

CHAPTER 7

How pragmatists can be local expressivists

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I

Contemporary pragmatists – or perhaps that should be neo-pragmatists – are often sympathetic to expressivist accounts of vocabularies that have often been regarded as metaphysically problematic: moral and modal vocabulary, for example. Huw Price is one of the most prominent such philosophers. At the same time, as Price has been quick to recognise, there is a question of whether pragmatists such as himself have the right to such sympathy. The question circles round the issue of what James Dreier (2004) has called ‘creeping minimalism’. I want to suggest an answer. But first I need to set up the problem.

Let me begin with a few words about the distinctive character of contemporary neo-pragmatism (which from now on I shall just call ‘pragmatism’). According to David Macarthur and Huw Price, pragmatism is defined by two commitments.

Linguistic Priority. When dealing with metaphysical issues, don’t start by asking about (say) the nature of values: examine what is distinctive about evaluative language.

Anti-representationalism. Representationalists explain the (proper) use of vocabulary items in terms of their meanings, and explain meaning (at least of non-logical vocabulary) in terms of semantic (word-world) relations, such as reference. By contrast, anti-representationalists eschew the use of semantic notions as explanatory primitives. All vocabularies – semantic vocabulary included – are to be characterized (or explained) functionally, in terms of their use properties. Oversimplifying a bit, meaning does not explain use: use explains meaning.

Macarthur and Price thus offer the following equation:

RAGMATISM — LINGUISTIC PRIORITY . ANTI-REPRESENTATIONALISM.

There is a lot to be said for this account of pragmatism, though there is more to pragmatism than the equation allows.

The two components in pragmatism are not of equal weight. In practice, nearly all philosophers find themselves taking an interest in the distinctive characters of different vocabularies. The heart of pragmatism is anti-representationalism. Anti-representationalism links contemporary pragmatists with James and Dewey. James and Dewey think of belief in functionalist terms, as mediating (through inference) between perception and action. But, in contrast to contemporary pragmatists, they equate their anti-representationalist outlook with a view about *truth*.

James and Dewey treat anti-representationalism as implying the rejection of the correspondence theory of truth in favour of some kind of epistemic theory. Beliefs are worth having – ‘true’ – to the extent that they play their mediating role effectively, facilitating inference in ways that help us to cope with concrete problems (for example, by enabling us to anticipate experiences). On this instrumental view of truth, coping with problems replaces ‘corresponding to the facts’ as the criterion of truth: hence James’s well-known claim that truth is whatever is ‘good in the way of belief’.

By contrast, contemporary pragmatists are much more inclined to favour a *deflationary* or *minimalist* approach to truth, holding that the use of the truth predicate is fully captured by our commitment to the non-paradoxical instances of some appropriate equivalence schema: for example,

$$(DQT) \text{ 'p' is true if and only if } p.$$

Deflationism allows them to concede to correspondence theorists that truth is a non-epistemic notion, without compromising a functional (use-based) approach to meaning. While retaining the anti-representationalist spirit of classical pragmatism, deflationism stays closer to our ordinary use of ‘true’ than do accounts such as James’s, which threaten to elide the distinction between truth and justification. This is a real step forward.

So much for pragmatism. Now for expressivism or ‘non-cognitivism’. The basic expressivist thought is that although sentences involving certain vocabularies display the logical syntax of assertoric sentences – embedding in conditionals and so on – they remain *fundamentally non-descriptive*. Thus, free-standing moral judgements *express evaluative attitudes* and so are more intimately related to decision and action than to belief. Similarly, judgements of causal necessitation issue *inference tickets*: i.e. express commitment to the goodness of certain kinds of material inference. We understand moral and modal judgements through appreciating what we *do* with them rather than what we *say*. Strictly speaking, we don’t say anything.

Price argues that the virtue of expressivist approaches to meaning – indeed, the virtue of use-theoretic approaches generally – is that they are *ontologically conservative*. Representationalist explanations of meaning tend to inherit the apparent ontological commitments of the vocabulary under review. A representationalist approach to moral predicates will tend to commit us *ab initio* to moral properties and thus (if we have naturalistic inclinations) to metaphysical worries about their character. By contrast, the only antecedent ontological commitments of use-theoretic approaches to meaning are to speakers, their utterances and so on: that is, to things that everyone is bound to recognise anyway. Expressivism's ontological conservatism gives it obvious attractions for philosophers with a naturalistic turn of mind. Values – or normative properties – enter the world through our taking on normative attitudes. They are not metaphysically problematic entities (or properties), waiting to be detected by some special faculty, distinct from our normal five senses. Further, the motivating aspect of value-judgements is built-in. If value-judgements express desires or preferences or decisions, there are no worries about whether we can recognise the to-be-doneness of an action without being motivated to act accordingly.

It should be no surprise that pragmatists are susceptible to expressivism's charms. Pragmatism is a naturalistic philosophy in several ways. Not least, pragmatists are anti-Platonist. They want to treat norms as human phenomena that we are responsible *to* but also responsible *for*. Granted, pragmatic naturalism is not reductive, say, in the manner of physicalism: this is one way in which pragmatism is anti-metaphysical. But pragmatism has no time for the *supernatural*, another way in which pragmatism is anti-metaphysical. Pragmatists value anti-representationalism in part *because of* its anti-Platonist, anti-supernatural, potential. Anti-representationalists are excused from supposing that the meaningfulness of normative concepts depends on their referring to practice-independent normative properties, to which we must be presumed to stand in some kind of ‘detective’ relationship. Put more positively, anti-Platonism embodies what Robert Brandom calls ‘pragmatism about norms’: the view that normative *statuses* are instituted by our taking up normative *attitudes* (as is obviously the case with respect to the rules of games). Price shares this view, I think.

So far, so good. But now comes the problem. Standard expressivist views are strictly *local*. Thus, moral expressivists *contrast* the expressive character of moral vocabulary with the robustly representational character of scientific or other straightforwardly descriptive talk. They take this contrast

between expressive and representational uses of language to be essential to their position. Local expressivism goes with local anti-representationalism. But pragmatists are anti-representationalists across the board. As semantic deflationists, they have no ‘robust’ notion of truth. If sentences are used in ways that respect the syntactic discipline of assertoric discourse, then they are used to make assertions and are as ‘truth-apt’ as sentences get to be. The apparently vital contrast between descriptive and expressive uses of language is erased.¹ Once it is erased, how is what remains of expressivism to be distinguished from the most extreme realism? As Dreier states the problem: ‘Minimalism sucks the substance out of heavy-duty metaphysical concepts. If successful, it can help expressivists recapture the ordinary realist language of ethics. But in so doing, it also threatens to make irrealism indistinguishable from realism’ (2004: 26).

Macarthur and Price deny that there is a problem here. Expressivists are right to trace metaphysical anxieties about, say, moral facts to representationalist prejudices. If we think that, to be significant, terms of moral appraisal must refer to moral properties, we will inevitably find ourselves trying to explain how such properties get a footing in the world around us. Expressivists are therefore also right to offer anti-representationalist accounts of moral talk. But they are *wrong* to suppose that, to make their point, they need to keep their anti-representationalism local. Pragmatists are *global anti-representationalists*, explaining *all* vocabularies along the anti-representationalist lines expressivists follow for particular cases. Far from

¹ Sellars does not face this problem, at least not immediately, since he is not a semantic deflationist. For deflationists, the conceptual content of ‘true’ is fixed by our primitive acceptance of the (non-paradoxical instances) of some equivalence schema, in the case of Paul Horwich’s minimal theory: (MT) The proposition that p is true if and only if p. Sellars’ claim is that these equivalences are not to be regarded as primitive but rather as ‘following’ from the ‘definition’ (the scare quotes are Sellars’ own) of truth in that for a proposition to be true is for it to be ... *correctly assertible* – assertible, that is, in accordance with the relevant semantical rules and on the basis of such additional, though unspecified, information as these rules may require. Truth is thus ‘semantic assertibility’. However, since Sellarsian ‘semantical rules’ are rules of criticism, embodying inferential and other epistemic proprieties, semantical assertibility is a kind of idealised justification. This epistemic theory of truth allows for ‘alethic pluralism’. Semantic assertibility defines the generic concept of truth: specific ‘varieties of truth correspond to the relevant varieties of semantical rule’. So, for example, in mathematics truth is provability. But, notoriously, Sellars goes much farther. Basic factual discourse aims to *picture* the world. Picturing is a non-semantic form of representation involving a correspondence relation between ‘natural linguistic objects’ (utterances and inscriptions) and configurations of objects in the world. (Not *facts*: this is Sellars’ emendation of this Tractarian idea.) The question of whether or not to try to find *anything* in this aspect of Sellars’ philosophy is the main bone of contention between ‘left wing’ Sellarsians (such as Rorty and Brandom) and ‘right wing’, orthodox Sellarsians (such as Joanna Seibt and, with qualifications, Jay Rosenberg). But if we go with the left-wingers, we will be back to wondering what semantic minimalists should make of normative or modal expressivism. See Sellars 1968: Chapter 4 and Sellars 1962b.

conflicting with pragmatism, local expressivisms *support* it by providing templates for anti-representationalist approaches to meaning that invite generalisation.

Expressivists will not be impressed. Semantic deflationism, they will say, enforces a ‘seamless’ view of language, eliding essential distinctions. Not so, Price responds. Anti-representationalism leads to *metaphysical* quietism but not to *philosophical* quietism. Metaphysical quietism is compatible with functional pluralism. The relevant lines of demarcation can still be drawn, just *not in representationalist terms*. Charting the different functions that different forms of discourse fulfill is the (naturalistic) project of ‘philosophical anthropology’.

I think that Price is exactly right. However, his response requires elaboration. There are lots of functionally different uses of words. Asserting is different from commanding or promising. What has to be shown is that pragmatists can draw lines more or less where expressivists want to draw them, for reasons bearing at least some relation to those that expressivists give but without invoking the semantic distinctions that traditional expressivists rely on. Traditional expressivists will doubt that pragmatists can do any such thing. Radical quietists, such as Horwich, will agree, but on the grounds that there are no lines to be drawn. Of course, Horwich will deny that this erasing of boundaries makes his position indistinguishable from extreme, global realism. He will insist, fairly enough, that he has set *all* philosophical theses aside. In Price’s terms, this radical quietism is both metaphysical *and* philosophical. But my sympathies are with Price. It would be more satisfying to show that global anti-representationalism is compatible with a form of functional pluralism that respects expressivist intuitions. However, perhaps unlike Price, I think that this is a non-trivial undertaking. The constraints imposed on pragmatists by semantic deflationism are severe. A semantic deflationist has no notion of fact beyond that of true proposition, and no notion of truth that can bear any explanatory weight.

Accordingly, it won’t do to explain the functional difference between descriptive and normative discourse in terms of their expressing, respectively, beliefs and desires (or some other desire-like states) and then go on to explain the belief – desire distinction in terms of direction of fit (beliefs aiming to fit the world, desires aiming at getting the world to fit them). Such a strategy would bring in representationalist notions through the back door. It is all very well to talk about the ‘different roles in our lives’ that different vocabularies play. But how are these roles to be characterized, if

the language of philosophical anthropology must *exclude any explanatory use of representationalist idioms?*²

If we are to recognize that there are insights to be retained from local expressivism – moral or modal expressivism, say – while operating within the framework of a fully general anti-representationalism, we must draw lines in roughly the places that traditional local expressivists draw them and do so for reasons that bear some significant relation to those that motivate locally expressivist views. I think that this can be done. In what remains, I show how.

2

To see whether pragmatism can accommodate expressivist insights, we have to ask what is involved in giving an explanation of meaning in terms of use (an EMU).

In offering to explain ‘meaning’ in terms of use, there are two explanatory goals we might have in mind. One is to explain *meaningfulness*: whatever distinguishes a linguistic item – a word or sentence – from a mere sound or scribble. Our goal, we might say, is to explain the *nature* of meaning. A second quite different goal is to explain the *meanings* of particular vocabulary items. This second task is not one that all philosophers associated with the pragmatist tradition take seriously. Some philosophers with pragmatist leanings (e.g., Quine and Davidson) are *sceptics about meanings*. However, scepticism about meanings comes in different grades.

1. There is no fact of the matter as to what a person’s words mean. Accordingly, there is *nothing to explain*.
2. One can determine what someone’s words mean, in the sense that there is a right thing to say in a particular interpretative- or speech-context. However, meaning is contextually sensitive and interest-relative. Accordingly, the conditions under which w means M cannot be specified in a *general, theoretically illuminating way*. Explanations of meaning are *incurably local*.

² I think that the tendency on the part of Price and Macarthur to downplay the problem of accommodating expressivist insights reflects their stripped-down view of pragmatism. The attractions of expressivism, for pragmatists, reflects pragmatism about norms, the flip side of pragmatic anti-Platonism. Pragmatism is ‘anti-metaphysical’ in its hostility to postulating supernatural entities to guide human practices. But if we take Price at his word and take metaphysical quietism to entail having *no* views about the nature of norms, pragmatism (in its most typical articulations) is not metaphysically quietist. But can it be expressivist? That is the question.

3. While compact and general explanations of the meanings of particular vocabulary items are not generally available, they can be given *in certain special cases*.

These distinctions will be important in our consideration of vocabulary-specific EMUs that are minimalist or deflationary.

Since we have a particular interest in minimalism, we can start with a case for which all neo-pragmatists are committed to giving a minimalist EMU: ‘true’ itself. I shall use this example to motivate a general meta-theoretical analysis of EMUs. I shall then exhibit the generality of the analysis by applying it to other cases: causal-modal vocabulary, observational vocabulary and deontic vocabulary. I shall show how the analysis provides for accommodating the insights of local expressivisms within the framework of global anti-representationalism.

I begin, then, with ‘true’. As a concrete example of a deflationary account of truth, let us take Paul Horwich’s minimal theory. (It should be clear that the general analysis of an EMU that I am going to present owes nothing to the details of Horwich’s theory of truth. Any deflationary theory would have done as well.) Horwich holds that our use of ‘true’, hence the meaning of the truth predicate, is fully captured by our commitment to all (non-paradoxical) instances of the equivalence schema:

(MT) The proposition that P is true if and only if P.

Horwich is making three claims here. First, with respect to giving the meaning of ‘true’, the rule of use implicit in our acceptance of the instances of MT is *explanatorily* fundamental. Second, the instances themselves are *epistemologically* fundamental. That is, ‘We do not arrive at them, or seek to justify them, on the basis of anything more obvious or more immediately known.’ Third, accepting the instances of MT is ‘the source of *everything else* we do with the truth predicate’ (Horwich 2001: 149). This ‘*everything else*’ is the expressive function of the truth predicate, which is to endorse or repudiate claims that we do not or cannot specify. Truth talk is a useful generalising device.

Now, although the EMU for ‘true’ is deflationary – and so undoubtedly special in some ways – we can still treat it (following Horwich) as a paradigm for EMUs generally. Viewed this way, the template it offers breaks down into three components:

1. (I-T): a *material-inferential* (intra-linguistic) component. Excepting sentences that generate paradox, the inference from ‘Snow is white’ to ‘It

is true that snow is white', and vice versa, is always good; the inference from 'Grass is green' to 'It is true that grass is green', and vice versa, is always good, and so on.

2. (E-T): an *epistemological* component. Such inferences are *primitively* acceptable (*a priori*). They are 'free' moves in the discursive game.
3. (F-T): a *functional* component. The truth predicate is important exclusively as a generalising device. It enables us to do things that we could not otherwise do: endorse or repudiate claims that we cannot explicitly state because we do not know what they are ('You can trust John: anything he tells you will be true') or because there are too many ('Every proposition of the form "p or not-p" is true').

This meta-theoretical analysis makes it clear that 'use-theoretic' explanations of meanings appeal to two distinct notion of use. The I and E clauses specify the inferential patterns that competent users of 'true' display (or the proprieties they respect) in their use of 'true'. This is use as *usage: how* a word is used. The usage-specifying clauses are fundamental in that they neither receive nor need any deeper *theoretical* explanation. They do, however, both invite and receive a *functional* explanation from the F-clause. After all, use patterns are ten a penny: you can make them up *ad libitum*. Why, then, do we have a concept that answers to the use patterns given by I-T and E-T? F-T tells us why. The F-clause appeal to use as expressive function: *what* a word is used to do, *what* it is useful *for*.

This distinction is vitally important. There is a sense in which Horwich is quite right to say that the rule of use indicated by MT is 'the source of *everything else* we do with the truth predicate'. The sense is this: the use properties given by I-T and E-T *enable* truth talk's functional role. But, as Horwich himself remarks, 'the truth-predicate exists solely for the sake of a certain logical need' (1998: 3). So there is an equally good sense in which *what we do with the truth-predicate* explains our possessing a concept determined by those use properties. The concept's functional and utility point up its 'survival value'.

I now turn to the EMU's minimalist or deflationary character. The EMU for 'true' is minimalist in four distinct ways.

1. It is *compact*. The essential points about 'true' are briefly stated without anything vital being omitted.
2. It is *theoretically modest*. The analysis is given in terms of platitudes that virtually everyone would accept. Compared with, say, the view that truth depends on reference, which must in turn be identified with a complex causal relation, the minimalist account is *shallow*: more *phenomenological*

- than *theoretical*. It is controversial *only* in claiming that nothing more need be said.
3. It is *ontologically conservative*. The use of ‘true’ is characterised without reference to the property of truth.
 4. It is *functionally restrictive*. Truth talk plays a more limited role in our discursive practices than proponents of ‘robust’ theories imagine. In particular, truth is not a *theoretically significant concept*. It is in virtue of this last feature that the account can be thought of as *deflationary*.³

Items 1, 2 and 3 are aspects of theoretical minimalism. The fourth, functionally restrictive aspect of the account makes its theoretical minimalism plausible. With respect to the minimal theory’s deflationary character, then, the key claim is that ‘true’ has no *explanatory* use. Indeed, it has no use beyond its generalising role. In this sense, truth is not a ‘substantive’ property.⁴

The results so far already suggest two possibilities. First, vocabulary items for which we can give minimalist or deflationary EMUs are the special cases that provide exceptions to Quinean scruples concerning compact meaning analyses. The second is that not all EMUs need be minimalist or deflationary, so there may be lines to be drawn. With these possibilities in mind, we look at the rest of our EMUs, beginning with Sellars’ account of the causal modalities.⁵

Sellars treats causal statements (lawlike generalisations) as involving something like entailments. They embody, thus authorise, material inferences. Since Sellars thinks that natural-kind terms are richly dispositional, so that causal commitments are built into our concepts of ordinary things and substances, he holds that claims such as ‘Salt dissolves in water’ hold as a matter of conceptual necessity. In the form given by

³ The different ways of being ‘minimalist’ are only loosely related. In particular, it would be possible to claim a richer functional significance for truth talk without compromising the EMU’s ontological conservatism. Price has a view of truth along these lines. Price thinks that truth talk has a distinctive normative flavour. In terms of my analysis, we should think of Price as espousing a less restrictive F-clause: adding a normative-expressive function to the generalising function stressed by Horwich and other strict deflationists. Whether we should follow Price in this is a question worthy of further discussion.

⁴ Paul Boghossian (1990) has argued that semantic deflationists fall into inconsistency when they say that truth is not a ‘substantive’ concept, since the distinction between substantive and non-substantive concepts implies a non-deflationary understanding of truth. But *pace* Boghossian, the substantive/non-substantive distinction is itself explicated in terms of use and does not presuppose the idea that predicates are (and others are not) ‘robustly representational’.

⁵ Sellars 1957; see especially Sections 79–82, pp. 282–5. I have pieced the EMU together from various things Sellars says. He does not state his view in anything like the form in which I state it here.

my meta-theoretical analysis, a Sellarsian EMU for causal talk would go something like this:

1. (I-C)

- (a) Causal claims (lawlike statements) state physical necessities and involve material entailments (conceptual connections). (This is why causal claims ‘support’ counterfactual conditionals.) Causal claims constrain what is physically possible: thus, the inference from ‘ $N_c(p \supset q)$ ’ to ‘ $\sim P_c(p \& \sim q)$ ’ and vice versa, is always good.
 - (b) Since there may be circumstances (that we cannot exhaustively specify) in which a given lawlike connection does not hold, entitlement to expect the effect, given the cause, is defeasible. The material inferences authorised by causal statements – or by the causal commitments embodied in natural-kind concepts – are non-monotonic.
2. (E-C): causal claims (and/or lawlike statements) are open to repudiation and may require justification, on *empirical* grounds. This distinguishes causal from, for example, mathematical necessity (even if they conform to the same modal logic). Causal claims may be built into natural-kind concepts, but there can be *empirical grounds* for *conceptual change*.
3. (F-C): in advancing causal/lawlike claims, we are issuing inference tickets. We express commitment to inferring q from p, *ceteris paribus*.

In this case, the I-clause marks out lawlike connectedness as a kind of entailment (Sellars says ‘physical’ entailment); the E-clause distinguishes physical necessity from other kinds (e.g., mathematical) in terms of how entitlement to the entailments that express it is acquired or lost; and the F-clause gives the functional significance of concepts determined by such use properties. As with the EMU for ‘true’, the expressive aspect of the EMU for causal modality resides in the F-clause. And, as before, this clause is where the real explanation lies: the functional significance of causal talk explains our possessing a concept with the use characteristics captured by the I- and E-clauses.

Sellars’ account of the causal modalities is fundamentally expressivist. For Sellars, causal talk is a special kind of normative (in fact deontic) talk: it issues inference tickets. The EMU quite obviously meets the criteria for being minimalist or deflationary: compactness, ontological conservatism, theoretical modesty and functional restriction. This brings me to my first thesis, which is that local-expressivist EMUs are minimalist EMUs with a particular kind of F-clause (one mentioning the expression of an evaluative

or practical attitude). However, the tripartite template highlights a trap to avoid: the temptation to think of saying and doing (or expressing) as pointing to different *kinds* of meaning rather than as distinguishable *aspects* of meaning. Recall the EMU for ‘true’. The F-clause says that truth talk is a generalising device: that’s all. But we must not confuse the claim that truth is not useful for *explanatory* purposes with the claim that truth predictions are not *descriptive*. Similarly, we should not think that the claim that causal laws issue inference tickets entails that they aren’t used to say anything.

Let me reiterate the vital point made explicit by my meta-theoretical analysis. In any EMU, the I- and E-clauses, on the one hand, and the (F) clause, on the other, are concerned with aspects of use that must not be confused and that must not be thought to compete. The inferential and epistemological properties (or proprieties) captured by the (I) and (E) clauses concern *how* certain vocabulary items are (to be) used, assertorially or inferentially, and so fix meaning in one sense of (or perhaps one sense of) *conceptual content*. They capture ‘use’ as *usage*. By contrast, the (F) clauses capture what an item conforming to such proprieties can be used (is useful) *for*. They capture ‘meaning’ in the sense of *pragmatic (functional) significance*: expressive role and/or utility. If we fail to keep this distinction clearly in mind, or if we think that these different aspects of ‘use’ are in competition, we will be tempted to suppose that, when deploying certain vocabulary items susceptible of minimalist analysis, but having a distinctive expressive function, we aren’t *really* saying anything but *only* doing something.

That the expressive function of a particular vocabulary item explains its assertional and inferential use proprieties, themselves specifiable in an ontologically conservative way, is the local expressivist’s deep insight. The tendency to take this insight to imply that the vocabulary to which his analysis applies is not ‘really’ descriptive is his *ur*-mistake. The mistake occurs because the temptation to treat describing and expressing as alternatives that we must choose between is acute with respect to the standard candidates for expressivist treatment. This is so because these locutions have a *special* pragmatic significance beyond saying how things in some respects are: for example, by reporting on them. Focusing on this special pragmatic significance can encourage us to slip into thinking that use is at bottom *only* pragmatic significance, forgetting the use patterns that fix conceptual content. In this way, we will come to suppose that in deploying ‘true’ or ‘cause’, we aren’t really ascribing a property – truth to a statement or causal

power to an object – we are *merely* endorsing a claim (or set of claims) or expressing an inferential commitment.⁶

A question is likely to come up here. I suggested that the (I) and (E) clauses of an EMU explain conceptual content – what we are saying – whereas the (F) clauses explain what we are able to do by saying that. But *what* are we saying in the cases under review? *Pace* proponents of traditional meaning analyses, in which ways are suggested for translating statements of some problematic kind into complex statements belonging to some privileged kind, *there is no non-trivial answer to such questions*. By conforming to the use patterns/proprieties for ‘true’ or ‘causes’ – given by the material-inferential and epistemological clauses of the EMUs – we are able to say that p is true or that A causes B. End of story. Minimalist EMUs offer ontological conservatism without reduction or elimination.

3

The question is whether semantic minimalists can draw lines more or less where local expressivists want to draw them and for reasons that local expressivists can sympathise with. My suggestion that expressivist analyses are a particular kind of minimalist (or deflationary) EMU will help answer this question only if we can capture an appropriate contrast between minimalist and non-minimalist EMUs. So the next question is, are there non-minimalist or non-deflationary EMUs, and, if so, what makes them non-minimalist?

This brings me to a third EMU, extracted from Sellars’ analysis of the observation term ‘red’.⁷ It too follows the tripartite template, though with a crucial complication.

⁶ I think that Sellars was alive to this danger. This is why he says that ‘the language of modality is interpreted as a “transposed” language of norms’ see Sellars 1953: 21; Page references in this chapter are to the reprinted version). To stick with the case in hand, in making causal statements about things in the world, or even in deploying ordinary natural-kind terms, we express semantic (material-inferential) commitments, which are for Sellars a kind of normative commitment. As Sellars puts the point, we *convey* information (about our normative attitudes) that we do not *assert*. Indeed, since for Sellars the use rules given by the I- and E-clauses of an EMU concern *proprieties* of use, and not mere regularities, these clauses themselves have a prescriptive character and so an expressive function. This is why Sellars remarks, *a propos* of Carnap on rules for L-derivability, that the utterance ‘ ψ a is L-derivable from ϕ a’ must be taken to *convey* what ‘ ψ a is necessitated by ϕ a’ conveys. Causal statements express rules, which in turn express inferential commitments (Sellars 1953: 22). I am not sure whether endorsing Sellars’ proposal sets me at odds with Robert Brandom’s claim that inferential commitments are *made explicit* by modal vocabulary.

⁷ See Sellars 1956: 35–8. Page references in this chapter are to the reprinted version.

1. (I-R): the inference from ‘x is red’ to ‘x is not green’, ‘x is not yellow’, etc., is always good. i.e., necessarily, if x is monochromatically red, x is not monochromatically green (yellow, etc.). Further inferential moves include those from ‘crimson’ to ‘red’, ‘red’ to ‘coloured’, etc.
2. (E-R):
 - (a) The inferential moves specified by (I-R) are free.
 - (b) To master ‘red’ in its reporting use, the speaker must have a reliable discriminative reporting disposition (RDRD), a disposition, given appropriate motivation and conditions, to report ‘x is red’ only in the presence of a red thing in his field of vision.
 - (c) For a speaker fulfilling (b), a reporting move of ‘x is red’ is generally free but open to challenge, hence requiring justification, *in special circumstances*.
3. (F-R): In a reporting use, tokens of ‘x is red’ express reliable discriminative reactions to an environmental circumstance. In this way, they function as language-entry transitions and thereby play a distinguished role in securing/undermining ‘theoretical’ entitlements. But, in themselves, they have no special *expressive* function. They are purely assertoric and *in this sense* ‘merely descriptive’.

These clauses are of course illustrative rather than exhaustive. But they are enough to show that the EMU is *not* minimalist.

First, it is not mere laziness that deters me from attempting to state the EMU in a more complete form. Rather, I doubt that the inferential properties given in (I-R) *can* be exhaustively specified. I-R points towards the kind of inferences ‘red’ is involved in but does not fully display them. The EMU is thus not genuinely compact and so fails to be as uncompromisingly minimalist as that for ‘true’.

While not minimalist with respect to ‘red’, the EMU can be seen as offering a non-metaphysical account of *observationality*. The EMU for ‘red’ stands to the EMU for a term’s being an observation term rather as the EMU for, say, ‘salt’ stands to the EMU for the causally modal commitments that deployment of such a natural-kind term involves. On Sellars’ account, the observation/theory distinction is *methodological*, not *ontological*. That is, the EMU for observationality does not postulate a privileged range of sensible qualities, intrinsically suited to be the objects of non-inferential reporting, nor a special mode of awareness tailored to the ‘immediate’ grasping of such qualities. (This is how it detaches the special epistemic weight attaching to

observation reports from the myth of the given in its empiricist version.) The EMU is theoretically modest.

While not fully minimalist, then, the EMU for ‘red’ is still minimalist in spirit, or so we might suppose. And in some respects it is. But not in all. While theoretically modest, the EMU is *not ontologically conservative*. By E-R, sub-clause (2b), observation reports are bound up with reliable discriminative reporting dispositions: this is what allows them to function as *language entry transitions*, making possible their distinctive role in the regulation of theory. But because of its appeal to such dispositions, the EMU for ‘red’, or any word with a reporting use, involves world–word relations essentially. To be sure, the world–word relations on which entry transitions depend are *causal*, not *semantic*. ‘Red’ does not refer to red things by virtue of this causal relation: the causal relation resides in the E-clause. Since the EMU attempts no reduction of reference to causal relatedness, it implies no representationalist backsliding. But this essential clarification does not affect the point that the EMU involves the *use*, and not merely the *mention*, of the term whose meaning it analyses. The avoidance by EMUs of semantic relations as explanatory primitives does guarantee ontological conservatism.

This point suggests a refinement in our understanding of the relations between the three types of clause in our template for an EMU. So far, I have been contrasting the I- and E-clauses with the F-clause, suggesting that the former determine conceptual (= assertional or descriptive) content. But we can see why Sellars is drawn to a narrow conception of ‘conceptual content’ in which such content is fixed by the (I) clauses alone. We can see why EMUs have three components; in particular why we should separate the material-inferential and epistemic clauses.

The prior fixing of conceptual content by the I-clause in an observation-term EMU saves the EMU from circularity. Because the E-clause for ‘red’ uses the word ‘red’ and does not merely mention it, the E-clause presupposes that ‘red’ has been given conceptual content independently of the application conditions that assure it a reporting use. Further, this prior fixing of conceptual content by the I-clause is what enables us to treat the observational/theoretical distinction as methodological rather than ontological. It is an essential feature of Sellars’ account of that a word introduced as a theoretical term can acquire an observational use – a new application – without change of meaning. The constant element is the conceptual content fixed by the I-clause.

In Sellars' view, though conceptual content is determined fundamentally by the I-clause, a language at large could not be about the world in which it is used unless it contained *some* observation terms. The presence of such terms is a condition on meaningfulness for *all* terms, even though mere causal relatedness to environmental circumstances does not fix the conceptual content of *any*. Still, meaning in the broadest sense involves all three components identified by my meta-theoretical analysis. Some terms build causal relations into their full EMUs and some don't. Observation terms do so directly. Theoretical terms do so indirectly, in that they are introduced in ways that involve essential relations to the observable facts that they explain.

Can we say that, in addition to giving a fundamental explanatory role to a special expressive function, 'expressivist' EMUs belong to the class of EMUs that don't involve world-word relations essentially? Yes, if we are careful enough.

To explain what I have in mind, let me turn to normative vocabulary, in particular to 'ought'. The EMU I want to consider combines ideas from Sellarsian analyses of causal modality and observationality. The EMU for 'ought' is a kind of mirror image of that for an observation term. The EMU for 'red' uses the idea of reliable discriminative responsiveness to capture the idea that, in acquiring information observationally, we react to our surroundings. In this way, observation reports function as 'language entry transitions'. But 'oughts' have motivational force: to decide what one ought (all things considered) to do is to decide what to do. As leading to action, 'oughts' are connected with what Sellars calls language *exit* transitions. So here (following Brandom following Sellars)⁸ is a sketch of one form that an EMU for 'ought' might take:

(I-O) 'Ought' implies 'It is not permissible not to ...', 'can', etc.
(i.e. we are dealing with deontic *modality*).

(E-O) 'Oughts' are related to practical reasoning (of various kinds): reasoning to a conclusion ('I shall ...') where the reasoner has a reliable disposition to act on his conclusion. (The modality is distinctively *deontic*.)

(F-O) 'Oughts' express endorsement (commitment to the soundness) of certain patterns of practical inferences. (Further refinement would distinguish different kinds of 'oughts': prudential, moral, etc.)

⁸ See Sellars (1954); also Brandom (2000: Chapter 2).

This is crude but sufficient to make the point I need to make. This EMU, like that for ‘red’, involves a language–world relation. However, since in this case the language–world transitions are *exit* transitions, the EMU remains ontologically conservative. We get an analogue of representationalist talk of ‘direction of fit’ but without representationalism’s theoretical baggage. The EMU for ‘red’ invokes responses to red things. In the EMU for ‘ought’, by contrast, deontic facts enter the characterisation of use only *via* deontic attitudes. The latter alone belong to the causal order. This is so both locally and globally. The EMU for ‘ought’ is minimalist in a way that the EMU for ‘red’ is not.

4

Let me sum up.

I distinguished three grades of scepticism about meaning. The least severe allowed that, while not generally available, compact EMUs for particular vocabulary items can be given in certain special cases. Vocabulary items susceptible of minimalist analysis are the special cases for which particularised EMUs can be given. We can’t do this for items that stand for ‘substantial’ properties: paradigmatically natural-kind terms because such terms find multifarious (and changing) explanatory uses: in other words, for all the reasons central to Quine’s repudiation of the analytic–synthetic distinction. But in such cases we don’t need an EMU because there is *nothing to explain* in a general, theoretical way. Sameness of meaning is a context-sensitive and interest-relative notion. The distinction between change of meaning and change of belief gets no purchase outside particular pedagogical or expository contexts. There are no ‘meanings’ to be captured. The same should probably be said of *thick* moral concepts. What we *can* deflate is their normative character.

Minimalist analyses of modal and deontic vocabulary accord with ‘pragmatism about norms’, the view that norms are instituted by – and enter into the causal order only by way of – normative attitudes. This non-reductively naturalist view contrasts with such supernaturalist views as Divine command theories of morality and what John McDowell calls ‘Rampant Platonism’, without being either ‘subjectivist’ or ‘anti-realist’ (1994: 77–8). The only sense in which norms do not belong to the ‘natural’ world involves the sense of ‘nature’ that contrasts nature with culture, not the sense that contrasts the natural with the supernatural or the non-natural. If there is a problem remaining to be solved it concerns the *emergence* of norms. But

pragmatists know where to look for a solution: the evolution of cooperative behaviour (as explained by evolutionary game theory, perhaps).⁹

At the same time, pragmatists can draw lines that approximate those drawn by local expressivists. The key is to see local expressivism as presenting minimalist or deflationary EMUs with a distinctive F-clause, while recognising that not all EMUs are minimalist. Minimalist EMUs are conservative at the *theoretical* level, the level where lines are drawn. But minimalism imposes no obligation to say that there is no property of truth, or that there are ‘really no such things’ as necessary connections or obligations. Quite the opposite: in a *plain* way we can and should talk about such things.

In sum, we get global anti-representationalism with functional pluralism, thus metaphysical quietism without philosophical quietism. And that is what we wanted.

⁹ Sellars (1963b) thought that the puzzle of how we got into the normative dimension was ‘the last refuge of special creation’. He also thought that an expressive account of the function of normative vocabulary, which went naturally with pragmatism about norms, told us to look to the evolution of co operation for an answer.