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Pragmatism Without Idealism[*]

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Our goal is to examine three broadly pragmatist strategies which might be alleged to undermine realism by infecting it with unwanted subjectivism: one concerns "deflationist" views about properties, one concerns Carnap's pragmatism about ontology, and one concerns subjectivism about the notions of structure and structural similarity. In each case critics allege that the intrusion of pragmatic and/or subjective elements into our ways of thinking about the world have the unwanted result that the realists' cherished contrasts between subjective vs. objective, or what is real vs. what linguistic forms are pragmatically expedient, or what is discovered vs. what is projected, are undermined. We argue that these allegations are unfounded: the pragmatist strategies do not, in fact, threaten realism in the ways suggested.

We believe in the existence of an objective, mind-independent world—much of which is the way it is regardless of human interests, goals, cognitive/perceptual capacities, and research agendas. There would have been fossils, neutrinos, and curvatures in space-time even if no one had been around to theorize about them; Kepler's laws would have accurately modeled planetary motion even if no one had realized it. To this extent we are "realists." But we also believe that our concepts of *objectivity*, *mind-independence*, and cognate notions are shot through with interests,

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[*] The authors are united on some fronts but not others; a brief genealogy of the project is thus appropriate. RK is concerned with the costs, if any, incurred by expressivist semantic strategies; in this context he has explored the details of Carnap*--an expressivist about the discourse of ontology—and various deflationary views about reference and properties. KS is interested in pragmatist critiques of metaphysics; Sider offers arguments purporting to show that interest- and goal-relativity, if postulated to belong to the semantic content of various metaphysical notions (e.g., "structure" or "similarity" or "object") has the effect of spreading to other portions of the metaphysical picture, thereby infecting our worldview with a pernicious subjectivism and undermining realism. KS rejects these arguments. The authors share a commitment to anti-representationalism and to the view that certain forms of pragmatism are consistent with a thoroughgoing realism. Responsibility for robust deflationism about properties and Carnap* is RK's; responsibility for arguments against Sider's "infection" arguments is KS's. The expressivist strategies endorsed by RK are, for the most part, rejected by KS.

goals, and similarity standards grounded in provincial facts about ourselves. To this extent we are "pragmatists." Such a package, if not examined too closely, appears incoherent: varieties of pragmatism are often claimed to undermine the very objectivity insisted upon by self-avowed realists. But this appearance is illusory.

Our goal is to examine three broadly pragmatist strategies which might be alleged to undermine realism by infecting it with unwanted subjectivism: one concerns "deflationist" views about properties, one concerns Carnap's pragmatism about ontology, and one concerns subjectivism about the notions of structure and structural similarity. In each case critics allege that the intrusion of pragmatic and/or subjective elements into our ways of thinking about the world have the unwanted result that the realists' cherished contrasts between subjective vs. objective, or what is real vs. what linguistic forms are pragmatically expedient, or what is discovered vs. what is projected, are undermined. We argue that these allegations are unfounded: the pragmatist strategies do not, in fact, threaten realism in the ways suggested.

One cautionary note: we hold no brief (here) for the adoption of the pragmatist strategies we consider. Certain pragmatist-inspired "deflationisms" about truth, and about the relation between predicates and properties, might or might not be tenable; the Carnapian view about ontology might or might not be tenable; subjectivism about structure—a position adamantly rejected by Theodore Sider—might or might not be tenable. Our modest goal is to show that the costs incurred by certain pragmatist strategies are lower than might appear.

Achieving this goal is urgent in light of ongoing misunderstandings; here, for example, is a recent characterization of 'pragmatism' offered by Beebee, Effingham, and Goff:

> Pragmatism is a variety of global anti-realism….(Actually many pragmatists would describe themselves as realists; however we are working with a definition of anti-realism

> according to which the anti-realist holds that reality is not mind independent, and pragmatists subscribe, implicitly at least, to that thesis). [1]

This is a mistake. Although we do not doubt that definitions can be tailored to accommodate this position, it is simply confusion to regard pragmatists as implicitly committed to the view that "reality is not mind independent." This is the confusion we target in what follows. More specifically: we demonstrate that various noxious forms of idealism, creeping subjectivism and mind-dependence are no consequences of the pragmatist strategies considered.

I

A clear specification of *pragmatism* would be helpful, but difficult to provide: a wide variety of views tend to appear under the pragmatist rubric. Frequently it involves little more than homage paid to the work of James, Pierce, and Dewey. More robust versions stress doctrinal and/or methodological views about truth and reference, the primacy of institutional norms in any adequate picture of our place in the world, the possibility of epistemically privileged representation, the significance of justificatory holism, relations between ontology and social practice, and/or the folly of seeking to "ground" institutional practices in facts about confrontations with ontological realities which somehow "make normative demands" upon our practices.

Here is Peirce's formulation:

> Consider what effects, which might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object.[2]

Here is a formulation by Eric MacGilvray, a contemporary political theorist:

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1. Beebee et. al. (2011): 172-3.
2. Peirce (1878). Note that Peirce clearly distinguishes "our conception of the object" from "the object of our conception." His pragmatism is a theory about concepts, not a theory about the nature of the world around us. No hint of idealist metaphysics lurks here.

> The term "pragmatism" refers to a theory of meaning, justification, and inquiry that was developed in the United States in the late 19th century. At the heart of pragmatic thought is the pragmatic maxim: that "there is no distinction of meaning so fine as to consist in anything but a possible difference of practice." According to the pragmatic maxim, any meaningful belief commits us to a particular set of expectations regarding the likely consequences of a given course of action.[3]

Here are some hints by Richard Rorty:

> …justification is a matter of social practice, and…everything that is not a matter of social practice is no help in understanding the *justification* of human knowledge, no matter how helpful it might be in understanding its *acquisition*.[4]

> Conversational justification, so to speak, is naturally holistic, whereas the notion of justification embedded in the epistemological tradition is reductive and atomistic. …we understand knowledge when we understand the social justification of belief, and thus have no need to view it as accuracy of representation.[5]

Here is a statement by Simon Blackburn:

> You will be a pragmatist about an area of discourse if you pose a Carnapian external question: how does it come about that we go in for this kind of discourse and thought? What is the explanation of this bit of our language game? And then you offer an account of what we are up to in going in for this discourse, and the account eschews any use of the referring expressions of the discourse; …Instead the explanation proceeds by talking in different terms of what is *done* by so talking. It offers a revelatory genealogy or anthropology or even a just-so story about how this mode of talking and thinking and practicing might come about, given in terms of the functions it serves.[6]

And here is a helpful remark by Robert Brandom:

> An account of the conceptual might explain the *use* of concepts in terms of a prior understanding of conceptual *content*. Or it might pursue a complimentary explanatory strategy, beginning with a story about the practice or activity of applying concepts, and elaborating on that basis an understanding of conceptual content. The first can be called a *Platonist* strategy, and the second a *pragmatist* (in this usage, a species of functionalist) strategy. …The pragmatist direction of explanation…seeks to explain how the use of linguistic expressions, or the functional role of intentional states, confers conceptual content on them.[7]

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3. MacGilvray (forthcoming).
4. Rorty (1979): 186.
5. *ibid.*: 170.
6. Blackburn (2013): 75.
7. Brandom (2000): 4.

Yet other formulations portray pragmatism as a view about the status of intuitions: their right to be respected in philosophical argumentation, and the extent to which they are mere traces of socially-grounded language games we've learned to play.[8] Additional versions involve the relation between truth and warranted assertibility, the status of bivalence in referential semantics, the explanatory role (if any) of semantic notions such as *truth* and *reference*, and/or the bifurcation of language into descriptive and expressive components.[9] Still other formulations challenge the possibility that our best, most highly confirmed theories of the world might satisfy our theoretical and operational constraints yet nonetheless fail to accurately mirror reality; this challenge is often accompanied by skepticism about any robust property of *mirroring*, *correspondence, reference* or *intended interpretation* required to sustain the putative failure.[10]

It is not clear how these "pragmatisms" relate to one another, or what entailment relations hold among them. The form that especially interests us here is nicely articulated by Michael Williams:

> The heart of pragmatism is anti-representationalism. Anti-representationalism links contemporary pragmatists with James and Dewey…. [They] treat anti-representationalism as implying the rejection of the correspondence theory of truth in favor 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…On this instrumental view of truth, coping with problems replaces "corresponding to the facts" as the criterion of truth…
>
> By contrast, contemporary pragmatists are much more inclined to favor a deflationist 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) "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.

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8. See, e.g., Rorty (1982): xiii-xlvii.
9. Elaboration of these implementations of pragmatism is provided in Kraut (1990).
10. See, e.g., Putnam (1978); Putnam (1983).

Williams then provides an explicit linkage with expressivism:

> The basic expressivist thought is that although sentences involving certain vocabularies display the logical syntax of assertoric sentence—embedding in conditionals and so on—they remain *fundamentally non-descriptive*. Thus freestanding moral judgments *express evaluative attitudes*, and so are more intimately related to decision and action than to belief.[11]

Various forms of deflationism about truth are often conjoined with "deflationary" or "minimalist" accounts of the relation between predicates and properties. Not a surprise. Insofar as the goal is to free us from (alleged) illusions about language-world correspondences as the touchstone of truth, it is liberating to think that the meaning of predicates is simply a matter of their functional use in the language game, and involves no correspondence with entities (viz., properties) which somehow explains and/or legitimizes their use. According to *minimalism about properties* (as James Dreier formulates it)

> …the collected instances of the schema
>
> *x* has the property of being F iff *x* is F
>
> together embody all there is to know about properties. There is a property for each intelligible predicate, but no ontological commitment involved in accepting these minimal, deflated properties. Once we understand that 'wrong' and the like behave logically and grammatically as predicates, there is no further question of whether there is a property of being wrong.[12]

Thus minimalism about properties is a natural adjunct to deflationism about truth: it invokes a deflated notion of *property possession* ("There no more to having the property of redness than the humble fact that x is red"), and thus travels lighter ontologically.

Such minimalism appears, at first blush, to undermine our connectedness with a mind-independent reality, insofar as it severs vital language/world connections between

11. Williams (2013): 129.
12. Dreier (2004): 26.

meaningful predicates and real properties. The kind of pragmatism motivating property minimalism thus threatens to ramify into full-blown idealism.

And there is a further methodological cost. Various theorists place great store in the contrast between *those predicates which express properties and those which do not*. It is a commonplace in discussions of moral realism and noncognitivism, e.g., to urge that moral predicates, unlike predicates of natural science, fail to correspond to real properties. But the property minimalist cannot countenance such a contrast. If a predicate is meaningful, its applicability to an object exhausts the notion of its expressing a property; thus in the deflationist picture (according to Dreier) *every* meaningful predicate expresses a property.

Therefore the kind of pragmatism implemented in property minimalism has the result that a venerable semantic contrast—viz., that between predicates which play a vital role in genuine explanation and thus express properties (e.g., ‘x has mass 1.44 kg’) vs. those which play no vital role in explanation and thus do not express properties (e.g., ‘x is morally reprehensible’)—must be abandoned.

Dreier suggests that once we make the pragmatist-friendly move of “deflating” the notion of property possession to consist of no more than the phenomenon of correct linguistic usage, we are thereby forced to say that every meaningful predicate expresses a property—thereby eliminating the contrast between those predicates which express properties and those which do not. He dubs the problem “creeping minimalism.” As he puts it—with dramatic impact—“Minimalism [of this sort] sucks the substance out of heavy-duty metaphysical concepts [e.g.the concept *property possession*].”[13]

13. Dreier (2004): 26.

Creeping minimalism can be resisted, if sufficient care is taken in implementing the pragmatist sentiment that lies at the foundation of property minimalism. A thoroughgoing pragmatist, concerned with the actual shape of discursive practice not only in the marketplace but *also among working semantic theorists*, would likely inquire into the *role* played by such locutions as 'predicate P expresses a property, whereas predicate Q does not'. The pragmatist, after all, wishes to understand and accommodate the realities of actual discursive practice--even those which find place for talk of property possession and "ontologically loaded" contrasts among predicates. If we think of "Predicate P expresses a property" as itself an expressive device, which serves to manifest a commitment to the sense that P plays an essential role in explanations, creeping minimalism is halted.

Dreier tells us that "Minimalism sucks the substance out of heavy-duty metaphysical concepts." But this alleged result depends upon how we understand the substance of the "heavy-duty" concepts in the first place. There might be a theory of properties located between Dreier's "deflationist" version and the "heavy-duty" version: an intermediate between the minimalist notion and a more robust notion. Such middle ground might be consistent with metaphysical realism while conforming to various neo-pragmatist scruples. One such theory might be dubbed "robust deflationism about properties" (RDP).[14]

Here is the recipe for developing RDP: begin by noting that some predicates are projectible (like 'blue' but unlike 'grue') whereas others are not; that some predicates figure into natural laws and others do not; that some sets exhibit a nomological unity

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14. The theory of properties broached here is a variant of the semantics of 'truth' talk suggested in Kraut (1993).

whereas others are simply gerrymandered collections. "Realist" theories of properties are customarily invoked to explain such phenomena: it is alleged that projectible predicates are such by virtue of expressing real properties, that laws of nature (as opposed to mere universal generalizations) are about properties and magnitudes, and that members of "natural kinds" (as opposed to arbitrary, gerrymandered collections) share properties.[15] When invoked in this setting, properties purport to play a certain explanatory role.

But we might doubt that such appeals to properties do genuine explanatory work; rather, the appeals to properties merely provide colorful description in lofty metaphysical terms—with little advance in understanding—of the phenomena in question (projectibility, nomologicality, underlying unity among predicate extensions). David Pears describes universals as "shadows cast by words;"[16] Blackburn speaks of properties as "the semantic shadows of predicates."[17] This recurring imagery should be taken seriously: it conveys a crucial point about *order of explanation*. Shadows are *dependent* entities: they depend for their existence upon the physics of light propagation and opaque objects. Nevertheless, shadows are real.

Properties are like that: dependent entities, the existence and behavior of which depend upon the semantics of predicates, but nonetheless real. This is the core insight of RDP, which insists that some—but not all—predicates cast such metaphysical shadows: those predicates, for example, that play essential roles in explanatory projects. Should it emerge that certain predicates—e.g., moral predicates—are no essential ingredients in explanations of human practice, RDP denies that such predicates express properties.[18]

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15. Such tactics are pursued in canonical form in Armstrong (1978).
16. Pears (1951): 220.
17. See Blackburn (1993): 8.
18. See, for example, Harman (1977); Harman (1986); Harman and Thomson (1996).

On this approach, only those predicates which we regard as *indispensable in our explanatory endeavors* would be said to express properties. RDP thereby avoids the result that every meaningful predicate expresses a property; but it also avoids the view that properties provide explanations and/or justifications of linguistic practice. This blocks the spread of creeping minimalism.

As with other claims in systematic metaphysics and semantic theory, the devil is in the details: it must be shown that RDP accommodates ordinary discourse about properties, and that it provides resources for an adequate semantic account of predicate expressions.[19] Should these tasks be tractable, RDP allows a certain kind of pragmatist to acquiesce in a metaphysics of properties without thereby countenancing any superlative entities on which the *legitimacy* of ordinary practice depends. For according to RDP, properties codify aspects of the semantic roles played by predicates within our discursive practices, and thus depict the demands we place upon ourselves. Upshot: a suitably modified property minimalism, conjoined with an expressivist account of *what we are doing* when we contrast predicates which express properties with those which don't, accommodates the distinction (admittedly in deflated form) between predicates that express properties and those that do not. Pragmatism without Idealism.

II

One way to understand the Carnap of *The Logical Syntax of Language* and "Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology" is *eliminative*. Weary of centuries-old, incessant disputes about the objective existence of various kinds of entities, and propelled by his

19. Development and defense of this approach to properties is undertaken in Kraut (2010).

radical empiricism, Carnap offered a bold suggestion about what we *ought* to be doing instead of wasting time on cognitively vacuous ontological disputes. He says, e.g.,

> An alleged statement of the reality of the system of entities is a pseudo-statement without cognitive content. To be sure, we have to face at this point an important question; but it is a practical, not a theoretical question; it is the question of whether or not to accept the new linguistic forms.[20]

Such passages recommend--on one reading--the elimination of metaphysical discourse, and its replacement by considerations about the practical consequences of adopting various linguistic resources. The motive behind such replacement is that the ontologist's concept of "objective existence" is not sufficiently well-defined; we should thus stop arguing about the existence of various kinds of entities and instead explore the consequences of adopting one or another "linguistic framework." Carnap denies that there *is* such a fact as the objective existence (or nonexistence) of a kind of entity--a fact that would legitimize adoption of one linguistic framework rather than another. Ask not whether numbers enjoy objective reality; this is a pseudo-question. Ask instead about the practical consequences of adopting or abandoning first-order number theory.

This recommendation--that we abandon ontological discourse and adopt pragmatic discourse in its place--is radical. Most of us are prone to ask not only which linguistic forms ought to be adopted--given our practical and theoretical goals--but *what there is*. We countenance a distinction between practical and ontological inquiries. But Carnap--on this reading--challenges the very intelligibility of the ontological inquiry: What would it *be*, he asks, for there to be entities of a given sort?

Thus construed, Carnap advocates departure from current practice, seeking to purge ontological inquiries from our repertoire. But the price is high: after the proposed

20. Carnap (1967): 214.

purge we are left with an impoverishment that frustrates the Ontologist in us all. So much the worse, perhaps, for that Ontologist; or, more likely, so much the worse for Carnap's eliminative proposal.

Enter a second, non-eliminative Carnap: one seeking to preserve ontological discourse by proposing a *meaning analysis* or *reductive account of truth conditions.* Thus construed, Carnap's claim is that ontological questions are translatable, with minimal loss of meaning, into pragmatic questions about the advisability of adopting certain linguistic frameworks ("quasi-syntactic questions misleadingly formulated in the material mode of speech"). Translation, not elimination, is the task at hand. Here are some remarks that place him within this camp:

> To accept the thing world means nothing more than to accept a certain form of language...[21]
>
> We may still speak...of "the acceptance of the new entities" since this form of speech is customary; but...this phrase does not mean for us anything more than acceptance of the new framework, i.e., of the new linguistic forms. [22]

On this view, ontological discourse is relatively harmless--when properly understood--and explicable ("translatable") without loss of fact-stating power. Thus

> (1) Numbers and functions exist.

is claimed equivalent to

> (2) Given our goals, it is advisable to accept the frameworks of Peano arithmetic and real analysis.

The problem here is that no interesting equivalence holds between (1) and (2): pending arguments to the contrary, existence is one thing and pragmatically motivated acceptance of a linguistic framework quite another. (1) is a claim about the constitution of reality;

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21. *ibid.*, 208.
22. *ibid.*, 214.

(2) is a claim about how we ought to speak. To challenge this contrast is so *obviously* to challenge the very idea of an objective, mind-independent world that, pending further argumentation, there is little reason to suppose that this was Carnap's suggestion. Perhaps some forms of pragmatism do, after all, foster a departure from realism; but any pragmatism that rests upon a heavy-handed, stipulated and implausible *ex cathedra* translational paraphrase is one we deem unworthy of consideration.

Yet a third interpretation of Carnap's suggestion is this: ontological discourse--talk about the kinds of entities that exist and the kinds of objective facts that obtain--packs a unique kind of expressive power: not to state facts or describe the world, but to do something else.

Enter a third Carnap: a descendent of Hume, an ally of the emotivists, advocating an irrealist or "nondescriptivist" account of ontological discourse. He claims that ontological discourse is not in the business of stating facts: it serves some other purpose. Its function is to manifest, or render explicit, commitments to the adoption of certain discursive resources. Such adoption, in turn, is grounded in pragmatic considerations.

This Carnap neither eliminates nor reduces: he celebrates ontological discourse as a useful mechanism, an instrument that serves to articulate commitments to certain linguistic frameworks. This Carnap does for metaphysics what Ayer and other emotivists do for morality, what Hume does for causation, and what Kripke's Wittgenstein does for the language of rule-following: provide a non-reductive explanation that seeks to legitimize a region of discourse by portraying it as a non-descriptive mechanism for formulating commitments, expressing attitudes, or achieving some other non-fact-stating task.[23]

Thus construed, Carnap's theory of ontology parallels noncognitivist theories of morality. Recall that such theories aim to neither eliminate nor discredit moral evaluative practice, but rather to portray it as legitimate in light of possible metaphysical and/or epistemological misgivings. Carnap's theory of ontology is best understood analogously: ontological discourse—discourse about what sorts of entities exist—is a device that enables explicit expression of pragmatically motivated commitments to the adoption of certain linguistic forms. It is, in current parlance, an *expressivist* theory.[24] This strategy enables Carnap to reconcile the practice of ontology with empiricist requirements.

This "irrealist" Carnap is partly contrived; but there is some historical basis. Noncognitivist explanations of moral discourse were part of Carnap's intellectual climate; and the kind of metaphysical discourse that constitutes the bulk of Heidegger's *Was ist Metaphysik*? is construed by Carnap as expressive. He says

> The (pseudo)statements of metaphysics do not serve for the description of states of affairs....They serve for the expression of the general attitude of a person toward life.[25]

Here we find Carnap's expressivism made explicit.

On the present interpretation, Carnap seeks neither elimination nor reduction of ontological discourse: he wishes to explain it--while preserving its integrity--within the larger context of human commitment, as a mechanism that functions to achieve certain

23. see, e.g., Schroeder (2010); Kripke (1982).
24. Expressivism is one species of noncognitivism. Helpful terminological clarifications, and contrasts between expressivism and other varieties of noncognitivism, are provided in Schroeder (2010): Chs. 2 and 4.
25. Carnap (1959): 78.

non-descriptive ends. Historical accuracy aside, this irrealist Carnap deserves serious consideration. Call him ‘Carnap*’.

III

Carnap* believes—or says he believes—that there would have been fossils, neutrinos, and curvatures in space-time even if no one had been around to theorize about them. To this extent he is a “realist.” It is not clear, however, how this stance is consistent with his views about the function of ontological discourse. He seems to collapse the contrast between what there is and what linguistic mechanisms it is advisable to adopt, thereby infecting the world with unwanted subjectivity. His critic claims that Carnap*’s alleged realism is a sham.

His critic is confused. The collapse is illusory. Carnap*’s theory does *not* portray ontological claims as equivalent to claims about the advisability of adopting certain linguistic resources (no more than emotivism portrays moral claims as equivalent to claims about sentiments). The theory maintains the contrast between what there is and what linguistic forms it is advisable to adopt; it does this by sustaining a distinction between the *expression of a commitment* from the *assertion that such a commitment is pragmatically advisable*.

To see this more clearly, consider a hotly contested ontological claim: "Properties exist." Carnap* portrays the claim as manifesting a commitment to adopting specific linguistic forms: in this case, resources containing abstract noun phrases and higher-order quantification. But the ontological claim is not *about* such commitment.

This vital contrast can be sharpened with an analogy. I might offer either of these utterances to Lisa:

(3) I promise to meet you at Brenen's tomorrow at noon.

(4) It is advisable, all things considered, that I meet you at Brenen's tomorrow at noon.

These utterances are neither semantically nor pragmatically equivalent. (3) performs the action of undertaking a commitment: incurring certain obligations, and licensing certain expectations on Lisa's part; (4) does none of those things: it rather describes the situation as one in which I am better off meeting Lisa than not meeting her. This contrast precisely mirrors, according to Carnap*, the contrast between claiming *that properties exist* and claiming *that it is advisable to adopt a language that permits higher-order quantification*: the former *expresses* a commitment, whereas the latter *describes* the world as making such a commitment advisable.

Such a contrast is obvious in connection with performative linguistic acts. It is the actual undertaking of commitments, not judgments about the pragmatic utility of doing so, foregrounded in Carnap*'s theory. His conjecture is that there is, within our customary repertoire, an expressive mechanism that serves to render explicit certain discursive commitments we have actually adopted. That mechanism is the discourse of ontology.

The existence of properties is not, after all, equivalent to the pragmatic advisability of adopting higher-order quantification; to this extent Carnap*'s theory is consistent with customary realist ontology. Therefore the feared subjectivity does not, on Carnap*'s approach, contaminate the content of talk about the world.

But the problem runs deeper: there is nagging suspicion that Carnap*s strategy somehow undermines the mind-independence of an objective world, insofar as *existence* is inextricably linked to pragmatically grounded commitments. His theory appears to spawn a subjectivist infection, a pernicious mind-dependence that contaminates everything around us. A subjectivist epidemic looms.

Not so. The feared epidemic is illusory. It is vital to see why.

The alleged problem is that an expressivist semantics for ontological discourse somehow entails that all items claimed to exist are mind-dependent. If ontological claims are indeed expressions of attitudes, it is unclear clear how such a subjectivist consequence can be avoided.

An analogous objection is frequently raised against noncognitivist theories of moral discourse, and it is instructive to review it here. If the role of moral idioms is to manifest sentiments, then—the argument goes—morality itself is dependent upon sentiment. But then—the argument continues—so much the worse for expressivism, because the view from within moral practice does not countenance the dependence of morality upon sentiment. Immoral acts would be immoral even if everyone approved of them. Moreover: even if the relevant moral attitudes are contingent upon various factors, it is no consequence that moral properties are themselves contingent upon those factors. So in the sphere of moral theory, prevalent intuitions about the objectivity of morality are claimed to be violated by varieties of moral expressivism. The expressivist—it is alleged—is committed to the mind- and sentiment-dependence of morality.

Simon Blackburn suggests a strategy that enables the expressivist to circumvent such unwelcome "subjectivist" results:

> The utterance "whatever I or we or anyone else ever thought about it, there would still have been (causes, counterfactual truths, numbers, duties)" can be endorsed even if we accept the projective picture, and work in terms of an explanation of the sayings which gives them a subjective source.[26]

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26. Blackburn (1984): 19.

To see what Blackburn is up to, consider

> (5) If everyone—myself included—had positive sentiments toward burning down orphanages, then burning down orphanages would be morally acceptable.

Expressivism does not validate (5): it does not underwrite the truth of conditionals that claim dependence of morality upon sentiment. Whatever the sentiments, burning down orphanages is morally unacceptable: in offering this latter verdict, the expressivist sees himself—when turning self-reflective—as manifesting negative sentiments toward burning down orphanages.

In other words: a carefully implemented expressivism purports to accommodate the possibility of an act's being morally wrong *independent* of moral sentiment. The intuited gap between moral value and moral sentiment is explained as itself a manifestation of sentiment—a disapproval of certain relations among values and sentiments.

Blackburn's recommended procedure for avoiding the dependence of morality upon sentiment is tied to his more general semantic strategy of treating conditionals with normative antecedents and consequents as expressing "higher order attitudes": attitudes about the cotenability of attitudes. Unfortunately, his strategy has attracted considerable criticism (as Schroeder describes it, "[The] 'higher-order attitudes' accounts are plagued with fatal problems...."[27]). But there are available alternatives, as we shall see below.

The analogy with expressivist accounts of moral commitment is instructive; fortunately, Carnap* requires none of the "higher order attitude" machinery deployed by Blackburn, nor does his expressivism carry a commitment to Idealism: his theory does not entail the mind-dependence of existence. Consider

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27. Schroeder (2008): 9-10: fn. 3; see also van Roojen (1996).

> (6) If no one were committed to the explanatory ineliminability of discourse about microparticles, then microparticles would not exist.

If (6) were validated by Carnap*'s expressivist semantics for ontological discourse, the result would be the dependence of microparticles upon explanatory agendas. And that, according to the realist, would be a reductio on Carnap*s strategy. But Carnap*'s expressivist semantics does not underwrite the truth of (6); to see this, note that a standard semantics for counterfactuals might dictate the following intuitive procedure for assessing the truth of (6):

> Go to the closest worlds in which people have different explanatory commitments than those commonly undertaken in the actual world—including commitments to the explanatory ineliminability of the linguistic framework of microphysics. Look at those worlds. You will see that in each of them, there are microparticles; never mind what the denizens of that world think about which linguistic frameworks are or are not explanatorily ineliminable. Each such world contains protons, neutrons, electrons, and all the other items we take to be constitutive of physical reality.

Perhaps we judge denizens of those worlds to be misguided in their linguistic commitments; but the non-mind-dependent entities that exist in those worlds do not depend upon the commitments of local inhabitants. During reflective moments, we regard our ontological judgments about such situations as expressions of our own metalinguistic commitments. But that does not validate (6). What we would say were we denizens of one of the worlds to which the antecedent of (6) directs attention is irrelevant. We assess these counterfactual situations from our own perspective, not from that of denizens of other worlds.

An overzealous critic might point out that the similarity metric defined over the space of possible worlds relevant to semantic evaluation of (6) and its kin might—depending upon one's understanding of similarity and closeness among worlds—rest upon interests and subjective standards: that is, the pragmatist might regard distance relations among worlds as interest-relative. If so, then judgments of similarity among worlds turn on subjective standards. Therefore, subjective standards of similarity enter into the truth conditions for counterfactuals like (6)—the falsity of which purports to capture the content of claims about microparticles being mind-independent. Idealism threatens.

In reply, we point out that the Lewis-style semantics for counterfactuals is just an example to illustrate how exactly the critic's argument breaks down. There's no reason to think that a pragmatist would have to accept it. Only insofar as Lewis's analysis captures our intuitions about counterfactuals does it serve our purposes. Moreover, the interest-relativity of similarity in Lewis's semantics for counterfactuals is a well-known problem that has nothing to do with pragmatism. In defense of it, Lewis himself writes, "The truth conditions for counterfactuals are fixed only within rough limits; like the relative importances of respects of comparison that underlie the comparative similarity of worlds, they are a highly volatile matter, varying with every shift of context and interest." Far from imposing some pernicious vagueness into counterfactuals, interest-relative assessments of similarity are the perfect tool for analyzing them. "It often happens that two vague concepts are vague in a coordinated way," writes Lewis. Such concepts, "sway together rather than independently."[28] For Lewis, counterfactuals and interest-infused similarity are just such a pair. Therefore, regardless of one's assessment of Lewis on counterfactuals, our use of it to illustrate the pragmatist reply to charges of idealism is above reproach.

To sum up: Carnap* denies that the semantic dependency of ontological claims upon explanatory commitments infects the content of such claims with contingency. His expressivism does *not* validate

28. All quotes from Lewis (1973): 92.

> (7) If everyone deemed it inadvisable to adopt the language of number theory, there would be no numbers.

Rather, his account validates

> (7') If everyone deemed it inadvisable to adopt the language of number theory, they would deny the existence of numbers.

(7') is consistent with realism about numbers.

Upshot: Carnap*'s pragmatist expressivism about ontological discourse generates no spreading subjectivist infection. Pragmatism without Idealism. [29]

IV

A pattern emerges when one considers objections to property minimalism and/or expressivism about ontology which purport to reveal idealist consequences. The critic alleges that a pragmatist treatment of certain key locutions somehow ramifies and infects all talk about reality. Theodore Sider operates within a quite different framework, but reaches similar conclusions. His objection is framed by an elegant theory of what it is for a discourse to be *substantive*; this, in turn, rests upon his elaborate account of metaphysical fundamentality (Sider usually uses the term 'structure' instead of 'fundamentality'). Within Sider's framework one can provide a detailed argument to the conclusion that pragmatist treatment of discourse about objectivity ramifies in a vicious way—a way that, according to Sider, undermines his preferred realism. But Sider's arguments are not sound. Thus, the fear-of-idealism critique—at least, in

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29. More extensive motivation of Carnap*'s strategy and its ramifications can be found in Kraut (forthcoming).

the form provided by Sider—fails. But insofar as Sider's framework accounts well for metaphysical intuitions about substantivity, we learn something important about criticisms of pragmatism in general from the fate of Sider's argument.

The major goal of Sider's recent project is to generalize the concept of *naturalness* so that it applies not only to properties. In current philosophical climate, when metaphysicians use the word 'natural' they usually mean what David Lewis meant by it: the natural properties are the ones relevant to deciding which things are similar or dissimilar, and they provide something like a minimal supervenience base for all abundant properties.[30] In generalizing the concept of naturalness, one of Sider's main targets is the existential quantifier; but he also addresses truth functions (e.g., conjunction) and operators (e.g., necessity). He calls his new concept *structure*.

For Sider, 'structure' is synonymous with 'fundamental' and 'joint carving'; therefore, structural truths are just fundamental truths or truths that "carve nature at its joints"—i.e., truths such that it is not the case that they hold in virtue of other truths. For Sider, to be a metaphysical realist about something is to take it to be structural, and to say that a certain metaphysical dispute is *merely verbal* is to deny that the structure of reality is at issue in the dispute. Indeed, Sider claims that metaphysics *just is* the study of structure.

A central part of Sider's project is his theory of substantivity. This theory aims to make sense of the distinction between disputes that are shallow, nonobjective, conventional, or terminological on the one hand, as opposed to those that are deep, objective, nonconventional, or about the world on the other (these are Sider's terms).[31] 'Substantivity' may be predicated of disputes, questions, sentences, and perhaps other things; in what follows we focus on sentences.

According to Sider:

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[30] Lewis (1986) and Dorr and Hawthorne (2014) for discussion.
[31] Sider (2012): 52.

(Substantive) a sentence s is *substantive* iff for every expression e in s, one of e's semantic candidates is more structural than the others, or s has the same truth value on each of e's semantic candidates.

(Nonsubstantive) a sentence s is *nonsubstantive* iff for some expression e occurring in s, the semantic candidates for e are such that for one of e's semantic candidates s is true and for another of e's candidates, s is not true, and all of e's semantic candidates are equally structural.

The semantic candidates for an expression are, roughly, the meanings it might have had. On this topic, Sider writes, "if a linguistic community, roughly in our circumstances, could have use E to mean m without seeming "semantically alien"—could have used E to reach "the same semantic goal" as we use E to reach, albeit perhaps by a different route—then m is a candidate for E."[32] Semantic candidates are meanings that an expression could have had without changing the proper use of the expression too much.

The terms 'objective' and 'subjective' have a long history and there are many definitions of them in contemporary analytic philosophy; Sider's account of substantivity purports to capture at least one sense of objectivity, whereas his account of nonsubstantivity is supposed to capture at least one sense of subjectivity.[33] Evidence for these claims is that Sider catalogues several kinds of subjectivity—i.e., several ways a sentence can be nonsubstantive. The following two are most prominent:

(Conventionality) A linguistic expression is *conventional* iff it has multiple candidate meanings that are equally structural and each would serve the semantic goal of the expression equally well.

(Projectivism) A predicate F is *projective* iff by uttering 'x is F', a speaker, S, communicates the proposition that x is P, where the property being P is a certain physical property that is the linguistic meaning of the predicate 'is F' in S's language and being P is the linguistic meaning of 'is F' because members of S's linguistic community bear a particular attitude toward Ps.

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[32] Sider (2012): 50.
[33] Dummett (1978), Wright (1992), and Fine (2001). See also Daston and Galison (2010).

An example of a conventional expression is ‘meter’—a slight change in the definition of ‘meter’ would be equally structural and serve our purposes just as well as the current meter. Sider’s example of a projective predicate is ‘is beautiful’, but he says that he is not committed to this being a good example. The important point is that a projective sentence contains an expression that has a range of equally joint carving candidates, the sentence’s truth value depends on which candidate is the meaning of the expression, and the choice of meaning is not arbitrary but reflects something important about us—i.e., our attitudes, interests, or biological dispositions.

Sider’s main argument in favor of realism about structure is that the alternative, subjectivism about structure, is untenable, as he explains in the following passage.

> Speaking just for myself, [subjectivism about structure] is incredible. It is really, really hard to believe that the fact that electrons go together, in a way that electrons-or-cows do not, is merely a reflection of something about us.
>
> But this is autobiography, not argument. The argument here, such as it is, is that any subjectivity in the notion of structure would infect all the domains in which structure is applied. If structure is just a refection of our language (or whatever) then so are the facts about similarity, intrinsicality, laws of nature, the intrinsic structure of space and time… And this is incredible.[34]

Given the explanatory centrality of structure in the conceptual scheme Sider advocates, subjectivism about structure would be a Bad Thing.

What is essentially the same argument occurs when Sider spells out the “incredible” consequences mentioned above in more detail:

> We have uncovered a web of connections between structure and various notions. This web of connections yields the primary argument against Goodman’s claim that structure is merely the projection of our interests or biology: subjectivism about structure leads to subjectivism about the other notions in the web.[35]

So far this is just the “infection” argument restated, but Sider continues:

> [T]he most significant fallout from Goodmania [i.e., subjectivism about structure], to my mind, arises from structure’s connections with epistemic value and with objectivity.
>
> Epistemic value: joint-carving languages and beliefs are better. If structure is

[34] Sider (2012): 23.
[35] Sider (2012): 77.

> subjective, so is this betterness. This would be a disaster. … If there is no sense in which the physical truths are objectively better than the scrambled truths, beyond the fact that they are propositions that we have happened to have expressed, then the postmodernist forces of darkness have won.
>
> Objectivity: whether questions are substantive, nonconventional, objective, and so on, depends on whether they are phrased in terms that carve at the joints. Given subjectivism about structure, we would have subjectivism about substantivity, depth, conventionality, objectivity. No discourses would be objectively objective. Another disaster.[36]

Presumably Sider thinks the postmodern forces of darkness are subjectivists about the comparative value of physical truths over scrambled truths ("scrambled truths" are those that result from some permutation of the terms involved in the physical truths). Sider's own example begins with 'every pig is an animal': he then permutes the interpretation of 'pig' so it is assigned the set of hard boiled eggs as its extension, and permutes the interpretation of 'is an animal' so that it is assigned the set of eggs.[37] The permutation makes the sentence 'every pig is an animal' true iff every hard-boiled egg is an egg. However, we fail to see why the scrambled truth (i.e., 'every hardboiled egg is an egg') is somehow not as valuable as the physical truth (i.e., 'every pig is an animal'). In fact, they are each physical truths in the sense that they are each about the physical world.

Perhaps Sider is thinking about the utility of truths like 'all emeralds are green' as compared with that of truths like 'all emeralds are grue', (something is *grue* iff it is green and observed before 3000CE or it is blue and not observed before 3000CE): granted, we seem to care more about the former than the latter. But, pace Sider, it is not clear why the betterness of the former would have to be objective in order to prevent disaster. Consider: many people believe that it is better to help an elderly person across an icy street than to punch a child in the face; but it is hardly clear that such people regard this betterness as an "objective" matter (insofar as they

[36] Sider (2012): 77.

[37] Sider's text is something of a scavenger hunt here. The passage quoted refers to section 2.6 which defends the epistemic value of physical truths over scrambled truths and refers to section 3.2 for a discussion of scrambled truths; it is section 3.2 where we get the permutation example.

think about objective/subjective contrasts). And—here is the key point—they do not regard this fact is somehow undermining morality.

In addition to Sider's claim that subjectivism about structure infects the concepts of epistemic value and objectivity, a third example occurs in Sider's discussion of whether structure is itself structural (i.e., whether being a joint carving notion carves nature at its joints). He mentions a view he calls Melianism (named after a position described by but not necessarily advocated by Jose Melia in conversation): according to this view, naturalness itself is not natural. Instead, naturalness is defined as a disjunction of the natural properties. For example, one might hold that for x to be natural is for x to be a property invoked by the standard model of particle physics, or a property invoked by the standard model of cosmology, or a mathematical property, or a logical property; there is nothing more to being natural than being on this list. Sider's main objection to the analog of Melianism for structure is the following:

> "Objection: Melianism diminishes the significance of duplication, intrinsicality, lawhood, and other notions defined in terms of naturalness." Here we approach a more telling objection. Since Melian naturalness is highly disjunctive, so will be the defined notions. So although the Melian agrees with Lewis on the first-order questions—on which objects are duplicates of which, which properties are intrinsic, what the laws are, and so on—he must regard Lewis's focus on these first-order questions—questions of duplication, intrinsicality, law, and so forth—as being arbitrary, because based on highly disjunctive notions. This is a strange predicament. The Melian is trying to achieve Lewis's aims on the cheap, but his theory implies that these aims are metaphysically arbitrary and not particularly worth pursuing.

This passage suggests a worry that is exactly analogous to that voiced by the infection arguments presented above. In particular, if structure itself is not structural, then it might very well have several equally structural semantic candidates: some of these treat the claim "'black hole' is structural" as true, whereas others treat it as false. In that case, claims about structure are nonsubstantive. Likewise, because duplication, intrinsicality, and all the rest of these Lewis-inspired metaphysical notions are defined in terms of structure, claims about them turn out to be nonsubstantive as well. This metaphysical infection argument threatens any of the terms defined in terms of structure that Sider places at the center of his conception of metaphysics.

Subjectivists about structure might bite the bullet and embrace the idea that all our metaphysical notions are so subjective that any metaphysical disputes conducted with them are nonsubstantive. Philosophers like Huw Price and his recent defense of global quasi-realism come to mind.[38] However, this extreme position is not needed by the subjectivist about structure because the infection argument fails, even according to a theory of subjectivity that Sider ought to find plausible: his own.

V

Below is the outline of each infection argument where 'X' is a placeholder for the particular term on which each infection argument focuses:

1. X is not subjective. [assumption]
2. X is defined in terms of structure. [assumption]
3. If structure is subjective, then anything defined in terms of structure is subjective. [assumption]
4. Therefore, structure is not subjective. [1-3]

Sider has rather weak arguments for premise 1 in the case of epistemic betterness, objectivity, similiarity, duplication, intrinsicness, and laws. These arguments are of the form: we value X and if X turns out to be subjective, then we would no longer value it. It is, in general, an unconvincing argument (it is a version of the wishful thinking fallacy). Consider the likely response to someone who argues against special relativity by saying: simultaneity cannot be subjective because we value simultaneity and if simultaneity turned out to be subjective, then we

[38] Price (2011).

would no longer value it. It is hard to think of compelling instances of this argument form; for the present we set this issue aside, and will return to it later.

To evaluate his infection arguments, we need to clarify Sider's use of the expression 'subjective'. He writes as if the substantive/nonsubstantive distinction is intended to explicate the objective/subjective distinction. But according to Sider's own theory of substantivity, substantivity does not attach to concepts or linguistic expressions. Instead, it is sentences or questions or disputes that are substantive or nonsubstantive, and there is no reason to think that every sentence containing a particular expression has the same substantivity status (i.e., that they are all substantive or they are all nonsubstantive). Even dramatically nonstructural terms like 'grue' might show up in substantive sentences—e.g., 'all grue things are grue' is substantive because all the candidates for 'grue' count it as true. And even perfectly structural terms like 'set' can occur in nonsubstantive sentences—e.g., 'the Hooker Emerald is a member of the set of grue things' is nonsubstantive because the candidates for 'grue' are equally structural and some count it as true and others count it as false. Therefore, the first result is that, on Sider's view, nonsubstantiality about some particular concept or linguistic expression is incoherent, or at best trivially false. As Sider takes great pains to emphasize, "Substantivity, or lack thereof, is not intrinsic to semantic values."[39]

The upshot for the infection arguments is profound. If we read 'X is subjective' as 'sentences containing X are nonsubstantive' and read 'X is not subjective' as 'sentences containing X are substantive', then we can asses the infection arguments in light of Sider's theory of substantivity. And the results are not good for Sider: premise 1 and the conclusion are obviously false. So it appears at the outset that the infection arguments are all trivially unsound--at least, if by 'X is subjective' Sider means *claims about X are nonsubstantive*.

[39] Sider (2012): 60.

Instead of construing Sider's notion of subjectivity in terms of nonsubstantivity, we might try a different interpretation. Sider sometimes writes as if subjectivity is a particular sort of nonsubstantivity. Consider the following passage:

> A sentence is subjective, then, in the sense illustrated by the projectivist semantics, if and only if its truth-value depends on which of a range of equally joint-carving candidates is meant by some term in the sentence, where the candidate that we in fact mean was selected in a way that is not arbitrary, but rather, reflects something important about us, such as our values.[40]

The projectivist semantics he mentions in this passage was explained above in section II. According to this account of subjectivity, a sentence s is *subjective* iff:

(i) s contains an expression e that has several equally structural semantic candidates,
(ii) one of e's equally structural candidates counts s true,
(iii) one of e's equally structural candidates counts s false, and
(iv) e's meaning in the language in question is determined by some important feature of those who speak that language.

Notice that conditions (i), (ii) and (iii) are exactly the conditions under which a sentence is nonsubstantive. Thus, according to Sider in this passage, a sentence is subjective iff it is nonsubstantive and the expression that makes it nonsubstantive has a meaning that reflects some important feature of those who use it.

Unfortunately, the problem that arose in connection with the first interpretation of the infection argument (in terms of substantivity) applies equally to this interpretation. Namely, subjectivity is a feature of sentences and there is no reason to think that all the sentences in which a given expression occurs will be all subjective or all nonsubjective. In particular, we can treat 'X is subjective' in the infection arguments as 'sentences containing X are subjective' and 'X is not subjective' as 'sentences containing X are not subjective'. But the same examples from the first interpretation show that it is not the case that all sentences containing even perfectly structural expressions will be nonsubjective, and it is not the case that all sentences containing

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[40] Sider (2012): 70.

highly nonstructural expressions will be subjective. For example, 'all beautiful things are beautiful' is not subjective because it is substantive, even though 'Goya's painting, *Saturn Devouring his Son*, is beautiful' is subjective. Therefore, on this theory of subjectivity, the first premise and the conclusion of the infection arguments are trivially false. As such, the arguments are trivially unsound—at least, if by 'X is subjective' Sider means *sentences containing X are subjective*.

Are there other interpretations to explore? Recall that Sider proposes the projective metasemantics for 'is beautiful' in his discussion of nonsubstantivity: a predicate F is projective iff by uttering 'x is F', a speaker, S, communicates the proposition that x is P, where the property being P is a certain physical property that is the linguistic meaning of the predicate 'is F' in S's language and being P is the linguistic meaning of 'is F' because members of S's linguistic community bear a particular attitude toward Ps. Perhaps when Sider says 'X is subjective' he means that the projective metasemantics is appropriate for X. In what follows, we will say that X is *projective* to distinguish this interpretation from the previous one. Do the infection arguments fare any better on this latter interpretation? Yes, they do. The first premise and the conclusion are no longer trivially false, which is a big improvement. However, the third premise (i.e., if structure is projective, then anything defined in terms of structure is projective) is false on this interpretation.

To see why, let us return to Sider's example of a projective expression, 'is beautiful'. This expression is projective because its content—i.e., the physical property all beautiful things have in common, and by virtue of which they are beautiful—is conferred on it by the attitudes its users bear toward these things. Now let us define a new expression in terms of 'beautiful': let 'is an adonis' be defined as *is a beautiful young man*. Thus 'X is an adonis' is translatable, without loss of meaning, into 'X is a beautiful young man.' If Sider is right, then 'adonis' should be projective as well. However, there is no reason to think that it is. In fact, the content of 'adonis', which is the conjunction of whatever physical property all beautiful things have with the physical property of being a young human male, is conferred on it not by virtue of people's attitudes toward beautiful young men, but rather by stipulation (we just stipulated that it has this meaning). If instead we think of 'adonis' as already having a meaning in English, which is more or less right, then any number of metasemantic theories might explain why it has this content. For example, it might be that a descriptivist metasemantics is the right one (i.e., the platitudes concerning 'adonis'—of which 'an adonis is a beautiful young man' is surely central—determine which property is its semantic value. Either way, there is no reason to think that it is projective. In sum, even if 'adonis' is defined in terms of 'beautiful', it might be that 'beautiful' has its meaning by virtue of human attitudes toward beautiful things, while 'adonis' acquires its meaning by virtue of some other process. Thus, if by 'subjective' in the infection arguments, Sider means *projective*, then premise three is false and the arguments are unsound.

Here is yet another interpretive strategy. Perhaps by 'X is subjective', Sider means that X has several equally structural semantic candidates and no other candidates that are more structural than these. Let us use the term 'equistructural' for such expressions. Equistructural expressions show up throughout Sider's project, despite the fact that he has no special term for them. Recall that a nonsubstantive sentence must contain an equistructural expression. Moreover, he assumes that an equistructural expression is not perfectly structural.[41]

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[41] The assumption is false. For example, if the Planck length is a minimal length and there is a positive integer n for exactly how many Planck lengths are in a meter, then 'meter' is perfectly structural (because 'Planck length' is perfectly structural) even though 'meter' is also equistructural—i.e., it has several semantic candidates (e.g., n Planck lengths, n+1 Planck lengths, etc.) that are equally structural. Still, nothing in our discussion depends on this mistake.

Perhaps when Sider says ‘X is subjective’ he means that X is equistructual. Do the infection arguments fare any better on this interpretation? No. They have the same status as they do on the projective interpretation; namely, the third premise (i.e., if structure is subjective, then anything defined in terms of structure is subjective) is false. One of Sider’s examples of an equistructural expression is ‘bachelor’, whose equally structural semantic candidates are the property of being an unmarried adult human male and the property of being an unmarried adult human male eligible for marriage.[42] We can define a term, ‘bachelor pad’ as *a dwelling of the kind stereotypically inhabited by a bachelor*. Is ‘bachelor pad’ equistructural? Perhaps, but its content depends on the stereotype in question and we can imagine that the stereotype is determinate enough that ‘bachelor pad’ is not equistructural. Moreover, the stereotypical dwelling inhabited by an unmarried man and the stereotypical dwelling inhabited by an unmarried man who is eligible for marriage are probably the same. Thus, it is conceivable that ‘bachelor pad’ is not equistructural even though ‘bachelor’ is equistructual and ‘bachelor’ is defined in terms of ‘bachelor pad’.

Another of Sider’s examples of an equistructual expression is ‘cup’ (candidates: the property of being drinkware used to consume liquid, and the property of being drinkware not made of glass used to consume liquid).[43] We can define ‘cup holder’ as *a device for holding a cup*. However, any device for holding drinkware used to consume liquid will also be a device for holding drinkware not made of glass used to consume liquid, and vice versa. Thus, if ‘cup holder’ is equistructural, it is not because its definition in terms of ‘cup’ has infected it. The

[42] Sider (2012): 8. For what it is worth, this is not a good example because all unmarried adult human males are eligible for marriage. If the pope showed up at a city hall in the USA with his unmarried partner, they could get married.
[43] Sider (2012): 52.

upshot is that on the equistructural interpretation of 'subjective', the infection arguments are unsound because premise 3 is false.

The final interpretation we consider requires a reformulation of the schema used thus far:

1. P is a substantive sentence containing X. [assumption]
2. X is defined in terms of 'structure'. [assumption]
3. If P is a sentence containing X is and P is nonsubstantive, then the sentence that results from substituting in the definition of X for X in P is nonsubstantive. [assumption]
4. Therefore, the sentence that results from substituting in the definition of X for X in P is substantive. [1-3]

This argument might very well be what Sider has in mind. The idea is that if certain sentences containing 'structure' turn out to be nonsubstantive, then the sentences that result from substituting any term defined in terms of structure into them will be nonsubstantive as well, and we have good reason to think that these sentences are substantive. Thus, the sentences containing 'structure' are substantive. Perhaps the only way to explain why these sentences are substantive is that 'structure' is perfectly structural or highly structural, which is the overall conclusion Sider is after.

Is this a good argument? No. Again, the problem is premise 3. This time the problem is more difficult to detect. Sider actually takes pains to emphasize the feature of his theory of substantivity that is relevant for evaluating this version of the infection argument. He claims that substantivity is not a feature of propositions—instead, substantivity is metalinguistic in the sense that two sentences that express the same proposition might differ on substantivity. He provides the following example:

(8) Drinks with sour apple liqueur are not martinis.

(9) Drinks with sour apple liqueur are not drinks made of gin or vodka and vermouth with such-and-such proportions.

Sider writes:

> In my opinion, (8) is true; 'martini' means drink made of gin or vodka and vermouth with such-and-such proportions. … But we could have used 'martini' differently, so as to include sour apple liqueur drinks, without being semantically alien or carving worse at the joints. So (8) is nonsubstantive. … Although the terms in (9)—'sour apple liqueur', 'drink', 'gin', and so on—do not carve at the joints, they have no candidates under which (9) comes out false. But (8) is just the result of substituting for 'martini' in (8) an expression that has the same meaning (though not the same candidates). Moral: sentences that express the same proposition can differ in substantivity.[44]

This is a helpful example which demonstrates the subtlety of Sider's theory: the substantivity of a sentence cannot be read off the proposition it expresses or the semantic values of the expressions that occur in it. Instead, substantivity is a matter of two things: comparative structuralness of its expressions' candidates and the variation in truth value across those candidates.

Unfortunately for Sider, the fact that substantivity is metalinguistic undermines the version of the infection arguments in question. Because substantivity is a metalinguistic phenomenon, there is no reason to think that if a certain sentence containing an expression X is nonsubstantive, then substituting the definition of X into that sentence for X will result in a nonsubstantive sentence as well. Indeed, Sider's own example of sentences (8) and (9) are a counterexample. Thus, premise 3 of this version of the infection argument is false.

We anticipate the following objection to this analysis: the example Sider gives shows that it is possible that X claims are *substantive*, Y is defined in terms of X, and Y claims are *nonsubstantive*. After all, sentence (8) is a martini claim, which is nonsubstantive, and 'martini' is defined as a drink made of gin or vodka and vermouth with such-and-such proportions, but sentence (9) is substantive. However, premise 3 in the above argument is a different principle, and Sider's example is not a counterexample to it. A counterexample to premise 3 would be a

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[44] Sider (2012): 60. Passage has been renumbered.

situation in which X claims are *nonsubstantive*, Y is defined in terms of X, and Y claims are *substantive*. The martini example does not fit this description.

To answer this objection we need a different example—one that is in some sense the opposite of the Sider's martini example. Assume along with Sider that a drink made with apple liquor is not a martini. However, this claim is nonsubstantive because some of the equally structural candidates for 'martini' count it as true and others count it as false. Consider the expression 'a martini bar' which is defined as *a bar known for making martinis*. The counterexample concerns the following two sentences:

(10) James is at a martini bar.

(11) James is at a bar known for making martinis.

Sentence (11) is nonsubstantive because 'martini' has several equally structural candidates and some count (11) true while others count (11) as false. For example, the bar in question might be known for making drinks made of gin or vodka and vermouth with such-and-such proportions, but it is not know for making drinks made with apple liquor. Or it might be known for the later but not the former. On the other hand, (10) is substantive. The extension of 'martini bar' includes any bar known for making martinis, whether these martinis are made with apple liquor or not. We could have meant something slightly different by 'martini bar' but these differences would not affect the truth value of (10). Moreover, the differences between the semantic candidates for 'martini' have no effect on the semantic candidates for 'martini bar' even though 'martini bar' is defined in terms of 'martini'. The upshot is that premise 3 of the infection argument in question is false and the argument is unsound.

VI

Would it really be so bad if objectivity, epistemic betterness, similarity, intrinsicness, and related features turned out to be subjective? That obviously depends upon what one means by 'subjective'. Given the most plausible interpretation based upon Sider's writings, we would have to say that many sentences containing these terms are nonsubstantive; that's because these terms have several equally structural semantic candidates that affect the truth value of the embedding sentences. That is: these terms could have had other meanings, and these alternative meanings would have made some of our sentences containing these terms false. The fact that certain of these sentences are true is a fluke. The upshot would be that these terms are not really getting at reality as it is independently of us. Rather, these terms are about certain aspects of how we represent reality. All this can be summed up by saying that, on this interpretation of 'subjective,' certain sentences that seem substantive are not substantive at all.

Such a result is somewhat disheartening. But this is no reason to think that it is false; we make disheartening discoveries all the time. Moreover, Sider's own distinction between metaphysical substantivity and conceptual substantivity can play a role here. At worst, we would have discovered that some claims we thought were metaphysically substantive are instead conceptually substantive—they tell us something important about ourselves rather than something about the world. Or, rather, since we *are* denizens of the world, they tell us something about a part of the world constituted by ourselves.

Sider has given us no good reason to be realists about structure (or fundamentality), so the question of its metaphysical status remains wide open. Alternatives to realism about structure, like Robert Williams' theory, which treats 'fundamental' as an expressive device, are still viable.[45] Finally, Sider has given us no reason to think that structure is structural (or that fundamentality is fundamental). This topic is just starting to attract attention and with the

[45] Williams (2010, forthcoming).

popularity and importance of fundamentality in contemporary analytic metaphysics, one can expect it to grow considerably. The stage is set for theories that take structure or fundamentality to be nonfundamental, even if such theories have yet to reach the marketplace.

Here is a long but revealing quote from Sider's discussion of the significance of structure:

> [C]onsider the following series of scenarios. Scenario 1: the physical world is pretty much the way we think it is; it includes physical objects in addition to spacetime. Scenario 2: the physical world consists of nothing more than propertied points and regions of spacetime. Scenario 3: the physical world consists of a wave function in a massively dimensional configuration space. Neither three-dimensional space nor four-dimensional spacetime exist, fundamentally speaking. Scenario 4: our ordinary beliefs are caused by The Matrix, a computer simulation that directly stimulates our brains while our bodies lie in stasis.22 Scenario 5: I am a disembodied brain floating in an utterly empty space; the changes in my brain that give rise to my "mental states" happen purely by chance. In Scenario 1 my ordinary beliefs about myself and my surroundings are true. The same holds in Scenario 2, I think, though some would disagree. This is less clear in Scenario 3, since the structures in the world that ordinary beliefs would need to pick out in order to be true—patterns in the wave function—are so far from the joints in reality. Matters are worse in Scenario 4: our ordinary beliefs would be true only if interpreted as picking out aspects of the computer program, which are (we may stipulate) quite distant from reality's joints in the world that houses the program. And once we get to Scenario 5, if I can be said to have any mental states at all, nearly all of them are clearly untrue. They would be true only if they had contents defined on the world's empty space (or parts of my brain); but no assignment of such content could be regarded as being more correct than other assignments on which the mental states would come out false. Now, in this series of scenarios the match between our beliefs and reality's joint-carving structure is gradually eroded. The erosion is severe enough to disrupt truth only late in the series. But even earlier in the series, at stage 3, say, much of what we care about has been lost, even if what we normally say is still true. We are a partial intellectual failure if we live in configuration space or The Matrix, even if we believe truly. Moreover, even if the transition from truth to falsity in our ordinary beliefs is abrupt, what we care about in inquiry seems to be more continuously eroded in the series. These facts suggest that what we care about is truth in joint-carving terms, not just truth.[46]

We find this passage illuminating: not because it echoes our own views—in fact, we disagree with most of Sider's conclusions here—but because it provides a window into how he thinks about the epistemic value of structural locutions. For example, we have no idea why anyone would say that in the transition from stage 2 to stage 3, we have lost much of what we care about. There is no reason to think that even if the world is fundamentally a wave function in a configuration space, we have lost our partners, our children, our friends, our careers, or our

[46] Sider (2012): 74-5.

accomplishments. Remember: for the point he is trying to make, Sider is *not* saying that on scenario 3 things like ‘my family and friends are alive and well’ turn out false; rather, he is saying that there is such a huge gap between these familiar claims and how the physical world is fundamentally that the everyday claims somehow lose their value.

We do not agree. We don’t see that any value is lost. Nothing scientists can tell us about the physical universe, short of making our everyday beliefs false, will prompt the thought that we have lost some commonplace things we value. Moreover, as working metaphysicians we care quite a bit about what the physical world is like at a fundamental level. But we do not see how a mismatch between the kind of vocabulary needed to characterize reality at the fundamental level and the kind of vocabulary customarily used in daily life should make us care less about aspects of our everyday lives. It seems to us that the physical universe might turn out to be so different from the world of medium-size dry goods we experience, that the concepts needed to describe it are totally foreign to us. But there is no compelling reason to think that this somehow undermines the value of the things we deem important in our lives.

VII

We have surveyed three areas in which pragmatist strategies might be thought to undermine commonsense realism. We argued that in each such case the alleged undermining is illusory. Robust deflationism about properties—a strategy inspired by “meaning as use” approaches to the semantics of predicates—does not result in “creeping minimalism,” nor does it threaten the contrast between descriptive and expressive discourse. Carnap*’s expressivist treatment of ontological vocabulary does not collapse the contrast between what really exists and what linguistic forms it is pragmatically advisable to adopt. And Sider’s claim that treating certain basic metaphysical notions as grounded in subjective elements has consequences inconsistent with his preferred forms of realism is incorrect.

The pragmatist alleges that thought and talk of reality is permeated with interests, goals, perspectives, agendas, standards of similarity, criteria for explanatory success, and/or other pragmatic elements. Details of implementation vary enormously. However, it is no consequence of the pragmatisms considered here that the world around us is mind-dependent. Pragmatic aspects of the conceptual and discursive machinery with which we confront the world are not pragmatic aspects of the world confronted; interest-relative thought about the world is not thought about an interest-relative world. Pragmatism is not a theory about the mind-dependence of reality, nor does it yield such a theory as a consequence. The costs of pragmatism might be substantial—it depends upon the form and implementation; but Idealism is not one of them.

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