear in the scientific image. In that case there is no longer a problem about how to locate normativity in the natural world since these normative items will appear as a part of it. If that were so, there would no longer be a stark mismatch between the scientific and manifest images of the world and, as a result, the primary motivation for naturalization projects would evaporate.

But things are not so simple.[28] We must draw a distinction between what is *presupposed* by the natural and human sciences and what appears within the *content* of their explanations. It is an important pragmatist insight that scientific practice does indeed presuppose the central normative notions of reason and value: or, more fully, of one thing being a reason for (or against) another; and of the epistemic values of simplicity, reasonableness, coherence, etc.[29] That shows that science is committed to the reality of reasons and values but it does not, by itself, tell us anything about them since, plausibly, they do not appear within the scope of scientific explanations. In other words, it is highly unlikely that the concepts of reason and value will prove suitable, from a theoretical point of view, for employment in fruitful explanations in the human sciences. They are not like

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[28] I took a more optimistic attitude to this attempt at dissolution in Macarthur (2004).

[29] Cf. Putnam (1981, ch 6).

"artefact" in sociology, or "inflation" in economics, or "ritual" in anthropology. And this is, of course, tied to their normativity.

When considering normative items we must distinguish the ideal (or standard) from our (perhaps imperfect) grasp of it. Good reasons, as such, are not causally efficacious and cannot be expected to appear in psychological or social explanations. What might appear there, however, are *our* reasons, the ones we have *accepted or taken* as reasons (no matter how good or bad) since these are psychological states with causal roles. The same distinction between the ideal and our grasp of it applies in the case of values. And in both cases the special character of normativity shows up when our grasp falls short: we reveal that we are holding ourselves to the ideal or standard in saying that we have made a mistake or error. False belief, for example, is judged (hence *governed*) according to the norm of truth.[30]

But pragmatism, though naturalistic, is not restricted to scientific *explanations*. Its allegiance is to scientific *method* whether it is pursued in the sciences proper or in other disciplines. What pragmatism offers at this point is a general strategy for philosophising about norms in a non-metaphysical mode. The strategy has two steps:

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[30] Here I mean to recall the Kantian distinction between being governed by a norm as opposed to merely acting in accordance with a norm.

Step 1) Posing the Problem in terms of Linguistic Practice:

The first move is to pose the problem in practice-based rather than object-based

terms. We should not say that we are trying to explain what reason or value *are*

since that way of posing the issue inevitably invites a metaphysical construal (e.g.

What are these strange 'objects'? How do we refer to them or represent them in our

thought?) We should say, rather, that we are trying to understand our linguistic

practices of deploying the concepts of reason and value. A danger, of course, is to

avoid reading metaphysical assumptions into our account of linguistic practice.

This consideration leads to the next move.

Step 2) Shifting from Conceptual Analysis to Genealogical Explanation:

The second move is to offer genealogical explanatory strategies concerned with the

origins and functions of our normative practices. This, too, is a strategy for

philosophising without metaphysical presuppositions: i) it provides an alternative to

conceptual analysis and its commitment to a disguised metaphysics of concepts

(i.e. conceptual essentialism); ii) in contrast to many orthodox naturalists, it does

not start with metaphysically substantial representationalist assumptions but shifts

theoretical attention away from representation and reference and towards use;[31]

and iii) unlike traditional metaphysics, its explanations are historically situated and

not in the business of giving once-and-for-all answers that employ metaphysically

privileged concepts (e.g. "object", "property").

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[31] See Price (2004) for a discussion of the substantial representationalist
assumptions of orthodox naturalism.

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There are various theoretical alternatives available within this general strategy, two of the most promising being Brandom's "normative pragmatics" and Price's "subject naturalism". Since this reading of Brandom is somewhat controversial let me provide some defence of it. Consider this passage:

> Besides rejecting empiricism, the rationalist pragmatism and expressivism presented here is opposed to *naturalism*, at least as that term is usually understood. For it emphasizes what distinguishes discursive creatures, as subject to distinctively conceptual norms, from their non-concept-using ancestors and cousins. Conceptual norms are brought into play by social linguistic practices of giving and asking for reasons, of assessing the propriety of claims and inferences. Products of *social* interactions… are not studied by the natural sciences – though they are not for that reason to be treated as spooky and *super*natural. (2000, 26)

Here we have both the rejection of *orthodox* naturalism (which is, of course, consistent with endorsing methodological naturalism) and the quietist (non-Platonist, non-reductionist) treatment of conceptual normativity as arising out of our social linguistic practices. Brandom speaks of the latter as "demystifying norms" (1994, 63) where the demystification is largely a matter of finding a non-metaphysical way of explaining norms. Now let me very briefly sketch the bearing of normative pragmatics and subject naturalism on the problem of normativity.

Brandom approaches the study of discursive norms by way of a 2nd-person participant perspective on our linguistic practices. Normative statuses such as being a reason or a value are, like marriage, instituted by our social practices. In

Brandom's analogy of a conversation with a baseball game the participants of a conversation *reciprocally recognize* one another as players, governed by certain rules and sanctions, and granting each other certain entitlements. Within this 'score-keeping' framework – in which each person keeps track of a complex set of commitments and entitlements, their own and others', from their own point of view – Brandom regards the attitude of *taking as an assertion* as having explanatory priority. He explains,

> The basic explanatory challenge faced by the model is to say what structure a set of social practices must exhibit in order properly to be understood as including practical attitudes of *taking or treating* performances as having the significance of claims or assertions. (1994, 141)

A similar strategy is applied to the case of reasons and values: these are to be understood in terms of normative attitudes of *taking (or treating) as* a reason and *taking (or treating) as* a value.[32] In this way, "a normative significance is imposed on a nonnormative world" (1994, 48). A fundamental insight here is that once we

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[32] Brandom writes: "Being a reason is to be understood in the first instance in terms of what it is for a community to treat something in practice as such a reason, on the practical side of reasons for action as on the doxastic side of reasons for claims" (1994, 253).

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have understood what it is to *treat something as* a reason then that is all there is to understand about reason. And the same goes for value.[33]

Price's "subject naturalism", alternatively, is concerned with an investigation of the functions of our language (or concepts) from the 3rd-person perspective of an anthropologist.[34] He avoids the metaphysically loaded question "What are X's?" by asking instead "What do creatures like us use the term 'X' for?".[35] An important constraint on potential answers to this question is that they eschew any theoretical appeal to semantic notions (truth-condition, truth-maker, reference, representation etc.). Recent work in both philosophy and science seems to provide support for the idea that the only semantic resources theorists of language need are minimalist ones about which there is little, in general, to say beyond the trivial disquotational schemas, *"S" is true iff S* or *"R" refers to R's*.[36]

Adopting the stance of the social scientist, the subject naturalist wants to explain the general functional role(s) of our concepts or linguistic devices e.g. assertion. A nice example of this kind of functionalist account is Edward Craig's view that "the concept of knowledge is used to flag approved sources of

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[33] Any attitude of taking or treating something as a reason (or value), whether at the level of individuals of whole communities, could be mistaken. So, one problem for this model of explanation is to explain the *objectivity* of norms.

[34] We might call it a kind of *anthropological linguistics*.

[35] Price employs this Wittgensteinian strategy for his own purposes, namely, to discover of a certain sort of causal explanation. Wittgenstein himself wants to distinguish his conceptual investigations from any interest in causes or causal hypotheses.

[36] Of course, it is consistent with this minimalist approach that we might discover functional variations. E.g., we use the term "true" in different discourses as variously related to reason, evidence, justification and so on.

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information" (1990, 11) i.e. good informants.[37] Part of the explanatory point of the relevant functional accounts is that they do not invoke the concepts being explained as theoretical terms. So the functional story about the concepts of reason and value will not involve reasons and values. This is not to be interpreted as a form of instrumentalism, however. Price is not saying that we talk as if there are reasons and values but there really are no such things.[38] His fundamental point is akin to Brandom's but with a Carnapian flavour: once we understand our *talk about* reason and values then there will be no further question about what reasons and values *are*. The metaphysical questions simply lapse.

8. Conclusion

Both of these pragmatist programs – Brandom's neo-Hegelian account of how norms are instituted by social relations of mutual recognition and Price's appeal to functions to satisfy our philosophical urge to explain norms in a natural world – are, admittedly, not fully worked out yet. But they provide a genuine advance beyond the current stalemate in addressing the problem of normativity. From the pragmatist perspective what made this problem pressing was a metaphysical construal of norms which seemed to force us to see norms as a queer kind of "object" that does not fit into the natural world as it reveals itself to science and

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[37] Price's own favourite example is his genealogy of truth which holds that the concept of truth is both a grammatical device for disquotation and used to express a norm that motivates the resolution of disagreements.
[38] Price (1992, 404-5) writes, "The pluralist accepts with all sincerity that there are moral states of affairs, possible world, numbers, or whatever."

common sense. In this conundrum it does not help to identify norms with objects

in a scientific ontology either. That simply gives rise to an interminable oscillation

between supernatural Platonism and naturalist reductionism.[39] The key to

pragmatism's hopes of resolving this otherwise hopeless situation is its de-

ontologizing move of reformulating the problem in terms of the origins and

function of our normative linguistic practices. It is from the cloudless vantage

offered by metaphysical quietism that the constructive pragmatist can save the day.

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[39] Here it is interesting to consider the criticisms that McDowell's (1994) attempt to reconcile reason and nature has drawn. One of McDowell's primary aims is to overcome a modern scientistic conception of nature ("disenchanted nature") that apparently extrudes reasons from nature on the ground that reasons do not fall under natural laws. McDowell sees his task as one of steering between the twin threats of "rampant Platonism" (77) and "bald naturalism" (67) in order to achieve a "partial re-enchantment of nature" (88). This suggests McDowell is engaged in Ontology: as if he is arguing for an expansion of the realm of natural objects to include explanatorily autonomous normative "objects" as well. In this way his "relaxed naturalism" (89) invites the charge of supernaturalism cf. Fodor (   ). I have previously tried to defend McDowell against this charge in Macarthur (2004).

It must be admitted, however, that the expression of McDowell's thought would have benefited from the pragmatist outlook sketched here especially given his admission that his thinking "could be represented as a pragmatism in Rorty's sense" (155). As a metaphysical quietist it is clear that McDowell is not in the business of doing Ontology. But it can only confuse matters to talk of "partially re-enchanting" nature, as McDowell does. Similarly, his discussion of reason suggests an attempt to answer the metaphysical question of what reasons *are*. His real concern, however, is to contrast two kinds of *intelligibility* rather than two kinds of "objects". Reformulating the problem in terms of linguistic practice would have helped to avoid such misunderstandings.

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