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The Pragmatist Flight from Content

Juan José Acero

ABSTRACT

In *Pragmatist Semantics* Zalabardo devises the main guidelines of a pragmatist semantics as an alternative to semantic representationalism, i.e. to the view that holds that the meaning ground of a declarative sentence is made up of the referential links that bind its constituents to things, properties and relations in the world. The paper reveals four assumptions that support the pragmatist semantics of sentences used to ascribe propositional attitudes such as beliefs and desires. These assumptions closely connect the expounded pragmatism with a nihilist semantic tradition that has shaped much of contemporary analytic philosophy, the connection consisting of the abolition of the notion of content as a constituent of a propositional attitude.

KEYWORDS: *Representationalism, Pragmatism, Meaning, Propositional Attitude, Intentional Strategy.*

RESUMEN

En *Pragmatist Semantics* Zalabardo elabora las líneas principales de una semántica pragmatista como alternativa al representacionalismo semántico, es decir: la teoría según la cual la base semántica de una oración declarativa está constituida por los nexos referenciales que conectan sus constituyentes a las cosas, propiedades y relaciones del mundo. El comentario revela cuatro supuestos que sostienen la semántica pragmatista de las oraciones usadas para atribuir actitudes proposicionales tales como deseos y creencias. Estos cuatro supuestos vinculan estrechamente el pragmatismo presentado a una tradición semántica nihilista que ha dado forma a mucho de la filosofía analítica contemporánea, estando el vínculo en la abolición de la noción de contenido como constituyentes de las actitudes proposicionales.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *representacionalismo, pragmatismo, significado, actitud proposicional, estrategia intencional*

In *Pragmatist Semantics* (PS) José L. Zalabardo (Z) faces the goal of shaping a view of semantics alternative to representationalism. The one he favors is a version of pragmatist semantics. It should be clear from the very beginning that he is concerned not with the project of drawing up some kind of descriptive semantics, but with the enterprise of displaying the scaffolding of a foundational semantics.¹ A descriptive se-

mantic theory of language systematically pairs with each sentence of language and each of its syntagmatic constituents at least one semantic value. On the other hand, a foundational semantics of language takes issue with the facts responsible for the values assigned by the particular descriptive semantics chosen. It should also be clear that the sort of representationalism Z disagrees with is a brand of foundational semantics, not of descriptive semantics. It follows that “[...] we seem forced to conclude that the representationalist approach and the pragmatist approach are not really in competition with one another, since the former is a view in descriptive semantics, while the latter concerns foundational semantics” [PS, p. 11]. This specification gets modulated immediately after by adding that the pragmatist foundational semantics Z endorses is not committed to any assumption “as to what kind of item, if any, these facts need to pair with the expression as its semantic value” [PS, p. 12]. Instead of discussing the merits and demerits of Z’s pragmatist semantics, I will bring out four assumptions that give this sort of foundational semantics a peculiar profile. The story line of those assumptions, i.e. the link that makes them part of the same project, is the flight from content. I will understand the content of a particular belief of an agent as the proposition that captures what the agent believes, i.e. the object of the agent’s belief; and the content of a particular desire as the proposition that captures what the agent desires, i.e. the object of the agent’s desire. On the way of analyzing beliefs and desires that Z sets out to building his brand of pragmatism, to state that S believes/desires that so-and-so is to state something true, if S has the property of believing/desiring that so-and-so. This property in turn is the result of combining a psychological attitude, i.e. either a belief or a desire, with the proposition that so-and-so. Despite the approach, PS develops a sophisticated argument that dispenses with the notion of content. To reach this result a number of assumptions must be taken on. I will bring forward four of them, namely its empiricism, the adoption of a dubious syntax of language sentence, the deletion of the first-person point of view, and its naturalism. All of them play a significant part in the flight from content.

I. REPRESENTATIONALISM VS. PRAGMATISM

According to PS, representationalism is a package of claims whose backbone is the following statement:

This is the version of representationalism on which I am going to focus: a declarative sentence represents the world as a result of referential links between the terms that figure in it and items in the world that the sentence represents as combined with one another [PS, p. 7].

When presented in this way representationalism is a template that can be variously filled, depending on how the relationship between the sentences' constituents and their worldly counterparts is understood. None of the variants, Z points out, "will be directly relevant to the issues I want to discuss" [PS, p. 8]. The difference between representationalism and pragmatism as foundational semantical views lies in their respective meaning grounds. From the representationalist perspective sentences play the role of representing states of affairs in virtue of having a representationalist meaning ground. (Only declarative sentences will be taken up from now on.) This is the RR Principle [PS, p. 8]. The meaning ground of a sentence is set up by the links that connect its constituents to the world items that are their referents. Sentences represent parts of the world, i.e. states of affairs, because of those links and gain their meaning grounds from the existence of those language-to-world links. As for pragmatism, the sort of meaning ground it makes the most of is significantly different from the one representationalism brings to bear. According to pragmatism, it is in the use of language where sentences acquire their meaning, thereby seeing the features of language use as the meaning grounds that count. Put forward in a greater detail, any sentence has the meaning it has in virtue of those conditions which its use is subject to and which determine either its acceptance or its rejection.

My proposal, then, is to replace assertion with acceptance in the meaning-grounding characterization of how a sentence is used. When a sentence has a pragmatist meaning ground, on my proposal, it will have the meaning it has as a result of the way in which its acceptance and rejection are regulated. Likewise, when a predicate has a pragmatist meaning ground, it will have the meaning it has as a result of the procedures that regulate its ascription to objects, with ascription understood, like acceptance, in terms of the conviction that the way the predicate represents an object as being is the way things stand with the object [PS, pp. 92f.].

Thus, Z's proposal understands the concept of meaning *more epistémico* in so far as he binds it on the concepts of belief and justification. When things are so focused, a sentence's having the meaning it has in such-and-such circumstances results from the fact that speakers who use it are

justified in asserting it in those circumstances. However — and due to reasons I will overlook in what follows — Z sets himself apart from the justificationist line in following Wittgenstein's claim that "meaning is somehow constitutively connected with use" [*PS*, p. 91]. Z admits that this claim is his leading thought. Among all the features of sentence that make up its meaning ground those that take precedence over the rest are, according to Z, the features that govern its acceptance and rejection.

A pragmatist semantics is the alternative Z develops after having concurred with an objection to representationalism he develops under the label «The Open Question Argument».² The lesson he draws from the argument is that there are three kinds of sentences in a language like English which are short of the type of meaning grounds that representationalism requires. The kinds in question are (i) the discourses ascribing moral properties to agents ('It is morally right to kill one to save five'); (ii) discourses ascribing the property of being true to a sentence ("Snow is white" is a true sentence) or ascribe meaning to the expressions of a language ("La nieve es blanca", as John understands it, means that snow is white'; ("Nieve", as Beth understands it, means snow'), and (iv) discourses ascribing beliefs, desires and other psychological attitudes to agents. The RR Thesis is unreservedly condemned, and representationalism seems to end up in a hardly sustainable position, if these kinds of sentences lack the appropriate meaning grounds. In what follows I will specifically target on those sentences that ascribe psychological attitudes, i.e. propositional attitude sentences and on how Z deals with them to put up its pragmatist alternative.

To begin with, the question is, what are the pragmatist's meaning grounds of sentences such as 'John believes that there is milk in the fridge' and 'Beth thinks that that is a horse' (said while both the speaker and Beth are seeing the animal) responsible for those sentences' meaning what they mean. What are those meaning grounds like? What features do regulate the sentences' use, if they are to have the meaning they have? More specifically, what features do govern the ascription of beliefs, desires, and so forth? Z has a neat answer for the reader:

The central idea of my proposal is that what makes belief and desire ascriptions have the meaning they have is the fact that their acceptance is regulated [...] by reference to the success of the behaviour predictions they produce [*PS*, p. 108].

II. GENUINE PRAGMATISM

The questions I want to address first are, what sort of pragmatism is the one Z proposes, and what duties does such a pragmatism take on? Z starts distinguishing two kinds of pragmatism: a representationalist pragmatism (R-pragmatism) and a genuine pragmatism (G-pragmatism). Pragmatists of both kinds hold the meaning grounds of sentences to consist in the procedures that govern their acceptance and rejection. Both kinds of pragmatists spell out the meaning grounds by resorting to the same procedures, but “[these procedures] are used in a different way” [PS, p. 96]. R-pragmatists claim that in following acceptance procedures one is in position to identify the states of affairs that sentences would represent as obtaining. In other words, the states of affairs are specified in terms of those procedures. Therefore, whereas R-pragmatism is a form of representationalism, G-pragmatism “is emphatically not a version of representationalism” [PS, p. 96].

For the pragmatist, what makes a sentence have the meaning it has is not its relation to the state of affairs it represents as obtaining, but the way its acceptance is regulated. It is exclusively in this capacity that the acceptance procedures figure in pragmatist meaning grounds [PS, p. 96].

The R-pragmatist proposes that the acceptance conditions constitute the meaning grounds of the sentence. What makes the sentence have the meaning it has is the fact that its acceptance meets the norms that regulate its use. (I closely follow PS, p. 96.) The difference between the two kinds of pragmatism is clearly marked by highlighting the commitments that G-pragmatism must keep. R-pragmatists and G-pragmatists do not agree about sentence meaning grounds, and therefore about what their acceptance and rejection involve. Both kinds of pragmatism take the meaning of a sentence (when used by a speaker in certain circumstances) as fixed by procedures that rule its acceptance and rejection. Those procedures set up the semantic ground of its meaning. The critical phase of the analysis arrives when the pragmatist has to explain what the acceptance (and rejection) of a sentence consists in. R-pragmatism has it that to regulate the acceptance of a sentence (in a given use circumstance) is to determine whether the state of affairs the sentence represents (in a given use circumstance) as obtaining really obtains. To put it in a compact form — and overlooking a bunch of nuances — the meaning ground of a sentence, i.e. that in virtue of which the sentence means

what it means, is the state of affairs the sentence represents as obtaining. The rules that answer for the use of a sentence determine whether it represents the state of affairs that obtains when the speaker uses it. It is about this matter that the differences between the two kinds of pragmatism become patent.

According to G-pragmatism, the acceptance and rejection of sentences are feelings or sensations. In accepting a sentence the speaker, i.e. the ascriber, neither predicates of it a property or a concept nor takes on any commitment that concerns it.³ Acceptance and rejection are feelings or sensations: “It is simple an involuntary feeling provoked by some sentences, as we understand them” [*PS*, p. 92]. What kind of feeling is it? A feeling of conviction:

Acceptance of a sentence, as I’ll use the term, is a conscious, involuntary re-identifiable attitude towards the sentence consisting in the conviction that things are as the sentence represents as being [*PS*, p. 92].

The G-pragmatism’s semantic grounds of sentences are feelings of conviction that speakers experience as they understand them or, what amounts to the same, as they recognise that things are as the sentences say they are. Procedures that govern the acceptance of sentences by speakers set up the conditions that trace the dividing line between the appropriate experienced feelings of conviction and those which are out of place.

G-pragmatism is not without burdens. It avoids the obstacles that representationalism cannot get over, but it does not achieve it for free, because it has to pay the price of conceiving the meaning grounds of sentences according to empiricist guidelines. This claim could be disputed adducing that construing acceptance occurrences as feelings or sensations is not enough to warrant it. Setting aside the fact that a lengthy philosophical tradition flatly belies this reply, it is interesting to compare Z’s empiricist guiding spirit and Kripke’s alternative. Z’s empiricism seems to find inspiration in the following words of Kripke (1982):

Jones is entitled, subject to correction by others, provisionally to say, ‘I mean addition by “plus”, whenever he has the feeling of confidence —’ ‘I can go on’ — that he can give ‘correct’ responses in new cases [Kripke 1982, p. 90].

Feelings and reliance on what other speakers would say are the two aspects highlighted by this quotation. In fact, the second aspect gets a

prominent role in Kripke's answer to the target question, namely what are the meaning grounds of sentences used to ascribe beliefs, desires and further propositional attitudes. This is easily checked on paying attention to what Kripke goes on to write:

[...] and he is entitled, again provisionally and subject to correction by others, to judge a new response to be 'correct' simply because it is the response he is inclined to give. These inclinations [...] are to be regarded as primitive. They are not to be justified in terms of Jones' ability to interpret his own intentions or anything else. [Kripke 1982, pp. 90f.].

In spite of Kripke's insistence on the role performed by the speaker community, Z ignores it, and leaves out of sight everything apart from the agent's feelings or sensations. The crux of the problem lies in the inclinations that move the agent to act. "The aspect of this approach that I want to highlight is the fact that it involves ascribing a non-representational role to the sentences to which it is applied" [PS, p. 76]. No doubt, representationalism is under a strong attack. Nevertheless, Z's assault could not win everybody's affection due to the demands it imposes for sharing the principles of a highly complex and committed tradition. Whether to analyse the semantic grounds as G-pragmatism does or taking on another approach to meaning grounds, this is a decision that Z lets the reader make when he says that the feeling or sensation that Hume wrongly identified with belief "is a real phenomenon" [PS, p. 92]. As I have already pointed out, G-pragmatism thinks the acceptance of a sentence to be independent from whatever content it might be thought to convey. It is a purely episodic feeling. The G-pragmatist view of meaning grounds reserves no place for sentences' contents within G-pragmatist's toolbox. In contrast to G-representationalism, R-representationalism accepts states of affairs as contents, for referential relationships between things and words are embedded in the kind of meaning grounds it endorses. The only modality that the flight from content is enquired for in PS is the flight from representationalism.⁴

III. THE MEANING GROUNDS OF MENTAL ASCRIPTIONS

What are, then, the meaning grounds of sentences of the form 'S believes/desires that *p*'? Other verbs and phrases are used to ascribe propositional attitudes, such as 'to have the intention', 'to hope', 'to hate', 'to expect', and so on would lead to variants of this scheme.) Each

of these sentences make up what Z calls a BD discourse. BD discourses are vehicles of *mental ascriptions*. The question now is, what are meaning grounds of BD discourses? The flight from content also becomes evident in the way in which these discourses are regulated.

In order to characterise the meaning grounds of mental ascription Z relies on two ideas:

- (A) Sentences used to ascribe beliefs and desires “have, in general, a very simple syntax” (p. 107).⁵

Speakers employ these kinds of sentences to establish, or to put on record, a relation between *S*, a subject to whom a belief or a desire is ascribed, and a possible state of affairs that is presented as the content ascribed. In the above mentioned template the sentence’s content is symbolized by means of the expression ‘that *p*’, and the relation between the subject *S* and the content by means of the verb ‘believes’ and ‘desires’, etc.

- (B) The key ingredient of Z’s proposal is that “what makes belief and desire ascriptions have the meaning they have is the fact that their acceptance is regulated in this way — by reference to the success of the behaviour predictions they produce” [*PS*, p. 108].

In what follows I will put (A) aside except indirectly. I will center on (B) for its adoption reveals another assumption assumed by pragmatism. To bring it out I’ll use the following terminology. (I am echoing *PS*, p. 108.) I’ll call each instance of the template ‘*S* believes that *p*’ a *B-pairing of S with p*; and each instance of the template ‘*T* desires that *q*’ a *D-pairing of T with q*. The acceptance by a speaker *H* of a *B-pairing of S with p* counts as the ascription to *S* by *H* of the belief that *p*. And *H*’s acceptance of a *D-pairing of T with q* counts as the ascription to *T* by *H* of the desire that *q*. Relying on the terminology just introduced, I’ll say that a speaker (i.e. ascriber) *H* *B-pairs S with p*, and that *H* *D-pairs H with q*. Although those pairings count as put forward, they in fact are relationships between agents and sentences. Therefore, sentences are the contents, i.e. the objects, of propositional attitudes.⁶

With the help of this terminology, it is easy to state in compact terms the pattern that governs the acceptance by *H* of a BD discourse, namely that *H* predicts that the agent displays a behaviour most conducive to bringing about the state of affairs with which he has *D-paired* the

agent, if the state of affairs with which H has B -paired the agent obtain. (See *PS*, p. 114.) A behaviour m is most conducive to bringing about that p , if for every behaviour n ($n \neq m$): n has a greater degree of efficacy than m . Having Dennett (1978; 1987) in mind, Z calls this predictive strategy the *minimal intentional strategy* (MI).

A quick look at the statement of MI is enough to realize that the content of mental ascriptions is out of Z 's task in *foundational* semantics. Therefore, the flight from content is complete. As it happens, pragmatism falls within a contemporary philosophical trend whose initial outburst was Quine's project of radical translation and whose landmarks result in a sort of semantic nihilism that has become a second nature for most analytic philosophers.⁷ The particular way of joining in this tradition that pragmatism adopts in *PS* is a subtle version of the idea that BD discourses are the resources used by a speaker H to ascribe beliefs and desires to an agent S on condition that the ascription gives rise to predictions most conducive to successful behaviour. Set out plainly, pragmatism understands mental ascription in the following way:

- (C) Ascribe the agent those BD discourses that best anticipate the agent's behaviour.

Although I reiterate that pragmatism may be classed among the forms in which the nihilist semantic tradition becomes manifest⁸, a second assumption comes to light on asking from whose point of view mental ascriptions take place. In (C) two subjects are on play: S (or T) and H . S (or T) is the agent to whom beliefs and desires are ascribed. H is the ascriber, i. e. the speaker who makes the ascription by accepting sentences of the form ' S believes that p ' and ' T desires that q ', thus predicting the agent's behaviour. The speaker's feelings of conviction set the point of view from which BD discourses are accepted.

However, the MI strategy is not the only available option. Instead of focusing on predicting the agent's behaviour, we could ask the ascriber to assign to the agent those beliefs and desires that best capture her (S 's or T 's) view of the situation concerned. Seen in this light, the speaker's role consists in identifying the agent's belief-and-desire world. That is, (D) would be an alternative to (C):

- (D) Ascribe the agent the BD-discourses that best represent her belief-and-desire world.

Recanati has put forward a complex version of this alternative and called it the theory of simulation:

The simulation theory is the view that metarepresentational prefixes such as ‘John believes that’ have such a pragmatic function: they indicate that the speaker is not characterizing the actual world, but, say, John’s ‘belief world’. [...] The point of the belief ascriber is, simply, to show how the world is according to the ascriber. [In such a case], according to the theory, the utterance is not a genuine assertion but an instance of pretend assertion [Recanati 2000, p. 49].

It is not easy to sensibly combine the theory of simulation with pragmatism. On the one hand, if the acceptance conditions of BD discourses are faithful to the way the agent, *S* (or *H*), sees the world, or its relevant part, that is, if those conditions rightly reflect *S*’s point of view, it would be natural to conclude that the speaker, *H*, closely follows the trail of *S*’s belief-and-desire world. Therefore, the problem does not amount to setting up the rules which mental ascription abides by. The crux of the matter lies in specifying the rules that *H* has to obey to ascribe to *S* the belief that *p* *being faithful to S’s viewpoint*, and to ascribe to *T* the desire that *q* *being faithful to T’s viewpoint*. The first-person point of view, i.e. the agent’s perspective, is unavoidable on this alternative. (C) contradicts this conclusion due to the privileged function in charge of the MI strategy. In sum, pragmatism cancels the first-person perspective. We are, then, before a choice to be made at the beginning on the enquiry. “I am going to take as my starting point”, writes Z, “the characterization of this predictive strategy that Daniel Dennett has developed under the label *Intentional Stance*” [PS, p. 108]. Z does not justify the choice, but the availability of (D) counsels not to forget that it is a decision, not an argument, what he puts on display.⁹

On the other hand, the theory of simulation does not analyse BD discourses as G-pragmatism does. Z claims that the syntax of these sentences is in general very simple. Its structure is relational and acknowledges a binary relation between an agent whom either a belief or a desire is ascribed and a content. According to Z’s view, (C), though independent of it, works in tandem with the requirement that BD discourses have a relational syntax, their structure being either ‘*S* believes that-*p*’ or ‘*T* desires that-*q*’. Instead of these analyses, a very different syntactical scheme reinforces the ascription that (D) advocates: ‘Believe-that_s *p*’ and ‘Desire-that_r *q*’. ‘Believe-that_s’ and ‘Desire-that_r’ are modal operators that respectively symbolize the expressions ‘*S* believes that’ and ‘*T* desires that’.

It is plain, according to (D), that BD discourses do not have a relational syntax, and that the structure they fill is far from being as simple as Z suggests.¹⁰ In short, that BD discourses have a relational syntax is another assumption that supports Z's pragmatism. In disregarding (D), Z does not lend attention to the fact that the MI strategy is not the only option in the logical space of answers to the question about the conditions that regulate the acceptance of BD discourses.

IV. THE HYBRID POLICY AND THE FLIGHT FROM CONTENT

(C) is not the last step in the pragmatism's flight from content. Pragmatists initially think taking the ascription of mental states as sentence acceptance to have the advantage of turning the ascription of beliefs and desires endowed with content into a metaphysically innocent option. However, the MI strategy comes up against a brick wall when the pragmatist confronts the challenge of predicting behaviour in situations in which there is agency but no possibility of helping himself to beliefs, desires and further propositional attitudes. These conditions obtain during the ontogenesis of the intentional stance, for instance in children under the age of 4. The interesting section 6.4 ("The ontogenesis of the Intentional Stance") convincingly illustrates the success of a predictive strategy more simple than MI, one that does not ascribe any mental state representing the relevant goal as a state of affairs that the agent intends to bring about. Thus, in the violation of expectation tests, infants of an age from 9 to 12 months seem to use a strategy more rudimentary than the MI to which the ascription of beliefs and desires makes no contribution.

We predict that the agent will display a behaviour that would be most conducive to bringing about A if B obtained. The 12-month-olds, by contrast, appear to predict that the agent will display a behaviour that will be as a matter of fact, i.e. by their lights, most conducive to bringing about A. [...] according to Csibra and Gergely, in the 12-month-olds the ascriptive aspect is simply missing. They don't ascribe to the agent a mental state representing the relevant goal as a desired state of affairs [PS, p. 118].

Following Csibra and Gergely (1998; 2007), Z refers to this procedure as the teleological strategy, whose guide principle is the following claim:

(E) If you have *D*-paired the agent *J* with the goal *q*, predict that *J* will deploy behavior most conducive to the attainment of *q*.

In other words, if the speaker *H* assigns to the agent *T* the desire that *q*, *H* will predict that *T* will display behavior most conducive to bringing about that *q*. The differences between (C) and (E) are deep. Whereas the MI strategy makes use of two-argument functions, mappings from beliefs and desires onto behaviours, the teleological strategy “appears to employ a function from states of affairs to behaviours” [*PS*, p. 118]. (C) puts the focus on the prediction — say by infants from the age of 9 to 12 months — of the agent’s behaviour on the basis of belief and desire ascription. As for (E), the teleological strategy centers on predicting how the agent will behave in order to make it the case that a certain state of affairs obtains.

The combination of the MI strategy and the teleological strategy constitute the hybrid policy. This policy makes up the guidelines to be followed in the practice of behaviour prediction, thereby identifying the conditions of its success or failure. The MI strategy sets the conditions that govern the acceptance (or the rejection) of sentences used to ascribe either beliefs or desires to agents. Those conditions constitute the sentences’ semantic grounds. The teleological strategy also carries out a regulative task in anticipating the agent’s behaviour, but it does not appeal to ascribing to the agents either beliefs or desires. In the teleological strategy “the ascriptive aspect is simply missing” [*PS*, p. 118].¹¹

The pragmatist flight from content reaches its summit in adopting the hybrid policy. This becomes manifest at the end of his enquiry into the semantic grounds of BD discourses when *Z* raises the “intriguing hypothesis” that the teleological strategy “remains our default procedure for predicting behaviour” [*PS*, p. 119], and that the MI strategy is kept for what *Z* calls “the hard cases”. This strategy brings to the stage sentences, feelings of acceptance and states of affairs to predict the agent’s behaviour. The teleological strategy reduces the predictive machinery even more, limiting its resources to states of affairs and behaviour occurrences. Neither strategy aims at opening an explanatory and predictive room to states endowed with content. The economy of means that results in turning to the teleological strategy makes it suitable to fit in with the demands of naturalism, that is, with the requirement that what philosophy tells us about the understanding of behaviour must be continuous with the methodology of empirical science. Pragmatism goes hand-in-hand with naturalism and is in line with the current research in developmental psychology. Although in *PS* naturalism leaves its stamp on the teleological strategy, it is clear that naturalism also seeps into the MI strategy, the obvious reason being that the psychology of belief and desire under the

scope of developmental psychology as well. Pragmatism's commitment to naturalism is the last assumption I wanted not to go unnoticed.

This is not a minor assumption, because it seems striking to consider as a hypothesis that the teleological strategy "remains our default procedure for predicting behaviour". Instead of being a hypothesis, it could have replied that it is a methodological decision. Therefore, it is appropriate to be doubtful whether infants, such as 9-to-12-month-olds, carry out predictions, i.e. whether thinking of them in this way is a matter either of decision or of empirical research. Z seems to join the first alternative, thus levelling the ground for the hybrid policy and turning infants into prediction agents. I find myself among those who see this decision as the result of dealing in very cheap concepts. As against my viewpoint, the hybrid policy tallies with naturalism and, as far as contemporary philosophy is concerned, naturalism is a sign of the times.

V. CONCLUSIONS

In this commentary I have delved into the pragmatist analysis of mental ascription sentences developed in Zalabardo's *Pragmatist Semantics*, i.e. the so-called genuine pragmatism. On his view, sentences used to ascribe beliefs and desires mean what they mean in virtue of the meaning grounds they have, i.e. in virtue of the conditions of acceptance and rejection to which those sentences are subject to. Zalabardo's crucial move consists in holding that those conditions are fixed by a certain kind of feelings experienced by the speaker. My aim has been to furnish evidence that this view constitutes another step within a nihilist semantic tradition that has given form to much of contemporary philosophy from the early decades of the twentieth century, a tradition that excludes semantic content from the theory of meaning. It is argued, first, that the flight from content is all of a piece with genuine pragmatism. Second, that the strategy, i.e. the minimal intentional strategy, employed to regulate the acceptance of sentences bans any reference to content. Finally, it is shown that the flight from content is also an essential feature of another strategy, i.e. the teleological strategy, which does not involve either B-pairings or D-pairings to predict the agent's behaviour. It follows that genuine pragmatism is more than a view about the meaning grounds of sentences used to ascribe beliefs and desires, for it stands on four assumptions: (i) the empiricism that it is embedded in pragmatist's meaning grounds; (ii) the claim that belief and desire sentences have a relational syntax; (iii) the

choice of the third-person perspective, as well as the avoidance of the agent's perspective, in characterizing those basis; and (iv) the naturalism that gives the pragmatist's predictive strategies their characteristic profile. It should be evident that the four assumptions are fertilized ground for hot debates, but it has not been my goal to take part in them.

Universidad de Granada
Departamento de Filosofía I
Campus de Cartuja, 18010 Granada
E-mail: juan.j.acero@gmail.com

NOTES

¹ Instead of distinguishing descriptive semantics from foundational semantics, we can follow Kaplan (1989) and tell semantics apart from metasemantics.

² This task is carried out in chapters 2 and 3. I will not stop to analyse how the argument proceeds, though I will take up one of its premises later.

³ Genuine pragmatism puts a significant distance from Robert Brandom's pragmatism when commitments are given a central role in framing the meaning grounds of sentences. See *PS*, § 5.6.3.

⁴ Instead of 'G-pragmatism' and 'G-pragmatist' in what follows I will use 'pragmatism' and 'pragmatist', because the opposition R-representationalism/G-representationalism will play no role in the rest of the paper.

⁵ This is the premise I alluded to above, in footnote 2. The premise is introduced in *PS*, § 2.1: "The Moorean premise can be employed as the basis of an argument against the claim that 'is morally right', as understood by us, refers to the property of maximising overall utility" [*PS*, p. 15].

⁶ In this respect, pragmatism closely follows Quine's flight from intension. See Quine (1960), §§. 43-45.

⁷ See Quine (1960), ch. 2. This judgement is far from being correct. The classic *The Logical Construction of the World* [Carnap (1928/1969)] already leaves semantics out of a complete rational reconstruction of the world. I argued for this claim in Acero (1995). Carnap's later work goes on limiting the autonomy of semantics. See Acero (2014).

⁸ However, there is at least one relevant difference between Quine's semantic nihilism and the variety Z favors I don't wish to ignore. Quine's foundational semantics counts on three kinds of items: human bodies' sensory surfaces, the excitation patterns of those surfaces, and a class of linguistic expressions, the language's observational sentences. Quine's commitment to psychological behaviorism is essential for shaping his semantic nihilism. G-pragmatism's foundational semantics also makes use of three kinds of items, in spite of being very different

from those that sustain Quine's nihilism: states of affairs, sentences and feelings or sensations. The stimulation of sensory surfaces is replaced by feelings, the sensory surfaces replaced by states of affairs, and the psychological behaviorism by a sophisticated sort of Humean empiricism.

⁹ Dennett argues that the intentional strategy, as well as the MI strategy, successfully captures the first-person point of view. As a consequence, (C) would be compatible with (D). I must admit that I don't see the force of Dennett's explanations. See Dennett (2005), pp. 40ff.

¹⁰ To say the truth, Z is far from being alone in adopting this assumption.

¹¹ Dennett claims that "the intentional stance is behavioristic in the sense of restricting itself to the intersubjective observable "behaviour" of all the subjects, and their parts, internal and external". Nevertheless, he adds that it is not behavioristic in another sense, since it precisely consists in "mentalistic" or "intentionalistic" interpretations of raw behaviour, identifying them as actions, expressive of beliefs, desires, intentions, and other propositional attitudes" [Dennett (2005), p. 38]. The difference between the MI strategy and the teleological strategy corresponds to that between the behavioristic aspect and the mentalistic aspect of the intentional stance.

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