Research Proposal:
Jason DeWitt

My work touches on issues in metaphysics of science, pragmatist philosophy of language, and metaphilosophy. I'm most concerned with the question: how should a naturalistic metaphysics of science be developed? I'm interested in working on the neopragmatist approach to metaphysics of science. This approach is inspired by quasi-realism in meta-ethics: just as ethical statements may not ultimately aim to represent moral reality, statements about causes or modality in science may instead have legitimate non-representational functions. Neopragmatists propose various accounts of what these functions are and how they align with our practices of identifying causal, modal, mathematical, etc. truths. These neopragmatist proposals also come with associated metaphysical differences—if, for example, modal statements in scientific discourse aren't describing modal reality, then traditional debates between realists and anti-realists become unnecessary.

My research program aims to develop and systematically extend a new framework for the metaphysics of science that I call "pragmatist realism." This approach emerges from my critical assessment of neopragmatist metaphysics, which reveals both the promise and limitations of purely "deflationary" approaches. Through a few interconnected projects, I am aiming to establish the theoretical foundations of pragmatist realism and demonstrate its application across multiple domains within the metaphysics of science.

In one project of mine, I am developing a challenge to the coherency of "global" neopragmatism—the position adopting expressivism towards all language. Using resources from within the neopragmatist literature itself, I demonstrate that arguments attempting to establish, almost *a priori*, that every discourse should be understood in a non-cognitive way ultimately fail. This challenge establishes that pragmatist metaphysics must be piecemeal and non-global, providing a crucial theoretical ground for the localist approach that pragmatist realism adopts.

In a draft of mine currently titled "Pragmatist Realism about Causation", I examine and critique perspectivalist arguments about causation defended by Jenann Ismael and Huw Price. I demonstrate how the failure of perspectivalist arguments provides a recipe for defensible pragmatist realism about causation and other scientific phenomena. The key insight is identifying relations like causation via human concerns and practices, then seeking out physical relations in the world that meet what has been identified pragmatically. This approach, analogous to physicalist views of color metaphysics, serves as my methodological template for pragmatist realism across other domains.

I'm also working on a paper where I use empirical studies of natural kind term reference to argue against Amie Thomasson's modal normativism, and to argue for an alternative view. This alternative maintains pragmatist methodological insights while adopting a more traditional metaphysically realistic approach to metaphysical modality in science.

I want to continue to systematically extend this "pragmatist realist" framework to other central areas of scientific metaphysics, especially scientific explanation and natural kinds. Each application will follow the methodological template developed in my work on causation.

I also have begun writing projects that diverge in content (but are similar in theme) to my work on metaphysics of science. One project investigates how Donald Davidson's philosophy of

language can capture the metaphilosophical benefits of Rorty's post-analytic pragmatism while avoiding any relativistic costs. Another project critiques the stance approach to scientific metaphysics developed by Anjan Chakravartty. I argue that the stance approach, despite its intended neutrality, is incompatible with central elements of externalist epistemology of science. This critique will contribute to ongoing debates about the relationship between epistemological and metaphysical commitments in philosophy of science.

My research proposal is to continue developing pragmatist realism as a systematic approach to the metaphysics of science. By combining methodological pragmatism with a qualified realism about scientific entities and relations, it offers a "third way" that avoids both the excessive metaphysical commitments of traditional analytic metaphysics and the deflationary and perspectivalist tendencies that threaten scientific inquiry's objective aspirations. The ultimate goal is to demonstrate that pragmatist realism provides superior resources for understanding the relationship between scientific practice and natural reality across multiple domains.