

Replies to my Critics

José L. Zalabardo

I am very grateful to the seven philosophers who have taken their time to engage with my ideas and share their reactions. It would be impossible to address their concerns in full without rewriting *Pragmatist Semantics*. These brief remarks will have to suffice.

Reply to Matt Simpson

In his contribution, Matt Simpson is primarily concerned with the contest between the brand of pragmatism that I advocate in *Pragmatist Semantics* and other pragmatist views. He usefully presents the rejection of representationalist meaning grounds for a target discourse as what all versions of pragmatism have in common. He then characterises my version as adding to this the thought that the terms of the discourse “bear some kind of representation relation to the things in the world that they are about”. He labels it as *moderate pragmatism*.

Simpson then pits moderate pragmatism against another member of the pragmatist family, that he labels as *deflationary pragmatism*. According to deflationism,

if you can say that a sentence S means that p (for some p), then you can say that S represents things as being such that p. If a sentence of the form ‘a is f’ means that a is F, then ‘a’ refers to a, and ‘f’ refers to f-ness. All of this is trivial and unexplanatory. And that means that it is consistent with the key pragmatist claim that the terms in the discourse don’t have representationalist meaning grounds.

Simpson’s goal is to argue that “moderate pragmatism is no better than this deflationary view, and not obviously significantly different from it.” Here I want to highlight some features of my view that might help us

determine whether or not it's really different from deflationism and, if so, whether there are reasons to prefer it.

I want to start by considering what seems to be a consequence of the deflationist view, on the characterisation given in the passage just quoted. I think it's undeniable that the sentence "modal jazz is boring" means that modal jazz is boring. It seems, then, that on the deflationist position the sentence comes out as representational and the predicate "is boring" as referring to the property of boringness.

On my view this is not so. You can say that "modal jazz is boring" means that p (for some p), and still say that the sentence is not representational. Nor does the predicate "is boring" have to have a referent. On my version of pragmatism, the representational status of a sentence is not guaranteed by the possibility of ascribing meaning to it with a that-clause. What it depends on is whether the sentence has the property of being representational, i.e. the property that the predicate "is representational" refers to. This is the property that we can identify by abstraction as the property referred to by those predicates whose ascription to a sentence is regulated by the same procedure as our predicate "is representational", i.e. by whether acceptance of the sentence is subject to an absolute standard of correctness. Hence those of us who think that acceptance of the sentence "modal jazz is boring" is not subject to an absolute standard of correctness should maintain that the sentence is not representational. I think this is the right result, on the notion of representational character that I intend to capture.

Now, Simpson restricts his deflationist's claim that representation comes for free to sentences "with the right kind of meaning", and perhaps this is supposed to include only sentences that satisfy my criterion for representation. But if this is what the deflationist is claiming, I think a difference still remains. For the moderate pragmatist, it is satisfaction of this criterion that bestows on a sentence representational status. At no point is the deflationist conception semantic concepts invoked in explaining why a sentence counts as representing the world.

It would also be useful to reflect on what Simpson presents as the central difference between moderate and deflationist pragmatism — the deflationist's rejection of the moderate pragmatist's claim that the terms of the target discourse "bear some kind of representation relation to the things in the world that they are about". It seems to me that a thoroughgoing deflationist should join the moderate pragmatist in accepting this claim, thereby blurring the contrast between the two views. For the deflationist, saying that a sentence of the form 'a is F' means that a is F en-

titles you to say that ‘F’ refers to F-ness. But isn’t this tantamount to saying that ‘F’ bears a representation relation to F-ness?

If we answer this question in the affirmative, the deflationist will be agreeing with the moderate pragmatist’s main contention, for those cases in which the moderate pragmatist is happy to say that ‘F’ refers to F-ness. However, a negative answer would exhibit, I think, one source of my suspicion that the deflationist is incapable of vindicating the representational character of a discourse. The view would then be that when we have earned the right to say that ‘F’ refers to F-ness through the deflationist route, we are not really committing ourselves to the existence of a representational relation between the predicate and a thing in the world that the predicate is about. This would expose the deflationist manoeuvre as failing to secure for its discourses what we find in discourses with representationalist meaning grounds. If ‘F’ had a representationalist meaning ground, there would certainly be a representational relation between the predicate and a thing in the world that the predicate is about.

For the moderate pragmatist, by contrast, there’s no difference at this level between a predicate with a pragmatist a meaning ground and a predicate with a representationalist meaning ground. In both cases there will be a representation relation between the predicate and a property. The difference, for the moderate pragmatist, doesn’t concern the existence of this relation, but its explanatory role. For the representationalist, the predicate will have the meaning it has by virtue of this relation. For the moderate pragmatist, by contrast, the semantic relation between the predicate and its referent will not figure in the facts that ground the meaning of the predicate.

But as Simpson points out later on, my main objection to the deflationist strategy for vindicating the representational status of a discourse concerns cases in which the discourse has been given meaning grounds which ascribe to it a non-representational function. My claim is that once a non-representational function is treated as a necessary condition for a sentence to have the meaning it has, we won’t be able to claw our way back to the thought that the sentence represents the world in the same sense in which this is achieved by sentences whose meaning grounds don’t include a non-representational function. If a sentence wouldn’t have the meaning it has unless it performed some non-representational function, it’s hard to avoid the conclusion that this is what it really does, even if deflationism allows us to talk as if it represented the world.

I’m not sure I understand Simpson’s objections to this line of reasoning. He claims that “a suitably framed deflationary pragmatism can

leave claims about function sufficiently ‘under the hood’ to be out of reach of ordinary intuitions”. I’m not sure this helps. I’m not claiming that ordinary intuitions are in conflict with the claim that the target discourses have a non-representational function. What the ordinary intuitions I’m invoking dictate is that the target discourses represent the world. My claim is that this wouldn’t happen if these discourses had a primarily non-representational function, no matter how deep under the hood this function lies. The moderate pragmatist doesn’t want to deny that a discourse, whether its meaning grounds are representationalist or pragmatist, may have all sorts of non-representational functions. The crucial point for the moderate pragmatist is that in order for a discourse to represent the world its non-representational functions can’t be included in its meaning grounds. If other speakers regulate acceptance of their sentences with the same procedure with which we regulate acceptance of ours, their sentences will have the same meaning as ours, even if the discourse doesn’t have for them the function that it has for us.

Reply to Javier González de Prado

Javier González de Prado focuses on my claim that discourses with pragmatist meaning grounds can be said to represent the world in the same sense as discourses with representationalist meaning grounds. He worries that the condition that I treat as sufficient for representation “only vindicates a shallow form of representation.” The reason is that the condition is satisfied by relativistic discourses, which exhibit a type of representation that is “distinctly weaker than the type of representation found in sentences with representationalist meaning grounds.”

I agree that any form of representation that would be exhibited by relativistic discourses would be distinctly weaker than the kind of representation that I claim for my target discourses. However, I think I can resist González de Prado’s contention that relativistic discourses satisfy my condition for representation. As González de Prado explains, my condition for representation is defined in terms of whether acceptance of the sentences of the discourse is subject to an absolute standard of correctness. The existence of this standard is not treated as a necessary or sufficient condition for representational character. Rather, in line with the pragmatist template, regulating one’s ascription of a predicate to a sentence by whether acceptance of the sentence is subject to an absolute standard is a necessary and sufficient condition for the predicate to mean what we mean by “is representational”. The property of being represen-

tational is the referent of those predicates whose ascription is regulated in this way.

González de Prado claims that the sentence “Brussels sprouts are tasty” satisfies this condition, since when I assert this sentence, “I take it to be correct for any speaker at any time. That is, I treat it as governed by an absolute correctness standard.” But these evaluations are relativistic in the following sense:

You will assess the correctness of that assertion from your own perspective, applying the standards determined by your taste. And there is no perspective-independent fact of the matter as to which of these perspectives is the right one.

González de Prado claims that a discourse that behaves in this way satisfies my definition of representation. I don’t think it does. If acceptance of a sentence is subject to an absolute standard of correctness, in my sense, then if I accept the sentence, I take rejection of the sentence by anyone who means by the sentence what I mean by it as incorrect. “Brussels sprouts are tasty” doesn’t satisfy this requirement. If I accept the sentence and you reject it, I won’t take your rejection to be incorrect. I realise that some people like Brussels sprouts and some don’t, and there is no intelligible sense in which one party is right and the other wrong. This feature of the discourse is incompatible with treating acceptance of the sentence as subject to an absolute standard, as I’m using the concept.

This is in contrast with the behaviour of discourses where I do take sentence acceptance to be subject to an absolute standard of correctness. Take the sentence “killing one to save five is morally right”. If I accept this sentence and you reject it, I will take your rejection to be incorrect. I realise that other people’s moral perspectives differ from mine, but I don’t think they are all equally correct. I think there is one correct moral perspective. This is the one that tracks the instantiation conditions of the referent of the predicate “is morally right”. This property is identified by abstraction, as the referent of those predicates whose ascription is regulated by the speakers’ sense of moral approval.

I take my own perspective to be the correct one, since that’s what it means for it to be *my* perspective. Of course, I realise I could be wrong — that your moral perspective could be the right one, but this admission of fallibility doesn’t amount to abandoning the idea that there is one correct moral perspective, or that mine is the correct one. I don’t have an

external, perspective-independent procedure for establishing this, but this is a purely epistemological point, with no tendency to undermine the claim that there is one correct moral perspective, defined by the property that the predicate “is morally right” refers to.

I think, then, that González de Prado’s ‘bad company’ argument doesn’t work. The representationalist is right to complain that any sense of representation that applies to relativistic discourses will be thin or shallow, but this admission has no consequences for the form of representation I claim for my target discourses, as this form of representation is not present in relativistic discourses.

González de Prado later considers another route by which one could come to the conclusion that the form of representation I claim for some discourses with pragmatist meaning grounds is inferior to what we find in discourses with representationalist meaning grounds. It is based on the idea that the referents of predicates with representationalist meaning grounds can be identified independently, whereas the referents of representational predicates with pragmatist meaning grounds can only be identified by abstraction, offering as a result no method for adjudicating disagreements concerning the satisfaction of predicates. The difference is certainly real but it concerns in the first instance our *cognitive access* to predicate referents. Argument is needed to establish that this epistemic difference corresponds to an ontological contrast between *robust* and *thin* referents. There are some very difficult issues in this area that cannot be addressed here, but it is open to the pragmatist to resist this inference from an epistemic contrast to an ontological one, arguing, to the contrary that the ontological robustness of a property is not in principle affected by the kind of access we can gain to it. In particular, the thought goes, a definition by abstraction of a property shouldn’t be seen as somehow bringing the property into existence, but as identifying a property whose existence is not dependent on the definition, even if the definition is our only way of gaining access to it.

González de Prado then takes issue with my contention that the pragmatist template is not universally applicable and, in particular, is not applicable to natural-kind terms. I argue in *Pragmatist Semantics* that the pragmatist template is not applicable to the predicate “is water”, because, as Twin Earth thought experiments show, sameness of ascription procedure is not sufficient for sameness of referent in this case. González de Prado proposes to overcome this obstacle by including a reference to our environment in our characterisation of the meaning-grounding ascription procedure for the predicate:

So, for example, the (toy) procedure for ascribing ‘is water’ would not just be to ascribe it to any transparent, thirst-quenching liquid, but to liquids that have those properties and are of the kind that interacted with the establishment of our water theories.

My main issue with this is that I’m not sure the resulting view would count as a version of pragmatism. The pragmatist seeks to specify who counts as meaning by one of their predicates what we mean by one of ours without specifying the conditions under which our predicate is satisfied. But on González de Prado’s proposal our account of the meaning ground of “is water” does give us a specification of the satisfaction conditions of “is water”: it will be satisfied by any transparent, thirst-quenching liquid of the kind that interacted with the establishment of our water theories. The predicate, on this account, has the meaning it has by virtue of its connection with the kind that satisfies this description. This sounds to me like a version of representationalism, even if ascription procedures are used for describing the predicate’s referent. It might of course be the right account of the meaning ground of the predicate, but this wouldn’t vindicate the universal applicability of the pragmatist model. The same point applies to González de Prado’s proposal to apply this approach to theoretical terms in science.

Reply to María Cerezo

María Cerezo highlights an interesting parallel between my position and the views expressed in Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*: the range of discourses for which I propose a pragmatist treatment are all among the discourses that Wittgenstein treats as consisting of “pseudo-propositions” or “non-sensical expressions”. As Cerezo points out, Wittgenstein’s reason for treating them in this way is not connected to the unavailability of referents for their terms: “The reason is rather that they attempt to say (to assert) what cannot be said (asserted).”

I think this parallel is not coincidental, and I’m grateful to Cerezo for highlighting it. Unlike other advocates of use-based semantics, I’m not proposing to apply the pragmatist model across the board, to deal with all representational discourses, but to apply it, specifically, to semantic discourses (and ethical discourse). My motivation for focusing on these areas is that they are those in which (my version of) the open-question argument precludes representationalist meaning grounds. As Cerezo observes, Wittgenstein’s reasons for selecting these discourses for

special treatment appear unrelated to mine, but I suspect there is a common pathology motivating Wittenstein's worries and mine that provides the ultimate explanation of why these discourses cannot be successfully brought under the default representationalist template. I have nothing useful to say at the moment about what this underlying problem might be, but I think that progress on this front would lead to a better understanding of the situation.

Cerezo's suggestion that the role that definitions by abstraction play for the pragmatist is similar to the role that elucidations play in the *Tractatus* is also illuminating. I think this parallel is very plausible on the reading of the *Tractatus* advanced by Hidé Ishiguro [Ishiguro (1969)], whose work Cerezo cites in this connection. As I argue elsewhere [Zalabardo Forthcoming], on Ishiguro's reading Wittgenstein's endorsement of Frege's Context Principle [TLP 3.3] points in the direction of Frege's discussion of the idea of defining the positive integers by abstraction using Hume's Principle. Furthermore, Ishiguro's proposal, I argue, is to understand the Tractarian account of the reference of names along the lines of the account of the reference of terms of the form "the number of Fs" that results from a right-to-left reading of Hume's Principle. And the role that Hume's Principle plays in the Fregean approach is played in the *Tractatus* precisely by elucidations. If this is the right reading of Ishiguro's ideas, and if Ishiguro's reading of the *Tractatus* is along the right lines, then our cognitive access to the referents of Tractarian names is closer in character to the access that we enjoy to the referents of predicates with pragmatist meaning grounds than to our access to the referents of predicates with representationalist meaning grounds. I realise that these remarks are hopefully imprecise, but articulating a specific proposal as to how pragmatist reference relates to Tractarian reference, on Ishiguro's reading, would take more work than I can do here.

Cerezo briefly raises some general concerns about the central role that the notion of acceptance is made to play in pragmatist meaning grounds. One of her worries is this: "if acceptance requires understanding the sentence [...], how can it really ground its meaning?" I think this is a legitimate concern and it's important to understand how the pragmatist hopes to remove it. There would be a problem here if facts about how the speaker understands the sentence were built into the notion of acceptance. For then we would be presupposing the very notion that we are supposed to explicate. But the pragmatist doesn't need to accept this point. She could maintain that the fact that the speaker accepts the sentence doesn't presuppose a pairing of the sentence with a state of affairs

that the sentence, as understood by the speaker, represents as obtaining. Acceptance typically includes the phenomenology of understanding, but the presence of this phenomenology doesn't require the sentence to have been paired with the state of affairs it represents.¹ This pairing could be produced, as the pragmatist suggests, by the procedure that regulates acceptance of the sentence, even though acceptance is accompanied by the phenomenology of understanding.

Cerezo also calls into question my claim that the feeling that acceptance consists in, on my view, will be reidentifiable. I suspect Cerezo is concerned that the speaker might make mistakes at this point—treat as an instance of acceptance a token feeling that isn't as a matter of fact acceptance, or fail to realise that a token feeling is an instance of acceptance. On the way I propose to understand the notion, the possibility of mistakes of this kind simply doesn't arise. The feeling type, acceptance, would be defined by the speaker's verdicts. A token feeling will be an instance of acceptance just in case this is how it seems to the speaker.

Cerezo then considers more specific challenges arising from the application of the model in the presence of vague terms. In the case of belief ascriptions, the problem is presented using as an example the following sentence:

(6) Juan believes that Emilia is blond.

Cerezo writes:

According to PS [the pragmatist model], the meaning grounds for (6) are accounted for in terms of the acceptance procedure that is based on the success of the behaviour predictions that ascribing the belief that Emilia is blond to Juan generates. However, since Emilia is a borderline case of blondness, it is likely that this procedure is not sufficient to regulate our acceptance of (6). Ascribing the belief to Juan might generate behaviour predictions whose degree of success does determine neither our acceptance nor our rejection of (6).

I'm not sure I see the problem. Ascribing to Juan the belief that Emilia is blond will generate behaviour predictions — e.g. we will predict that Juan will seek Emilia's company, if we have also ascribe to him the desire to hang out with blondes, etc. If Juan behaves in the predicted ways, the belief ascription will be confirmed. If he doesn't, the prediction will be

disconfirmed, independently of the fact that Emilia's hair is a borderline case. Now if we ascribed to Juan the belief that Emilia is a borderline case, that will also generate behavioural predications — perhaps we will predict that Juan will neither seek nor shun Emilia's company, having ascribed to him the desire to hang out exclusively with blondes. Once again, the belief ascription will be confirmed or disconfirmed depending on the success of the behaviour predictions it generates.

Perhaps more importantly, the pragmatist is not committed to the procedure always generating definite results. The pragmatist's point is that we count as ascribing a belief to Juan with sentence (6) just in case our acceptance of this sentence is regulated by the procedure I describe. We might definitely be applying this procedure even if it doesn't always yield definite results.

Cerezo then raises a similar issue for meaning ascriptions, using the following example:

(7) "Emilia is blond", as Juan understands it, means that Emilia is blond.

About this she writes:

given the indeterminacy inherent to the application of the predicate "blond" to Emilia, it is very likely that even if the speaker and the interpreter were in the same epistemic situation, they would not agree on whether Emilia is blond. This prevents the projection principle from playing its explanatory role to account for the meaning grounds for (7).

The indeterminacy of the projection exercise built into the notion of sameness of epistemic situation is an undeniable feature of the situation, whether or not vague terms are involved. The reason is, as Quine puts it, that "[c]asting our real selves thus in unreal roles, we do not generally know how much reality to hold constant" [Quine (1960), p. 219]. The problem is that we don't have clear answers to the following questions: in order for me to be in your epistemic situation, in what ways would I have to be similar to my actual self in order for it to be *me* who finds himself in that situation? and in what ways would I have to be different from my actual self in order to count as being in *your* epistemic situation? With or without vagueness, this will generate indeterminacies in the acceptance procedure that the pragmatist puts forward as the meaning ground of meaning ascriptions. However, as in the case of belief ascriptions, the

fact that the procedure doesn't always yield determinate results doesn't make it indeterminate whether the potential interpreter is following the procedure, and determinacy of this second kind is all that the pragmatist is committed to.

Reply to Robert Kraut

Robert Kraut's piece focuses with surgical accuracy on three central aspects of my project. He considers first the cluster of issues arising from the role of collateral information in speakers' acceptance of (assent to) sentences. Intuitively, we want to say that there's a difference between the following two cases:

- A means by the sentence "gavagai" that there's a rabbit nearby and accepts the sentence not only when she sees a rabbit, but also when she sees a certain type of fly, because she believes it to be a common rabbit parasite (call them rabbit-flies).
- B means by the sentence "gavagai" that there's either a rabbit or a rabbit fly nearby (she may or may not be aware of the connection between rabbits and rabbit-flies).

The problem for a use theory of meaning is that it's hard to see how this difference could be recovered from the speakers' patterns of sentence acceptance, as they would both accept "gavagai" in exactly the same circumstances.

As Kraut reminds us, Quine maintained that his notion of stimulus meaning could not accommodate this distinction, which would have to be treated as "illusory" [Quine (1960), p. 38]. Kraut argues that the same problem arises for Wilfrid Sellars' semantics. Kraut's question is, does my version of use-based semantics suffer from this kind of problem?

What we need to ask is whether there are cases where the pragmatist would want to say that linguistic expressions have different meanings but this difference has to be treated as illusory because the speakers' dispositions concerning the use of the expressions coincide.

Take the case of the predicate "is morally right", which I use in *Pragmatist Semantics* to illustrate the pragmatist approach. For the pragmatist, someone means by a predicate what we mean by "is morally right" just in case their ascription of the predicate to an action is regulated by whether the action produces moral approval in them.

Now consider these cases:

- C regulates her ascription of “is morally right” to an action by whether the action produces in her a sense of moral approval, but the actions that produce moral approval in her are precisely the actions sanctioned by the Bible.
- D regulates her ascription of “is morally right” to an action by whether the action is sanctioned by the Bible, independently of whether the action produces moral approval in her.

I think a version of the difficulty raised by Kraut would afflict a theory that tried to recover the meaning of these predicates from patterns of predicate ascription. Both speakers will ascribe their predicates to the same actions. Hence if meaning is determined by patterns of predicate ascription, we will have to conclude that C and D attach the same meaning to “is morally right”.

This is not what the pragmatist wants to say. For the pragmatist, C attaches to “is morally right” the same meaning as us, but D doesn’t. And I want to argue that the fact that C’s and D’s patterns of ascription of the predicate coincide is no obstacle to saying this. On my version of pragmatism, what makes a predicate with a pragmatist meaning ground have the meaning it has is not the speaker’s pattern of ascription, but the *procedure* with which this is regulated. And although patterns of predicate ascription arise from ascription procedures, sameness of pattern and sameness of procedure don’t always go hand in hand. On the one hand, we can have sameness of procedure but difference in patterns, as when you and I regulate our ascriptions of “is morally right” by our respective senses of moral approval, but we feel moral approval towards different actions. On the other hand, we can have sameness of pattern but difference in procedures, when two speakers regulate their ascriptions of a predicate with different procedures, but both procedures generate the same ascriptions of the predicate. This is the situation with C and D. Each speaker regulates her ascription of the predicate with a different procedure. The procedure employed by C is sufficient for her to count as meaning by “is morally right” what we mean by this predicate. D, by contrast, regulates her ascription of “is morally right” with a procedure that is incompatible with the predicate, as she understands it, meaning what we mean by it. The fact that the application of both procedures results in the same pattern of ascription poses no obstacle to this description of the situation.

It is of course possible to disagree with the pragmatist about whether this is the right result — to argue that D might also mean by “is morally right” what we mean by this predicate, in spite of the difference between her ascription procedure and ours. But this is a different issue.² What matters for our current purposes is that the differences in meaning that the pragmatist is committed to are not invalidated by cases in which patterns of linguistic use coincide.

There is an epistemological question as to how we find out which procedures speakers employ for regulating ascription of their predicates, but so long as we are prepared to accept that there can be different ascription procedures generating the same patterns of ascription, sameness of ascription patterns won’t force us to treat the differences in meaning to which the pragmatist is committed as illusory, independently of what we go on to say about how we discover these differences.

Kraut’s second point concerns the contrast between pragmatist and representationalist meaning grounds. He is worried that pragmatist meaning grounds might ultimately collapse into representationalist meaning grounds. He is right in thinking that a use-based approach *can* produce representationalist meaning grounds. This can happen in two ways, both discussed in *Pragmatist Semantics*. On the one hand, we can start from the ascription procedure of a predicate and take the predicate to refer to the property that an object instantiates just in case it satisfies the predicate’s ascription procedure. On the other hand, we can single out as the predicate’s referent the unique property, if there is one, whose presence in an object bears some causal/nomological relation to satisfaction by the object of the predicate’s ascription procedure. Both these positions would be versions of representationalism.

The question that we need to consider is whether pragmatist meaning grounds *must* take either of these forms, or whether, on the contrary, we can refrain from making them yield explicit definitions of the referents of the target predicates. I want to argue that it’s perfectly possible for the pragmatist to avoid this collapse into representationalism.

Take the predicate “means that snow is white”. As Kraut explains, the pragmatist would treat as the meaning ground of this predicate the procedure with which we regulate its ascription to a sentence, as described in Chapter 7 of *Pragmatist Semantics*. On this view, the predicate has the meaning it has by virtue of the fact that its ascription is regulated in this way, and someone will mean by one of her predicates what we mean by “means that snow is white” just in case they regulate their ascription of their predicate using this same procedure.

One could now note that the meaning-grounding procedure for the predicate can be used to define a sentence-property — the property of receiving a favourable verdict from the predicate’s ascription procedure — and maintain that the predicate refers to this property. If we make this move, we effect the collapse into representationalism that Kraut worries about.

However, the pragmatist would maintain that this move is not mandatory, and that her own position explicitly refrains from making it. She would add that there are good reasons for this. The meaning-grounding procedures for meaning ascriptions are substantially context-dependent. In particular, they will produce different verdicts on a given sentence when applied by different interpreters. You and I could correctly apply the meaning-grounding procedure for “means that snow is white” to a foreign sentence and come to different verdicts. Hence, if we wanted to use these ascription procedures to define referents for meaning-ascribing predicates, we would have to make these predicates refer to different properties as understood by different interpreters, in conflict with the intuitions about synonymy that the pragmatist aims to preserve. For the pragmatist, those of us who use the same ascription procedure for the predicate “means that snow is white” ascribe the same meaning to it, even though we might disagree on the verdicts that individual sentences receive from this procedure. If we made the representationalist move, we would have to accept that the predicate refers to different properties and hence has different meanings as understood by different putative interpreters.

One could try to prevent the representationalist move from clashing with our synonymy intuitions in this way by defining the referent of “means that snow is white” not in terms of the verdicts that you or I would obtain if we applied the procedure, but in terms of those that would be obtained by an ideal interpreter or under ideal conditions, but these manoeuvres face familiar obstacles, that I discuss in *Pragmatist Semantics*.

One could argue that the representationalist collapse is mandatory using the following reasoning: if we represent the world with our ascriptions of “means that snow is white”, as the pragmatist maintains, there’s got to be a property that we represent a sentence as instantiating when we ascribe the predicate to it. And from the pragmatist’s chosen starting point the only property that could be seen as playing this role is the property of receiving a favourable verdict from the predicate’s ascription procedure. The material in Chapter 8 of *Pragmatist Semantics* is intended to block this line of reasoning. “means that snow is white” must indeed

refer to a property, but the pragmatist doesn't need to provide an explicit definition of the property playing this role. She could use instead the kind of 'thick' definition by abstraction described in that chapter.

Kraut's final point concerns the relationship between my position and his own Robust Deflationism. As he notes, there is one important point of contact between the two views, as we both object to promiscuity in the ascription of predicates such as "is descriptive", "is representational" or "has truth conditions". Neither for Kraut, nor for me do these predicates apply to every well-formed indicative sentence. There is, however, an important difference between the two views. On Kraut's view, these predicates have a non-representational function. 'S is descriptive', he writes, "serves to render explicit the conviction that S plays an ineliminable role in explanation". By taking this line we reach the perplexing result that sentences ascribing descriptive character are not themselves descriptive. Contrary to what others have argued, I can't see that there's any problem with this—transcendental arguments for semantic realism don't seem to me to work [see p. 156]. However, I think our intuition that these sentences are representational is as strong as our intuition concerning meaning or belief ascriptions, and it would be preferable, other things being equal, to have an account of the semantics of "S is representational" that vindicates this intuition. This is what I try to do in *Pragmatist Semantics* [section 7.13], by providing a pragmatist meaning ground for these sentences: they have the (representational) meaning they have by virtue of the procedure with which we regulate their acceptance.

Reply to Juan José Acero

In his insightful contribution, Juan José Acero uses the label *the flight from content* to characterise what he sees as one of the main strands of my project. The label may well be accurate, but I'd like to spell out in some detail the sense in which I would accept that it applies to my project. If fleeing from content means refraining from ascribing an explanatory role in semantics to referential relations between language and the world, then it is undeniable that the pragmatist would count as fleeing from content in the regions of discourse for which she proposes pragmatist meaning grounds. Thus understood, flight from content is just a label for the rejection of representationalist construals of these discourses. However, the label suggests that rejecting representationalism in these cases is a matter of choice — that I could and perhaps should have chosen instead to ascribe to semantic relations the theoretical weight that

they bear on the representationalist model. This is not how I see the conceptual landscape here. I motivate my proposal by arguing that the representationalist model doesn't work in these cases—that language-world relations cannot bear the explanatory weight for the target discourses that representationalists ascribe to them. If this argument is accepted (and Acero doesn't say he doesn't accept it), then my rejection of representationalism would be more aptly characterised, not as a flight from content, but as forced eviction. As I see it, the range of options we are free to choose from concerning the meaning grounds of semantic discourses does not include representationalist meaning grounds.

Furthermore, among the options that are available to us, I would argue that my position brings the target discourses closer to representational content than any of the alternatives—in fact, I argue, as close as any discourse can be. Error theories deny that the sentences of these discourses have content of any kind. Non-cognitivism in its various forms (expressivism, instrumentalism, etc.) only ascribes to these sentences non-representational content. Quasi-realism does aim to treat the target sentences as having representational content, but I argue that it fails to achieve this. My claim is that the version of pragmatism that I offer is our only chance of ascribing genuine representational content to these sentences. Although I ascribe no explanatory role to semantic relations with the world, the end result is a characterisation of the target sentences on which they bear semantic relations to the world in the same sense as discourses for which these relations do play an explanatory role. This suggests to me that the phrase *flight from content* doesn't accurately represent my position. The label *semantic nihilism* that Acero also use for my view strikes me as equally unjustified.

Acero also finds evidence of my flight from content in my construal of acceptance as a feeling of conviction produced by certain sentences. I think here the pragmatist has no plausible alternative. Construing acceptance as a relation to a content is out of the question, since the content of the target sentence is the notion we are trying to explicate in terms of procedures for regulating acceptance. This also goes, by the way, for the position that Acero labels *representationalist pragmatism*. Thinking of it as the ascription of a property (truth) to the target sentence is not very promising either, if we want to avoid a representationalist account of the meaning grounds of truth ascriptions, as I've argued we must do. For then we would have to specify the meaning grounds of truth ascriptions in terms of their acceptance procedures, and construing acceptance in this context as ascription of truth would land us in an infi-

nite regress. Hence providing pragmatist meaning grounds for the target sentences does seem to me to require construing acceptance along the lines of a feeling.³ If we put this point together with my contention that representationalist meaning grounds are not available for the target sentences, it starts to seem hard to see how the meaning grounds of these sentences could fail to invoke the “empiricist” construal of acceptance.

Acero then focuses on my account of the meaning grounds of belief ascriptions. He takes issue with my description of the procedure with which we regulate these ascriptions, as based on their efficacy in the prediction of the subject’s behaviour. He claims, correctly, that no argument for this description is offered. And argument, he claims, would be needed, because there is an alternative at our disposal. On this alternative, our acceptance of belief and desire ascriptions is regulated by how well they capture the subject’s “belief-and-desire-world”. Following this procedure involves accepting belief and desire ascriptions on the basis of how faithful they are to the way the subject “sees the world, or its relevant part”. It’s not clear to me that this description of our procedure can be effectively used to specify the meaning grounds of belief ascriptions. As far as I can see, being faithful to how the subject sees the world is tantamount to ascribing to the subject the beliefs she actually has. But we can’t think of this — what the subject believes — as an independently defined notion, as we are in the process of explicating discourse about what the subject believes. Once we accept that this discourse should receive pragmatist meaning grounds, we are committed to seeing the meaning-grounding acceptance procedure as a specification of who counts as ascribing beliefs, i.e. as aiming to be faithful to the beliefs the subject has, or the way she sees the world. This goal, for the pragmatist, is defined by the meaning-grounding procedure, and cannot figure without circularity in our description of this procedure.

Acero also characterises my view as naturalist and seems to regard this as a disadvantage of the view. It’s important to see that in one sense of the term naturalism, corresponding to what Huw Price has called *object naturalism* [Price (2011)], the position I’m defending is diametrically opposed to naturalism. For the object naturalist, only items definable in the language of the natural sciences are eligible as referents of our terms. Terms for which we cannot secure a natural referent simply fail to refer. My position openly opposes this view. Terms with pragmatist meaning grounds have referents, but the items playing this role cannot be defined in the language of the natural sciences. The only possible definitions of these are the definitions by abstraction I describe in Chapter 8, based on

the procedures we employ for applying these terms. And contrary to what the object naturalist maintains, these items are just as real as those that can receive definitions in the language of the natural sciences.

My position is naturalist, however, in the sense of what Price calls *subject naturalism*. We are natural creatures, and language is a natural phenomenon. Our account of the meaning of linguistic expressions has to be compatible with these basic facts. In particular, our description of meaning-grounding acceptance procedures has to be recognisable as a description of how these natural creatures engage in the natural activity of linguistic communication. It's not clear to me whether Acero finds naturalism in this sense objectionable. If he does, that's a clear point of disagreement between us.

Reply to Bethany Smith

Bethany Smith's contribution offers an interesting comparison between the approach advanced in *Pragmatist Semantics* and the brand of pragmatism developed by Huw Price. One difference between the two positions that Smith highlights is that on my approach there is a binary distinction between discourses that represent the world and those that don't, whereas for Price, as Smith puts it, "for a given type of discourse there is an axis of representational function and non-representational function with the position of a sentence or perhaps a discourse sliding between extremes".

On my position, representational character is a property that some discourses have and some lack. This property is defined by abstraction, as the property that is the referent of those predicates whose ascription to a sentence is regulated by whether we treat acceptance of the sentence as subject to an absolute standard of correctness. When I treat acceptance of a sentence as subject to an absolute standard of correctness, if I accept (/reject) the sentence, I regard as incorrect its rejection (/acceptance) by any speaker at any time at which the speaker means by the sentence what I mean by it. On the view that I present, discourses are divided between those whose sentences we treat in this way and those whose sentences we don't treat in this way. On Price's view, by contrast, discourses are arranged in a sliding scale according to the extent to which we treat acceptance of their sentences as subject to an absolute standard of correctness. Furthermore, for Price, no discourse exhibits the maximum degree of absoluteness: "The so-called absolute standard is never entirely absolute" [Price Forthcoming].

I think there are powerful intuitive reasons in support of Price's idea that "representation always comes by degrees" [Price Forthcoming]. The inclination to treat rejection as always incorrect when we accept a sentence is felt with different degrees of strength for different discourses, and there is a wide range of discourses that seem to fall somewhere between the ends of the spectrum. Sentences stating what's funny, tasty, beautiful or stylish are likely candidates for this treatment. On the position presented in *Pragmatist Semantics*, there is no mechanism for ascribing to these discourses a less than complete degree of representational character. This is not an aspect of my view that I feel strongly about, and I wouldn't oppose a treatment of these discourses that somehow articulated the contrast between them and fully non-representational discourses.

What matters more to me is the thought that there are discourses for which the absolute standard is 'entirely absolute', and that these include discourses with pragmatist meaning grounds and, specifically, the semantic discourses I focus on in the book. If I accept "Mary believes that there's water in the fridge", or "la neige est blanche", as understood by Pierre, means that snow is white", or "snow is white' is true", then I treat rejection of these sentences by anyone who means by them what I mean by them as incorrect.

Price seems to think that there will always have to be a limit to how absolute the associated standards of correctness can be, on the grounds that "all assertoric discourses have the potential to force us to admit no fault disagreements" [Price Forthcoming]. Now, the concept of no fault disagreement can be construed in two different ways [Kölbel (2002), pp. 22-28]. On one construal, in order for disagreement about *p* to be no fault, neither acceptance nor rejection of *p* can count as incorrect. On the other construal, disagreement about *p* can be no fault even if either acceptance or rejection of *p* is incorrect, so long as the cognitive mechanisms leading to acceptance by one party and rejection by the other are functioning correctly. Call no fault disagreement of the first kind *strongly faultless*, and those of the second kind *weakly faultless*.

I think that weakly faultless disagreement is perfectly possible in the discourses that interest me. Two interpreters can produce conflicting interpretations even though they have both faultlessly applied the meaning-grounding acceptance procedures for interpretation. The reason is that the results produced by these procedures are highly dependent on features of the cognitive make-up of interpreters that will be different from interpreter to interpreter. But the possibility of weakly faultless disagreement is perfectly compatible with the relevant standard of correct-

ness being entirely absolute. We can still say that one party to the disagreement will have produced an incorrect interpretation, even if the cognitive mechanisms that produced it were functioning correctly. We won't have a procedure for deciding which of the faultlessly produced interpretations is incorrect, but this epistemic limitation should not reduce our conviction that one of the interpretations *is* incorrect — or our commitment to the correctness of the interpretation that was produced by our own application of the relevant acceptance procedures.

With respect to strongly faultless disagreement, however, the situation is entirely different. Treating a sentence as representational, on my construal of the notion, carries a commitment to treating strongly faultless disagreement as impossible. If I accept a representational sentence, then I must treat its rejection by anyone who means by the sentence what I mean by it as incorrect, even if the cognitive mechanisms leading to this rejection were functioning correctly. I maintain (a) that unconditional refusal to accept strongly faultless disagreement in a discourse is a perfectly coherent attitude, (b) that adopting this attitude is at least one way of manifesting our understanding of the discourse as representational and (c) that we take this attitude to the semantic discourses I discuss in *Pragmatist Semantics*. Now, it might be that adopting this attitude towards a discourse is not necessary for treating it as representational — that there are discourses that behave in a different way and still deserve the label of representational. In a spirit of consensus, I'm happy to keep an open mind about this. In fact, once we've described the rules governing a discourse without entirely absolute standards of correctness, in my sense, so long as the description of the rules is correct, I'm not sure we should worry too much about whether we should use the label 'representational' for discourses that behave in that way.

Reply to Manuel Liz

In his highly original contribution, Manuel Liz offers a strategy for grounding the abstraction principles used in Chapter 8 of *Pragmatist Semantics* to identify the referents of predicates with pragmatist meaning grounds. His proposal is to ground these abstraction principles in “more fundamental processes of projecting phenomena into certain multidimensional spaces.” Here's Liz's explanation of why the referent-identifying abstraction principles need to be grounded in something more fundamental:

The abstraction principles proposed by Zalabardo assume numerous simplifications and idealisations, many of them normative. The principles require the existence of some equivalence relations between language uses. But the identification of these equivalence relations depends on multiple decisions and commitments. The formulation of abstraction principles through conditions that are not only sufficient but also necessary is again the result of simplifications and idealisations. Also, it is an idealisation that an abstraction function assigns properties as references of the analysed predicates. All these simplifications and idealisations should be justified by something more fundamental.

I would like to hear more about the simplifications and idealisations that Liz has in mind. He is surely right that we cannot just take a complete description of a speaker's ascription procedure for a predicate *P* with a pragmatist meaning ground and plug this description into the right-hand-side of an abstraction principle that will identify the referent of *P*. This would produce unduly strong synonymy and co-reference conditions for *P*, as many features of the procedure that regulates its ascription will not be required for a predicate to be synonymous and co-referential with *P*. Identifying the right level of description for the meaning-grounding ascription procedure will require substantial work, of the kind undertaken in Chapters 6 and 7 for semantic predicates. The resulting description of an ascription procedure will involve simplification and idealisation, in that it will abstract from specific features of the ascription procedures employed by individual speakers, as these will not affect the synonymy or co-reference of their predicates. But I can't see how these simplifications and idealisations generate the need to ground the resulting abstraction principles in more fundamental principles. I accept that there's a need to justify our decision to treat an ascription procedure, at a specific level of abstraction, as grounding the meaning of a predicate, but I wouldn't expect this justification to be provided by a more fundamental principle. *Pragmatist Semantics* doesn't spell out explicitly where this justification should come from, but it seems to me that the ultimate source of justification for these decisions is provided by our synonymy intuitions — intuitions concerning the circumstances under which a speaker would mean by one of their predicates what we mean by the target predicate. The meaning-grounding status of an ascription procedure will be justified by our intuitions if they dictate that using the procedure to regulate ascription of a predicate is a sufficient (and necessary) condition for a speaker

to mean by this predicate what we mean by the target predicate. I don't think it's necessary or even possible to dig deeper.

In Chapter 8 of *Pragmatist Semantics*, the images of predicates under the abstraction operators of their referent-identifying abstraction principles are assumed to be properties. Liz appears to see this as a controversial restriction, and claims as an advantage of his alternative approach that his invariance functions have as their values invariance classes, which can later be 'pleonastically' designated as properties. Liz's position on this point is influenced, I think, by his assumption that abstraction principles only provide a partial and incomplete identification of the values of abstraction operators:

we must insist that this assignment will inevitably be partial and non-specific. The properties that appear as values of the abstraction functions are determined in a very incomplete manner.

This complaint is based on the idea that definitions by abstraction provide only a preliminary specification of the identity of the values of abstraction operators, to be completed by identifying these values with suitable items in our pre-existing ontological catalogue. On this understanding of definitions by abstraction, corresponding to what I call, following Paolo Mancosu, *thin* definitions, we can't take for granted that the items that (uniquely) satisfy the restriction imposed by referent-identifying abstraction principle will be properties. However, as Liz acknowledges, my proposal is based on treating definitions by abstraction as providing *complete* identifications of the identity of the values of predicates under abstraction operators, with no need to locate them in our pre-existing ontological catalogue. This is what I call, again following Mancosu, *thick* definitions. From this perspective, the claim that abstraction principles pick out properties as the referents of predicates is not a prediction as to where in our ontological catalogue we are going to find the items that satisfy the abstraction principles. Rather, it simply registers the fact that to be the referent of a predicate is a sufficient condition for an item to be a property, and consequently the items picked out by abstraction principles as referents of predicates automatically qualify for this status.

I can't do justice here to the suggestive strategy that Liz proposes to employ to ground my abstraction principles in his projection principles, but I want to register one concern about the direction in which this

move would take us. Liz doesn't say very much about the phenomenon of projection, on which his proposal is based, but he does tell us this:

The relevant projection processes take place in our experience and thought, whether conscious or unconscious.

It seems then that, on Liz's proposal, the images of predicates under invariance functions are singled out by projective mental processes. This raises the question of whose mental process are at work here — those of the speakers or those of the semanticist? In either case, the resulting picture seems to me to ascribe to mental processes a role in the determination of referents that they don't have under my proposal. If nothing else, this would surely call into question the superior Wittgensteinian credentials that Liz claims for his approach.

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NOTES

¹ In fact, as the later Wittgenstein observed, the phenomenology could be present in cases in which no sentence-state of affairs pairing exists.

² The debates concerning the possibility of moral testimony are relevant to this issue. See, e.g., (Hopkins 2007).

³ I give my reasons for rejecting an account of acceptance in terms of commitment in my discussion of Brandom in Section 5.6.3.

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