

## 7 Wilfrid Sellars Meets Cambridge Pragmatism\*

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### 1. Introduction

In this piece I want to connect Sellars with some philosophers I have taken to calling Cambridge Pragmatists. I shall note some similarities, argue that each side has something to learn from the other, and propose that there's a common lesson, very close to the surface in Sellars, that both sides should embrace explicitly.

Who are these Cambridge Pragmatists?<sup>1</sup> One of the most prominent is Simon Blackburn, and my use of the term goes back to 2011, the year I arrived in Cambridge as Blackburn's successor. There was an opportunity to apply for conference funding from a new university scheme. With Fraser MacBride, I came up with a proposal that seemed not only an excellent fit with our own interests, but astonishingly inclusive within recent Cambridge philosophy more generally. From my side, it connected my work not only to Blackburn (that link was obvious) and to several of our apparently disparate predecessors in the same chair, such as D. H. Mellor, Anscombe, von Wright, and Wittgenstein, but also to many other distinguished Cambridge philosophers of the past century or so—Frank Ramsey, Bernard Williams, and Edward Craig, for example.

This appealingly broad church was the view that for some interesting topics, the path to philosophical illumination lies not, as other philosophers have thought, in an enquiry into the (apparent) *subject matter* of the discourse in question, but in asking about the distinctive role of the *concepts* involved—how we come to have such concepts, what roles they play in our lives, and so on. A view of this sort is very familiar in Blackburn's work on topics such as morality and modality, for example—Blackburn now calls the approach 'expressivism' and traces it in both these cases to Hume. But it also turns up, in places, in the work of a very wide range of other Cambridge philosophers. At least arguably, for example, we find it in the work of Mellor on tense, Anscombe on the first person, Craig on knowledge, von Wright on causation, Williams on truth, as well as Wittgenstein and Ramsey, famously, on various matters.

The view in question seems appropriately called a kind of *pragmatism*. It claims to understand the concepts in question in terms of their *use*—their practical role in our lives—rather than in terms of any ‘corresponding’ metaphysics. So, a little cheekily, MacBride and I labelled our project ‘Cambridge Pragmatism’. As we were well aware, the cheek was triple-barrelled. One could find such views outside Cambridge. Many of the Cambridge philosophers on our list would not have regarded themselves as pragmatists. And there were famous pragmatists—not necessarily in quite the same sense—associated with another Cambridge! But despite or perhaps because of these blemishes, the label served our purposes very well. We organised a highly successful conference at the end of May 2012. It was held in the Winstanley Lecture Theatre at Trinity College, a few steps from Wittgenstein’s remote rooms.

For me an additional advantage of the label Cambridge Pragmatism was that it made it easy to raise a question that had interested me for a number of years, that of the relation between the self-avowed expressivism of Humeans such as Blackburn, on the one hand, and Robert Brandom, on the other. Blackburn and Brandom seemed to mean different things by the ‘expressivism’ (Brandom taking his inspiration from Hegel, not Hume). Yet there seemed to be obvious connections, even if very little dialogue. Moreover, Brandom linked his own expressivism to pragmatism, while Blackburn certainly counted as a Cambridge Pragmatist, in my sense. So, with Brandom himself present, our conference was able to enquire into the relationship between Cambridge Pragmatism and modern American pragmatism (as it descends from the original pragmatism of the faux Cambridge, so to speak).

From this starting point, Brandom’s own interest in Sellars provides one natural link to the question of the relationship between Sellars and Cambridge Pragmatism. Here I’ll exploit a different connection, something more like a common cause. We can link Sellars and Cambridge Pragmatists under the banner of Humean expressivism, in Blackburn’s sense. I’ll begin there, highlighting some similarities between Sellars on the one hand, and Ramsey and Blackburn on the other. I shall also say something about the general shape of Humean expressivism, emphasising two things: first, its deflationary consequences for metaphysics, and second, a particular kind of problem it faces—‘creeping cognitivism’, as I shall call it, adapting a label due to Jamie Dreier (2004).

I shall then describe Sellars’ attempts to wrestle with creeping cognitivism—not under that name, but I hope it will be clear that it is the same problem. I shall identify what I take to be Sellars’ solution, and propose that it is one that Cambridge Pragmatists need as well. However, the consequences are more far-reaching than Sellars or most of the Cambridge Pragmatists have realized, I think—it requires a more thoroughgoing expressivism, in a sense I’ll explain. Finally, I’ll raise the question whether Sellars is ready for the deflationary metaphysical consequences of this Cambridge way of developing Humean expressivism.

As I said, my conclusion will be that there are lessons to be learnt in both directions. Sellars has something important to offer to Cambridge Pragmatists in response to creeping cognitivism. But they in turn have something to offer Sellars, in their clarity about the fact that the view offers an *alternative* to metaphysics. And there's a common lesson, close to the surface but not explicit in Sellars, that both sides do well to take on board.

## 2. Sellars and Ramsey

Let's begin with some familiar quotations from Sellars' 'Counterfactuals, Dispositions, and Causal Modalities' (CDCM):

We have learned the hard way that the core truth of 'emotivism' is not only compatible with, but absurd without, *ungrudging* recognition of the fact, so properly stressed (if mis-assimilated to the model of describing) by 'ethical rationalists', that ethical discourse as *ethical discourse* is a mode of rational discourse.

It is my purpose to argue that the core truth of Hume's philosophy of causation is not only compatible with, but absurd without, *ungrudging* recognition of those features of causal discourse as a mode of rational discourse on which the 'metaphysical rationalists' laid such stress but also mis-assimilated to describing.

(CDCM, §82)

Thus Sellars thinks that in both the ethical and causal (or modal) cases, Hume got something right. He got right what the emotivists picked up in the ethical case—the fact that, in some sense, neither ethical nor causal discourse is in the business of 'describing the world'. What Hume got wrong, in both cases, was thinking that this put these topics outside the realm of *cognitive* or *rational* discourse.

As we shall see, Sellars anticipates Blackburn on these points. However, I think that he himself is anticipated by the first and most brilliant of the Cambridge Pragmatists, Frank Ramsey. This is clearest in Ramsey's 'General Propositions and Causality' (Ramsey 1929, hereafter 'GPC'), written in September 1929, only four months before Ramsey's tragically early death. GPC begins with a discussion of the logical status of unrestricted generalizations—claims of the form ' $(x)\Phi(x)$ '. Ramsey argues against his own earlier view that a sentence of this form should be treated as an infinite conjunction. However, as he puts it, "if it isn't a conjunction, it isn't a proposition at all" (GPC, 134).

In other words, Ramsey's claim is that these unrestricted generalizations—variable hypotheticals, as he calls them—are not *propositional*. They are doing some other kind of linguistic job. What job? As Ramsey puts it: "Variable hypotheticals are not judgments, but rules for judging: If I meet a  $\Phi$ , I shall judge it as a  $\Psi$ " (GPC, 137). Ramsey takes this to be the key to

understanding causal thinking, too—it, too, goes into the non-propositional box.

However, Ramsey spots an important difficulty for a view of this kind. If variable hypotheticals are “not judgments but rules for judging”, why do we disagree about them—why do we say “yes or no to them”, as Ramsey puts it? As he says, “The question arises, in what way [a rule for judging] can be right or wrong?” (GPC, 134).

Ramsey meets this challenge head-on, discussing various senses in which we can disagree with a claim of this general form. And he insists that we shouldn’t be surprised by the fact that we can disagree about something that isn’t a proposition. On the contrary, he claims: “Many sentences *express cognitive attitudes* without being propositions, and the difference between saying yes or no to them is not the difference between saying yes or no to a proposition” (GPC, 137, my emphasis.)

I hope that the similarity to Sellars is clear here. Sellars uses the term ‘describing’ where Ramsey uses ‘proposition’, but it is clear that they agree on two key points. First, the boundaries of the *propositional* (Ramsey) or *descriptive* (Sellars) are not where we naively take them to be—causal claims (and at least for Sellars, ethical claims) lie beyond those boundaries. Second, the boundaries of the *propositional* or *descriptive* do not line up with the boundaries of the *cognitive*. The latter category is much more inclusive. It includes causal claims (and for Sellars, ethical claims).

Ramsey also raises the question of the relationship between the kind of account of causal judgments he proposes and a traditional *metaphysics* of causation:

What we have said is . . . apt to leave us muddled and unsatisfied as to what seems to be the main question—a question not of the *psychological analysis* but of the *metaphysics*, which is ‘Is causation a reality or a fiction, and if it is a fiction, is it useful or misleading, arbitrary or indispensable?’

(GPC, 141, my emphasis)

Ramsey has offered us what he calls a ‘psychological analysis’ of causal talk and causal generalizations—an analysis in terms of the distinctive psychological attitudes they express. Here he imagines an opponent who brushes this psychology to one side, and attempts to return to metaphysical questions: Is there any such thing as causation? If so, what is its nature?

Ramsey doesn’t respond to this opponent directly, but it seems clear that he thinks that these questions turn out to be misguided, once we understand the *psychology* of causal judgment. In a case such as this, the interesting work takes place on the side of psychological analysis. We might say that he is ‘putting aside’ metaphysics. As I say, Ramsey himself is not explicit about this in GPC, but we’ll see that later Cambridge Pragmatists—Blackburn in particular—do make this point explicitly.

### 3. Humean Expressivism

I noted that Sellars took himself to be Humean in one sense but not in another. But what does an orthodox Humean expressivism involve (in this day and age, as it were)? In the original (1994) edition of his own *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, Blackburn proposed the following definition:

Expressivism. A term used for those theories of ethical discourse that contrast ethical sentences with expressions of belief.

(Blackburn 1994, 127)

However, the restriction to ethical discourse was already somewhat anachronistic. Blackburn had long been clear in his own work that the same kind of view is attractive in the modal case, and that there are close analogues with the moral case.

The current edition of Blackburn's *Dictionary* sorts this out. Its definition of expressivism begins as follows:

Theories that take as fundamental not the thought that we always use words to describe the world, but often to express attitudes, stances, habits of inference, and so on.

(Blackburn 2016, 170)

After noting that the view is well-known in ethics, the entry continues:

Expressivism is also applied to views in other domains that stress the practical function of uses of languages rather than any function of representing facts. So there are expressive theories of causation, modality, knowledge, and truth.

(2016, 170)

This is an understanding of the term that will allow us to count Sellars as an expressivist about causal modalities and counterfactual conditionals; Ramsey as an expressivist about laws, causation, and probability; and Blackburn himself—rightly stressing the parallel between the modal and the moral cases—about probability, causation, and necessity.

It is helpful to distinguish two claims normally combined in a view of this kind—I call them the *negative thesis* and the *positive thesis*. The negative thesis tells us, in what we may call *semantic* terms, what the vocabulary is *not* doing. It is not 'descriptive', 'truth-apt', 'fact-stating', 'propositional', 'representational', or something of that kind. Some expressivists—traditional noncognitivists, in particular—might use the term 'cognitive' at this point. We have seen that Ramsey and Sellars don't have that option, but they do offer versions of the negative thesis in terms of other labels on this list.

Ramsey says that variable hypotheticals are not *propositions*; Sellars that ethical talk and causal talk are not *descriptive*.

The positive thesis tells us, in what I shall call *pragmatic* terms, what the vocabulary in question *is* doing—for example, that it is expressing evaluative attitudes, or dispositions to follow a rule. An important question at this point is whether the notion of *expressing an attitude* is the only kind of pragmatic function that might be feature in this positive thesis. The question is partly terminological, because of course we could choose to define ‘expressivism’ in these terms. But then we would need another term if we encountered a vocabulary about which we wanted to maintain that while it is not expressive in this narrow sense, nor is it descriptive—it has some non-semantic function other than expression of an attitude. (Arguably, the disquotational theory of truth provides a suitable example.) So I prefer to use the term ‘expressivism’ broadly, for any view whose positive account of the function of a vocabulary lies on this pragmatic side.

As I said, contemporary versions of Humean expressivism normally combine both theses, positive and negative. A further question, to which I shall return, is whether both theses are essential to a view of this kind. I shall answer ‘no’. On the contrary, I think there are very good reasons (very close to the surface in Sellars) for abandoning the negative thesis, while remaining an expressivist in the positive sense.

#### 4. Quasi-Realism

I noted that Ramsey anticipates Sellars in insisting on the cognitive character of his non-propositional “rules for judging”, and that he raises the question as to how this cognitive character is to be explained—“why we say yes or no” to variable hypotheticals, as he puts it. The Cambridge Pragmatist who has been most explicit about this explanatory project is Simon Blackburn. It is the core of what Blackburn calls ‘quasi-realism’—the project of explaining the cognitive character of a vocabulary, given the expressive or pragmatic starting point.

Here is Blackburn’s own definition of quasi-realism, again from *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*:

[A] position holding that an expressivist . . . account of various domains can explain and make legitimate sense of the realist-sounding discourse within which we promote and debate views in those domains. A prime application is in ethics, although there are many others. *This is in opposition to writers who think that if expressivism is correct then our ordinary ways of thinking in terms of a moral truth, for example, or of knowledge, or the independence of ethical facts from our subjective sentiments, must all be in error, reflecting a mistaken realist metaphysics.* The quasi-realist seeks to earn our right to talk in these terms on the slender . . . expressivist basis.

(2016, 397, my emphasis)

In the sentence I have highlighted here, Blackburn makes the important point that quasi-realism *opposes* a certain kind of anti-realism. It rejects the metaphysical view that there are no moral facts or moral properties.

Blackburn is clear about the rejection of this kind of anti-realism at a number of places. One particularly forceful version occurs in an appendix to *Ruling Passions* (Blackburn 1998), containing Blackburn's responses to a list of commonly encountered questions. Question 18 asks: "Aren't you really trying to defend our right to talk 'as if' these were moral truths, although in your view *there aren't any, really?*" Blackburn's answer is emphatic:

No, no, no. I do not say that we can talk as if kicking dogs were wrong, when "really" it isn't wrong. I say that it is wrong (so it is true that it is wrong, so it is really true that it is wrong, so this is an example of a moral truth, so there are moral truths).

This misinterpretation is curiously common. Anyone believing it must believe themselves to have some more robust, metaphysically heavyweight conception of what it would be for there to be moral truths REALLY, and compared with this genuine article, I only have us talking as if there are moral truths REALLY. I deny that there is any such coherent conception.

(Blackburn 1998, 319)

This example is from the late 1990s, but Blackburn had made the same point much earlier. In his classic (1986) paper, 'Morals and Modals', he puts it like this:

What then is the mistake in describing such a philosophy [quasi-realism] as holding that 'we talk as if there are necessities when really there are none'? It is the failure to notice that the quasi-realist need allow no sense to what follows the 'as if' *except* one in which it is true. And conversely he need allow no sense to the contrasting proposition in which it in turn is true.

(Blackburn 1986, 57)

Again, the idea is that quasi-realism *deflates* the metaphysical language. The quasi-realist is a realist in these deflated terms, and denies that there are any other terms available—in particular, that there are any meaningful terms in which he might properly be said to be an anti-realist.

As I have noted elsewhere (Price 2009), a good ally at this point is the Carnap of 'Empiricism, Semantics and Ontology', who also favours this rejection of the traditional metaphysical issue of realism versus anti-realism:

Influenced by ideas of Ludwig Wittgenstein, the [Vienna] Circle rejected both the thesis of the reality of the external world and the thesis of its irreality as pseudo-statements; the same was the case for both the thesis of the reality of universals . . . and the nominalistic thesis that they are

not real and that their alleged names are not names of anything but merely *flatus vocis*.

(Carnap 1950, 215)

Another ally will be the Ramsey of GPC, who, as we saw, simply sets aside the metaphysical questions.

I take this ‘setting aside’ of metaphysics to be characteristic of Humean expressivism, and I shall return to it below. But first, returning to my quotations from Blackburn above (especially the first of them), let’s note the terms in which Blackburn puts this point. He says that the quasi-realist’s project is to show us that talk of *truth* and *knowledge* is perfectly in order, in the domain in question. It seems reasonable, then, to count Blackburn as someone who agrees with Ramsey and Sellars that expressivism is not in tension with the view that the domain in question is *cognitive* in character. On the contrary, we can think of the quasi-realist’s project, like Ramsey’s project, as being that of *explaining* this cognitive character—explaining how and why we can disagree about expressions of attitudes, for example.

One final, important point of agreement (or apparent agreement<sup>2</sup>) between Ramsey, Sellars, and Blackburn: They are all *local* expressivists. That is, they all hold that some statements *are* genuine propositions, as Ramsey puts it, or are genuinely descriptive, as Sellars and Blackburn put it. In other words they are all committed to a Bifurcation Thesis, as Robert Kraut (1990) has called it—to the view that there is a significant boundary of this kind, somewhere within the class of declarative claims. This brings me to an important challenge to this aspect of their common view—a challenge other expressivists also face, but which, as I’ll explain, is particularly acute for Ramsey, Sellars, and Blackburn.

## 5. Creeping Cognitivism

We noted that Humean expressivists typically espouse a negative thesis, saying that the vocabulary in question lies on the far side of a line (the ‘bifurcation’) that separates claims that are genuinely propositional (Ramsey) or descriptive (Sellars) from claims that are not. The bifurcation itself is characterised in what I called semantic terms. Yet, as Jamie Dreier (2004) noted, modern versions of this position tend to be deflationist about the relevant semantic notions. It then becomes hard to maintain that there is any interesting bifurcation left, and any sense in which the negative thesis is true, of the vocabularies in question. As Dreier complains, expressivists end up sounding just like realists. It is not clear that this is bad news for expressivists—after all, it is just what the quasi-realist wanted. But it does suggest that the standard version of Humean expressivism, committed to affirming both the negative and positive theses, is hard to maintain.

Dreier calls this the problem of ‘creeping minimalism’. I want to isolate a subspecies of the problem, one that seems particularly acute for Ramsey,



Sellars, and Blackburn. It is internally generated, a product of their (commendable) willingness to concede that the domains in question *are* cognitive. Having conceded this, they confront the question: “Well, if they’re *cognitive*, what does it mean to say that they’re not *propositional*, or not *descriptive*?” Clearly, the question carries a threat of a dilemma. Whatever these views propose as the mark of genuinely descriptive claims, it seems likely to be something that could be pressed into service as an account of genuinely cognitive judgements, too—thus undermining their own insistence that, as Ramsey puts it, “[m]any sentences express cognitive attitudes without being propositions.”

I shall call this the problem of *creeping cognitivism*. Greatly to his credit, Sellars appreciates that there a very difficult problem in this vicinity. Let’s see how he wrestles with it.

## 6. Sellars on Describing

As I noted at the beginning, Sellars thinks that Humean insights about certain vocabularies (e.g., moral and modal discourse) are compatible with the observation that these vocabularies are also rational discourses. He says, for example:

It is just as proper to say of statements of the form, ‘Jones ought to do A’ that they are true, as it is to say this of mathematical, geographical, or semantical statements.

(ITM, 531)

Here he is emphasizing the fact that prescriptive or normative claims are normally called true or false. So he is not an old-fashioned non-cognitivist, who wants to deny truth values to evaluative claims. Yet he also takes for granted the Bifurcation Thesis—he wants to say that evaluative and modal discourse is not properly “assimilated to describing.”

However, Sellars recognizes that it is by no means easy to say what ‘describing’ *means*. This is his attempt from ‘Empiricism and Abstract Entities’ (EAE), written in 1956:

The concept of a descriptive term is . . . by no means intuitively clear. It is easier to specify kinds of terms which are *not* descriptive than to single out what it is that descriptive terms have in common. Thus, I think it would be generally agreed that the class of non-descriptive terms includes, besides logical terms in a suitably narrow sense, *prescriptive* terms, and the logical and causal modalities. . . .

But what is it to describe? Must one be describing an object if one says something about it that is either true or false? Scarcely, for modals and even prescriptive statements (e.g., “Jones ought to make amends”) can correctly said to be either true or false. Perhaps to describe an object

is to specify some of its properties and/or relations. Unfortunately, the terms “quality” and “relations” raise parallel difficulties. Is it absurd to speak of goodness as a prescriptive quality?

We are back with the question, what is it to describe? In my opinion, the key to the answer is the realization that describing is internally related to *explaining*, in that sense of “explanation” that comes to full flower in scientific explanation—in short, causal explanation. A descriptive term is one which, in its basic use, properly replaces one of the variables in the dialogue schema

What brought it about that  $x$  is  $\Phi$ ? That  $y$  is  $\Psi$ .  
where what is requested in a causal explanation.

(EAE, 450–51)

At this point, then, Sellars is appealing to what is sometimes called an Eleatic principle. Willem deVries has recently proposed a similar criterion—see his paper in this volume. But Sellars himself soon changed his mind. He makes this clear in the Sellars-Chisholm correspondence (ITM), written the following year.

When I have said that the semantical statements convey descriptive information, but do not *assert* it, I have not meant to imply that semantical statements *only* convey and do not assert. They make semantical assertions. Nor is “convey”, as I have used it, a synonym for “evince” or “express” as emotivists have used this term. I have certainly not wished to assimilate semantical statements to ejaculations or symptoms.

It might be worth saying at this point that, as I see it, it is just as proper to say of statements of the form “Jones ought to do A” that they are *true*, as it is to say this of mathematical, geographical, or semantical statements. This of course does not preclude me from calling attention to important differences in the “logics” of these statements.

I quite agree, then, that it is no more a solution to our problem simply to say that semantical statements are “unique” than it would be a solution of the corresponding problems in ethics simply to say that prescriptive statements are “unique.” What is needed is a painstaking exploration of statements belonging to various (*prima facie*) families, with a view to discovering *specific* similarities and differences in the ways in which they behave. . . .

(ITM, 531)

At this stage, we have what looks by a Cambridge Pragmatist’s lights like a commendable focus on the idea that different bits of language are doing different jobs, in some interesting sense—a sense not immediately reducible to the observation that they are simply *about* different subject matters. (We also have a commendable recognition that ethical language isn’t the only

such case.) Sellars then returns to the question of the meaning of ‘descriptive’, and disavows his own proposal from the preceding year.

I also agree that the term “descriptive” is of little help. Once the “journeyman” task . . . is well under way, it may be possible to give a precise meaning to this technical term (Presumably this technical use would show some measure of continuity with our ordinary use of “describe”.) I made an attempt along this line in my Carnap paper, though I am not very proud of it. On the other hand, as philosophers use the term today, it means little that is definite apart from the logician’s contrast of a “descriptive expression” with “logical expression” (on this use “ought” would be a descriptive term!) and the moral philosopher’s contrast of “descriptive” with “prescriptive”. According to both these uses “S means p” would be a descriptive statement.

(ITM, 531)

Let’s be clear about Sellars’ situation at this point. He wants to say that in some interesting sense “S means p” is *not* a descriptive statement—he is committed to the descriptive/non-descriptive bifurcation, and to putting ascriptions of meaning on the right-hand side of it. But he hasn’t yet settled on anything that he regards as an adequate account of what it *means* to be descriptive or non-descriptive. He’s rejected the proposal he made in the Carnap paper the previous year, but he hasn’t come up with any alternative.

Sellars comes back to the issue in *Science and Metaphysics* (SM), several years later. This is from the preface, where he writes about what he calls “the heart of the enterprise” of the book:

I attempt to spell out the specific differences of matter-of-factual truth. Levels of ‘factual’ discourse are distinguished and shown to presuppose a basic level in which conceptual items . . . ‘represent’ or ‘picture’ (in a sense carefully to be distinguished from the semantical concepts of reference and [predication]) the way things are.

(SM, p. ix)

Note that Sellars is clear that to the extent that there is a category of the genuinely factual, or genuinely descriptive, it is not to be characterised in terms of *semantical* notions such as truth or reference—on the contrary, Sellars says, it must be “carefully . . . distinguished” from those notions.

How should it be characterised, if not in these terms? Later in the book, in the introduction to Chapter 7, Sellars offers us this:

My concern will be with what might initially be called ‘factual truth’. This phrase is intended to cover both the truth of propositions at the perceptual and introspective level, and the truth of those propositions

which, though ‘empirical’ in the broad sense that their authority ultimately rests on perceptual experience, involve the complex techniques of concept formation and confirmation characteristic of theoretical science

Since the term ‘fact’ is properly used as a synonym for ‘truth’ even its most generic sense, so that we can speak of mathematical and even ethical facts, ‘factual’, in the more specific sense indicated above, should be thought of as ‘matter-of-factual’, and as equivalent to Leibniz’s technical term ‘*vérités de fait*’.

(SM, 116)

Again, this is a gesture towards what Sellars needs, which is a distinction between the *genuinely factual*, on the one hand, and the *factual in the generic sense*, on the other (the latter but not the former including mathematical or ethical facts, for example). But so far as I can see it is only a gesture. Telling us that ‘genuinely factual’ is equivalent to Leibniz’s technical term does little more than to alert us to the fact that the same difficulty will arise for Leibniz, too—for Leibniz certainly hasn’t wrestled with the question of how to make sense of the Bifurcation Thesis.

In one relevant respect Sellars is admirably clear, however. He stresses repeatedly that there are *two kinds of truth* in the picture; or perhaps better, two *different* things that are mistakenly conflated under the name ‘truth’. One is a generic, semantic notion that Sellars characterizes like this:

[F]or a proposition to be true is for it to be assertible, where this means not *capable* of being asserted (which it must be to be a proposition at all) but *correctly* assertible, assertible, that is, in accordance with the relevant semantical rules. . . . ‘True’ then means *semantically* assertible (S assertible) and the varieties of truth correspond to the relevant varieties of semantical rule.

(SM, 101)

This generic notion applies to all kinds of propositions: mathematical ones, moral ones, and modal ones, for example. The other notion is much more specific, applying only to the ‘matter-of-factual’ vocabularies. As O’Shea describes it:

Sellars also argues that [in addition to this generic notion] there is a further ‘correspondence’ dimension to truth in the specific case of what he calls *basic matter-of-fact truths*. This is a descendant of Wittgenstein’s ‘picture theory’ in the *Tractatus*: basic matter of factual propositions in some sense form *pictures*, or ‘cognitive maps,’ or ‘representations’ of how objects or events in the world are related.

(O’Shea 2007, 144)

Sellars is very clear indeed that these two notions need to be kept apart. As he says, the relation of picturing is “a mode of ‘correspondence’ other than truth” (TC, 54). He tells us that it is important to

grasp the difference between the *primary* concept of factual truth (truth as a correct picture) . . . and the *generic* concept of truth as S assertibility, which involves the quite different mode of correspondence . . . in terms of which the ‘correspondence’ statements (i.e. equivalence statement) that ‘ $2 + 2 = 4$ ’ is true  $\leftrightarrow$   $2$  plus  $2 = 4$  is to be understood.

(SM, 119)

Again: “Picturing is a complex matter of factual relation and, as such, belongs in quite a different box from the concepts of denotation and truth” (SM, 136).

In my view, the realisation that there are two quite different notions in play in this vicinity— notions easily confused for one another—is a lesson that Humean expressivists should learn from Sellars. However, I think that not even Sellars properly understands its impact. Properly understood, I think, it means the end of the Bifurcation Thesis and commits us to a ‘global’ pragmatism, or global expressivism.

## 6. From Sellars to Global Expressivism

Recall again that Humean expressivism typically combines two theses. The *negative thesis* tells us in semantic terms what a vocabulary is not doing—it is not descriptive, fact-stating, ‘truth-apt’, or something of the kind. The *positive thesis* tells us in pragmatic terms what the vocabulary in question is doing—it is expressing evaluative attitudes, or dispositions to follow a rule, for example. Creeping cognitivism is the problem as to how we formulate the negative thesis, if notions such as ‘cognitive’, ‘truth’, or ‘reference’ and now being held to have a proper place on both sides of the bifurcation (as Sellars says the term ‘cognitive’ does, for example, and that the generic notion of ‘truth’ does).

Sellars’ clarity about the fact that semantic notion of truth is generic means that it is for him a very small step to the move I recommend: We should simply *abandon* the negative thesis, and with it the idea that there is any well-grounded *semantic* bifurcation in the first place. On the contrary: all the vocabularies in question are *equally* fact-stating, *in this generic sense*. (That’s what it means to say that these semantic notions are generic, after all.) As Sellars realises, this is quite compatible with retaining the *positive* thesis—with maintaining that there are very important *non-semantic* distinctions between the jobs done by different vocabularies.

The one piece of this view that Sellars doesn’t quite have, in my view, is an explicit recognition that his ‘picturing’-based notion of truth belongs on the pragmatic side—that it simply goes into the mix as one positive *pragmatic*

proposal about the role of particular vocabularies. But he can't possibly be far away from this conclusion. He himself insists that picturing "belongs in quite a different box" from the semantic notions. But as I noted above, the 'pragmatic' box of the positive thesis is best defined simply in opposition to the semantic box. Sellars is clear that picturing doesn't go into the semantic box, so he counts as a global expressivist by definition, in my terms. Only a lingering temptation to let 'picturing' creep back across the line to the semantic side, and so ground a semantic bifurcation after all, makes this classification seem controversial. And Sellars himself repeatedly insists that we should resist that temptation.

If we view the landscape in these terms, then we have given up entirely on the Bifurcation Thesis. In other words, we have simply abandoned the notion that there is a useful distinction to be drawn between descriptive and non-descriptive uses of language. Rather, we can find all the plurality we need at the underlying *pragmatic* level. Because we haven't abandoned the positive claims that expressivism makes at that level, our view surely counts as a form of expressivism. Yet it cannot be local, in the old sense, for we have embraced the challenge of creeping cognitivism, and recognised that there is no interesting semantic bifurcation. Accordingly, we should think of it as *global expressivism*, or *global pragmatism*. As I say, I think that Sellars himself leads us to this point, even if he doesn't quite appreciate the shape of the landscape that comes into view.

## 7. Two Notions of Representation

In recent work (Price 2011, Ch 1; Price *et al.*, 2013, Ch 2) I have drawn a distinction that I now take to have much in common with Sellars' separation of the generic, semantic truth, on one hand, and the 'picturing' notion of truth, on the other. My focus was somewhat broader than Sellars', concerned not with truth specifically but with the taxonomy of various notions of representation in play in contemporary philosophy and cognitive science. I proposed that it is helpful to distinguish two broad clusters of notions, and to recognise the theoretical advantages of insisting that they are distinct—of resisting the temptation to force them into the same box, to use Sellars' metaphor.

In one of my two boxes—the *e-representational* cluster, as I call it—the defining feature is environment tracking, causal covariation, indicator relations, or something of that kind. In this cluster, at least at first pass, we put the internal states that frogs use to keep track of flies, the states of thermometers that keep track of temperature, and the like. In the other box—the *i-representational* cluster—the defining feature is a role in some sort of functional, computational, or inferential network; for example, being a move in Brandom's game of giving and asking for reasons.

I proposed that notions from both of these clusters are useful for various theoretical purposes, but that we should avoid confusing them. No doubt

there are confusions we should avoid within each cluster, too, but it was the cluster-to-cluster confusion that seemed to me to be especially interesting. Indeed, in confusing the i-representational notion of propositional content with e-representational notions of word–natural world correspondence, it is the core mistake of much contemporary representationalism, in my view.

Against this background, it seems natural to regard Sellars’ ‘picturing’ as an e-representational notion and his generic notion of truth (S-assertibility) as an i-representational notion. For Sellars, as for me, keeping these notions distinct is the key to the project of combining the insights of Humean expressivism with the recognition that moral and modal claims are full blown truth-evaluable assertions. But for Sellars, too, I think the upshot has to be a kind of global expressivism—that is, a global anti-(traditional) representationalism that comes from recognizing that propositional content and word–natural world correspondence live quite different theoretical lives.

Note that Sellars himself tends to reserve the term ‘representation’ for ‘picturing’—what I call e-representation. In one sense, this is merely a terminological preference. (Other distinguished pragmatists have insisted to me that only i-representation deserves to be called representation.) But it may make it harder to appreciate that Sellars is something very close to a global expressivist, or global pragmatist. Pragmatists are traditional enemies of representationalism, after all. But Sellars is not a representationalist in the sense in question—the sense best characterized, as above, as a *confusion* of e-representation with i-representation. Sellars avoids that confusion by insisting that ‘picturing’ and S-assertibility belong in different theoretical categories. With that sorted out, pragmatism has what it needs, and nothing hangs on how we choose to label the two boxes in question.

## 7. Is Sellars Ready to Set Aside Metaphysics?

Finally, to the lesson I propose that Sellars might learn from Cambridge Pragmatists, and from contemporary Humean expressivists in general. I noted earlier that one of the characteristics of Humean expressivism, explicit in Ramsey and Blackburn, is a ‘setting aside’ of metaphysics, and a deflation of traditional metaphysical issues of realism and antirealism. I want to finish by proposing that Sellars needs to go this way, too.

In recent work (Price *et al.*, 2013, Ch 3) I have proposed that alongside the distinction between e-representational and i-representational notions in play in contemporary philosophy, we need to recognise a corresponding distinction between two notions of *world*. One notion (the ‘e-world’, as I called it) is the natural world, the object of study of science in a broad sense. The other notion (the ‘i-world’) is something like ‘all the facts’—everything we take to be the case. As in the case of e-representation and i-representation, both notions here are to some extent clusters, capable of being refined in various ways. But the important thing is to recognise that they are distinct, and answerable to different considerations. We look to science for answers

to questions about the e-world, but often to different domains of enquiry altogether for questions about the i-world. The i-world is equally at home with mathematical and moral facts, for example.

Again, this distinction might remind us of Sellars. In one of the passages quoted above, Sellars notes that “the term ‘fact’ is properly used as a synonym for ‘truth’ even its most generic sense, so that we can speak of mathematical and even ethical facts” (SM, 116). Sellars makes this point to distinguish this generic use of ‘fact’ from “‘factual’, in the more specific sense . . . thought of as ‘matter-of-factual’, and as equivalent to Leibniz’s technical term *‘vérités de fait’*” (SM, 116).

For me, the distinction between i-world and e-world is intended to further the expressivist project of setting aside many of the concerns of contemporary metaphysics. In this case, I have in mind the kind of metaphysical naturalism that maintains that the natural world is ‘all there is’ (i.e., that declares itself to be ‘realist’ about the natural world and ‘antirealist’ about anything else). I want to say that this view is trivially true or trivially false, depending on whether we mean the e-world or the i-world when we talk about ‘what there is’. In neither case is there an interesting philosophical issue—the appearance that there is one rests on confusing these two senses of ‘world’.

My closing suggestion is that Sellars needs to go this way, too. That is, he needs to accept for *facts*, as he affirms for *expressions*, that, as he puts it:

Once the tautology ‘The world is described by descriptive concepts’ is freed from the idea that the business of all non-logical concepts is to describe, the way is clear to an *ungrudging* recognition that many [facts] which empiricists have relegated to second-class citizenship . . . are not *inferior, just different?*

(CDCM, §79, emphasis in bold mine—Sellars says ‘expressions’ at this point)

In other words, I think that Sellars should accept that mathematical facts, moral facts, modal facts, and the like, are “not inferior, just different”.

This may seem in tension with Sellars’ naturalism, but much will depend on whether Sellars is really the kind of metaphysical naturalist mentioned above, who thinks of naturalism as an *ontological* doctrine. Elsewhere (Price 2004) I have contrasted that kind of naturalism (‘object naturalism’, as I called it) to what I termed ‘subject naturalism’—a philosophy that begins with the recognition that we humans are creatures of the natural world, and seeks to make sense of our thought and talk on that basis. This is the naturalism of Hume, among many others, in other words. If Sellars is content to be a subject naturalist, then he will have no difficulty at all in accepting this further deflationary consequence of Humean expressivism.



## 8. Conclusion

To sum up, I have argued that in his emphatic distinction between two notions of truth, Sellars has a basis for the response that Humean expressivism needs to creeping cognitivism. It involves an explicit rejection of the semantic Bifurcation Thesis. The result is in an important sense an anti-representationalist position, because it gives up a link at the core of orthodox representationalism between propositional content and word–natural-world correspondence. In Sellars’ terms, the former keeps company with S-assertibility, the latter with ‘picturing’, and these notions simply live in different boxes. In effect, then, Sellars is already a global expressivist, and Cambridge Pragmatists should follow him down that path.<sup>3</sup> But Sellars in turn needs the metaphysical quietism that Cambridge had with the Ramsey of GPC, and later with Blackburn. And his naturalism should be that of Hume, not the object naturalism of much of contemporary metaphysics.

## Notes

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1 I draw here on my account in Price (2017).

2 Cheryl Misak (2017) maintains that by 1929 Ramsey had rejected enough of the Tractarian picture of language to deserve to be counted as a ‘global’ expressivist, in my terms—in other words, that despite the contrast Ramsey draws in GPC between propositions and other claims, his real view by that point is that there are no propositions at all, in the Tractarian sense. I have some reservations about Misak’s claim, though I agree that the Ramsey of GPC could not have been far from the global view—see Price (2017) for discussion. For present purposes, for expository convenience, I’ll take for granted that Ramsey holds the ‘local’ view apparently on offer in GPC.

Note also that Blackburn (2017) now expresses doubts about local expressivism. Again, I’ll ignore this recent development for expository convenience.

3 Perhaps Ramsey is there already—see fn 2.

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