



Passages from Blackburn “Landscapes of Pragmatism”:

The other direction is more local. It considers an area of discourse, such as mathematics, modal talk, or ethical talk, and counsels that the sayings in such an area are best understood as doing something other than representing how things stand. Varieties of the approach include fictionalism, expressivism in ethics, and perhaps other kinds of constructivism. Rather than responding to how things stand, these pragmatists say, we must see ourselves as inventing a language in which to do other things, such as coordinate attitudes, lay down rules of language, voice other stances or postures of the mind. This kind of pragmatism insists on a kind of functional pluralism, whereby some parts of language are properly seen as representative, but others are not. Its stock in trade is therefore the contrast between one part of discourse and another. In this paper I want to sketch some advantages of this kind of local pragmatism before ending with some comments on the other, global, variety, and the consistency or otherwise of the two approaches.

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

Finally, the doings of the items of common sense are directly witnessed, reflected in experience or what Kant called intuition. Their whole life, as it were, consists in their role as systematizers and explainers of experience. There is therefore *no option of embracing the scheme, while holding back on its own explanations of why we do so*. Whereas in the other cases, there is every prospect of bracketing the existence of possible worlds and the rest, and coming to understand why we go in for the mode of thought in question in other terms. In other words, there is every prospect of giving an anthropology or genealogy which is itself free of the commitments in question.

Let us now pause to take stock. With deflationism in place, there is a legitimate, harmless, and unilluminating place for terms like truth and representation. But for an ‘ism’ to be born, we need more than that. I have been suggesting that we look instead at whether we have an ineliminable use of the referring expressions of the vocabulary in providing our best explanation, or most perspicuous representation, of why we use it — this is substantially what Price refers to as the Eleatic Criterion [Macarthur & Price (2007), p. 108]. We talk of chairs and tables because we are in a world of chairs and tables. We talk of the moons of Jupiter and forces and electrons because we are sensitive to the moons and the forces and electrons. But we do not have to give these flat-footed answers everywhere, and it is where we do not that pragmatism blooms.

Passages from Blackburn’s “Pragmatism: All or Some or All and Some?”

You will be a pragmatist about an area of discourse if you pose a Carnapian external question: how does it come about that we go in for this kind of discourse and thought? What is the explanation of this bit of our language game? And then you offer an account of what we are up to in going in for this discourse, and the account eschews any use of the referring expressions of the discourse; any appeal to anything that a Quinean would identify as the values of the bound variables if the discourse is regimented; or any semantic or ontological attempt to ‘interpret’ the discourse in a domain, to find referents for its terms, or truth makers for its sentences. Instead the explanation proceeds by talking in different terms of what is *done* by so talking. It offers a revelatory genealogy or anthropology or even a just-so story about how this mode of talking and thinking and practicing might come about, given in terms of the functions it serves. Notice that it does not offer a classical reduction, finding truth-makers in other terms. It finds whatever plurality of functions it can lay its hands upon. (Blackburn, ‘Pragmatism: All or Some’ in *Expressivism, Pragmatism and Representationalism*, ed. Huw Price, p. 75)

Contemporary pragmatists such as Brandom, Price, or Michael Williams have no wish to avoid talking about our environment in common-sense terms. They rightly see our *doings* as primarily concerned with actions in this environment. Rather the pragmatism is identified in terms of the avoidance of a semantic *metavocabulary* in favour of a pragmatic *metavocabulary*. In other words our *doings* with language are not to be described (as we give our *übersichtliche Darstellung*) in terms of representation, description, truth, and fact, for example, but in such terms as ‘the language game of giving and asking for reasons’. I shall call this the SBAN. [PASAS 2]

Brandom has helpfully interpreted Richard Rorty’s commitment to the SBAN in terms of

- (i) refusing to countenance self-interpreting presences, or in other words refusing to allow ‘representations’ without accounts of what is done in taking one thing as standing for another,
- (ii) suspicion of semantic *atomism*: we must remember that ‘meaning is holistic because understanding is’ (p. 97)
- (iii) suspicion of semantic *nominalism* (interpreting language in terms of a name/bearer relation; ignoring Frege’s insight into the priority of judgments and claims made by whole sentential episodes).

As Brandom presents it, use of a semantic metavocabulary does not entail these errors, but it is ‘guilty by association’. [PASAS 2]

To echo Michael Williams ‘we will get metaphysical quietism without philosophical quietism. And that is what we wanted.’ [PASAS 6]