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978-1-107-00984-4 - Expressivism, Pragmatism and Representationalism

Huw Price

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EXPRESSIVISM, PRAGMATISM AND REPRESENTATIONALISM

Pragmatists have traditionally been enemies of representationalism but friends of naturalism, when naturalism is understood to pertain to human subjects, in the sense of Hume and Nietzsche. In this volume Huw Price presents his distinctive version of this traditional combination, as delivered in his René Descartes Lectures at Tilburg University in 2008. Price contrasts his view with other contemporary forms of philosophical naturalism, comparing it with other pragmatist and neo-pragmatist views such as those of Robert Brandom and Simon Blackburn. Linking their different 'expressivist' programmes, Price argues for a radical *global* expressivism that combines key elements from both. With Paul Horwich and Michael Williams, Brandom and Blackburn respond to Price in new essays. Price replies in the closing essay, emphasising links between his views and those of Wilfrid Sellars. The volume will be of great interest to advanced students of philosophy of language and metaphysics.

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HUW PRICE

with

SIMON BLACKBURN

ROBERT BRANDOM

PAUL HORWICH

MICHAEL WILLIAMS



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For Ava and Aubrey Mungo

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Contributors

HUW PRICE is Bertrand Russell Professor of Philosophy and Fellow of Trinity College at the University of Cambridge. His publications include *Facts and the Function of Truth* (1988), *Time's Arrow and Archimedes' Point* (1996) and *Naturalism Without Mirrors* (2011). He is also co-editor (with Richard Corry) of *Causation, Physics, and the Constitution of Reality: Russell's Republic Revisited* (2007).

SIMON BLACKBURN is a Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, where he was Bertrand Russell Professor of Philosophy until 2011. He is a Distinguished Research Professor at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and Professor at the New College of the Humanities. His recent books include *How to Read Hume* (2008), *Practical Tortoise Raising* (2011) and *What Do we Know: The Big Questions of Philosophy* (2012).

ROBERT BRANDOM is Distinguished Professor of Philosophy at the University of Pittsburgh, and Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. His most recent books include *Between Saying and Doing: Towards an Analytic Pragmatism* (2008), *Reason in Philosophy: Animating Ideas* (2009) and *Perspectives on Pragmatism: Classical, Recent, and Contemporary* (2011).

PAUL HORWICH is Professor of Philosophy at New York University. His recent work includes *From a Deflationary Point of View* (2004), *Reflections on Meaning* (2005), *Truth-Meaning-Reality* (2010), and *Wittgenstein's Metaphilosophy* (2012).

MICHAEL WILLIAMS is a Krieger-Eisenhower Professor and Chair of the Department of Philosophy at Johns Hopkins University. He is the author of *Groundless Belief* (1977; 2nd edition 1999), *Unnatural Doubts* (1992; 2nd edition 1996) and *Problems of Knowledge* (2001).

Preface

The origins of this volume lie in a kind invitation from the Tilburg Center for Logic and Philosophy of Science (TiLPS), to deliver their inaugural René Descartes Lectures in May 2008. I was delighted to accept, and presented the lectures under the title ‘Three Themes in Contemporary Pragmatism’ (the themes in question being naturalism, representationalism and pluralism). The lecture series was held in conjunction with a research workshop on pragmatism and naturalism, providing me with a remarkable opportunity to discuss some of my recent work with the best kind of philosophical audience – broadly sympathetic to a considerable extent, yet challenging on many points. I am very grateful indeed to Professor Stephan Hartmann and his colleagues at TiLPS for their hospitality, and for doing me the honour of inviting me in the first place. I am also greatly indebted to the workshop speakers and participants, for their part in making it such a memorable and educational experience, from my point of view.

With the promise of such an excellent audience, I tried to use the lectures to do two things: first, to present what I felt to be the most interesting ideas in my recent work at that time, and, second, to try to think through some succeeding steps (very much work in progress, at that stage). Accordingly, I used the first lecture to present some material that was then recently in print, on the role and significance of representationalist presuppositions in conventional forms of philosophical naturalism.¹ In the second and third lectures, I went on to discuss my developing ideas about an alternative form of naturalism that rejects these presuppositions in their standard form.

Some of the latter ideas have since found their way into print in other places. One of the key themes of Lecture 2 involves an attempt to compare

¹ A substantial portion of the version that appears in this volume was originally published as ‘Naturalism Without Representationalism’, in David Macarthur and Mario de Caro, eds., *Naturalism in Question*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, pp. 71–88 (© 2004 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College), and is reprinted here by kind permission of the publisher.

Preface

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and combine the (seemingly distinct) ‘expressivist’ programmes of writers such as Simon Blackburn, on the one hand, and of Robert Brandom, on the other. I have since discussed that project at greater length in ‘Expressivism for Two Voices’ (Price 2011a), incorporating some material from the lecture printed here. Other portions of that lecture and the next made their way into the introduction to my recent collection *Naturalism Without Mirrors* (Price 2011b). But in preparing this volume I have tried to resist the temptation to update the lectures in the light of that later work, instead confining second thoughts to my new Postscript.

I am indebted to Stephan Hartmann not only for the initial invitation and his hospitality during the lectures but also for the proposal to try to turn them into a volume by inviting commentary essays, with which the lectures themselves would appear. Two of the commentators here, Paul Horwich and Michael Williams, were present at the original lecture series and workshop in Tilburg, while Simon Blackburn and Robert Brandom joined the project at a later stage. I am very grateful indeed to all four, and delighted to have the opportunity to respond to their essays in this volume. I am also much indebted to my editors at Cambridge University Press, Hilary Gaskin and Anna Lowe, for their encouragement, assistance and patience, through what – due to factors entirely on my side – turned out to be a much lengthier process than any of us had anticipated or intended.

The delay had a silver lining, in that it gave me an opportunity to present the lectures a second time (now under the title ‘Rethinking Representationalism’) as Nordic Pragmatism Lecturer in Helsinki in September 2011. I am grateful to Sami Pihlström, Henrik Rydenfelt and the Kotkasaari family for their kind hospitality on that occasion, and to the participants in an associated seminar series, which gave me an opportunity to discuss the four commentary essays in this volume. I had already had a similar opportunity in a graduate seminar at the University of Sydney earlier in 2011, in conjunction with a visit to the Pragmatic Foundations Project at the Centre for Time by Matthew Chrisman (to whom, as to other participants in that seminar, I am also greatly indebted).

Most recently, and another happy consequence of my own tardiness, a welcome incentive to discuss the relationship between my ‘global expressivism’ and the views of Wilfrid Sellars came from Jim O’Shea, of University College Dublin, in the form of an invitation to speak at his Sellars Centenary Conference in June 2012. I am conscious that my remarks on this subject in the Postscript are rather preliminary, but I am very grateful to have been given such a spur to begin to explore this fascinating topic (and indebted to Willem deVries for comments on an early version).

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Preface

The research on which this volume is based has been generously supported by an Australian Research Council Federation Fellowship, with associated funding from the University of Sydney; I am greatly indebted to both organisations. Among other things, this support made possible a series of conferences and workshops related to these themes, with many fascinating speakers and participants (including, at various stages, all four of my commentators in this volume). While I'm acutely aware of the impossibility of acknowledging all debts in such a rich field, and the inevitable arbitrariness involved in falling short, I would like to express my gratitude to the following partial list – participants in workshops, visitors, colleagues and former colleagues – from all of whom I have learned a great deal over the past few years: Robert Dunn, Patrick Greenough, Jenann Ismael, Robert Kraut, Anton Leist, Michael Lynch, David Macarthur, Paul Redding, Michael Ridge, Kevin Scharp, Lionel Shapiro and Amie Thomasson. I am also grateful to John Cusbert, for much invaluable and characteristically good-humoured editorial assistance.