

PRICE ON EXPRESSIVISM AND THE PLACEMENT PROBLEM

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RESUMEN

En “Naturalismo sin representacionalismo”, Huw Price propone una variedad de naturalismo –una que él denomina naturalismo del sujeto– que supuestamente puede evitar los problemas de la localización relacionados con entidades “incómodas” como son los hechos morales, los significados, las verdades matemáticas y otras similares. A partir de una concepción expresivista de todo el lenguaje, Price defiende que los problemas de la localización descansan sobre un error categorial: el error consiste en considerar que toda oración representa algún estado de hechos mundano. En nuestro trabajo, a partir de nuestra crítica al expresivismo de Price, cuestionaremos su respuesta a los problemas de la localización.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Naturalismo del sujeto, representacionalismo, expresivismo global, deflacionismo, verdad.

ABSTRACT

In his article “Naturalism Without Representationalism”, Price proposes a variety of naturalism –subject naturalism, as he calls it- that is supposedly able to avoid placement problems about “odd” entities such as moral facts, meanings, mathematical truths and the like. Assuming an expressivist conception about the entire language, Price argues that placement problems rest on a category mistake: the mistake of considering all sorts of sentences as representing worldly states of

affairs. In this article, by arguing against Price's expressivism, I call his response to placement problems into question. My thesis is that placement problems are genuine ontological problems.

KEY WORDS: Subject Naturalism, Representationalism, Global Expressivism; Deflationism; Truth.

1. In "Naturalism Without Representationalism", Price characterizes philosophical naturalism as "the view that natural science constrains philosophy" in the sense that "science takes the lead where the two overlap" (2011a, p. 184). Although the term "philosophical naturalism" has many senses in the literature, Price considers this as the basic one (2011a, p. 184). That sort of naturalism, understood in non-representational terms, is the one Price defends against another form of naturalism –"popular" or "object naturalism", as he calls it. Thus, Price supports a sort of naturalism without representationalism, which he calls "subject naturalism". Object naturalism exists in both ontological and epistemological keys. As an ontological doctrine, object naturalism is the view that "all there *is* is the world studied by science" (2011a, p. 185). As an epistemological doctrine, it is the view according to which "all genuine knowledge is scientific knowledge" (2011a, p. 185). Object naturalism, so characterized, faces what Price calls "placement problems", i.e., problems about how to place "odd" entities such as moral facts, mathematical truths, meanings, causation and physical modality in the natural world, that is, the world studied by science. In contrast to object naturalism, Price opts for his particular variety of naturalism, subject naturalism, which holds that "philosophy needs to begin with what science tells us *about ourselves*" (2011a, p. 186). This variety of naturalism is in agreement with the basic sense of the term "naturalism", because if the claims of philosophy conflict with science –which tells us that we are natural creatures- then philosophy needs to relinquish its aspirations. Subject naturalism combines the epistemological doctrine, according to which all genuine knowledge is scientific knowledge, with an expressivist conception of language. This particular variety of naturalism is capable of avoiding

–Price thinks- placement problems that undermine object naturalism in a way that I will briefly explain.

Price claims that there are two possible conceptions of the origins of placement problems. In the first one, the problems begin with linguistic data. Their starting point lies in human linguistic practice: we begin by noting that we use the term “X” in our language. Price calls this view of the origin of the placement problem “the linguistic conception”. When object naturalism adopts this view, it strives to consider how what speakers talk about could be the kind of thing studied by science. In the second view on the origins of placement problems, these difficulties begin with the objects themselves: in the light of a commitment to object naturalism, we are acquainted with X, and hence come to wonder how X could be a natural thing, an object studied by science. Price calls this way of addressing placement problems “the material conception”. Now, once one assumes that the linguistic conception is the correct one (Price makes some considerations in favor of this idea), and once one assumes anti-representationalism, one can arrive at the conclusion that there are no material problems at all: placement problems about meanings, values or mathematical truths do not arise anymore. Placement problems arise only when attention is shifted from the terms themselves to what they are about, that is, when one uncritically assumes representationalism. Once one adopts global expressivism –as Price suggests- one can see placement problems as resting on a category mistake: the mistake of considering moral, mathematical, etc. assertions as descriptive (or representational). If those kinds of assertions do not actually refer, the problem of how to integrate their referents into scientific ontology does not arise.¹ Without a representationalist conception of language, theoretical problems remain in the linguistic realm; they are puzzles about the plurality of ways of talking. The challenge is now to explain –in naturalistic terms- how human beings come to talk

¹ I think that expressivism is implausible for the case of sentences such as “The linguistic expression X (a word or sentence) means...”. Sentences of this sort do not express an evaluative attitude of the speaker. Notwithstanding this, I will not consider this particular point in the article.

in these different ways, and what role these different language games play in their lives.²

Although subject naturalism may indeed motivate some interesting questions,³ I will focus my attention on the key theoretical assumption of Price's argumentative strategy for dissolving placement problems: his global expressivist conception of language. In criticizing Price's expressivism I do not purport to defend object naturalism, but, instead, to (re)introduce the question of placement problems into the debate between naturalists and non-naturalists. This reintroduction could result –and this is what I would like to say– even if the resulting position consists in claiming that –as anti-reductionists argue– it is not possible to reduce the entities in question to a privileged ontology.⁴

2. Expressivism is often characterized as a meta-ethical theory according to which sentences that employ moral terms are not descriptive or fact-stating. Moral terms such as “good”, “just” or “brave” do not refer to real properties in the world, and, for this reason, sentences that contain moral terms have no truth conditions, and do not represent moral facts. The main function of moral sentences, according to expressivists, is not to assert any matter of fact, but rather to express an evaluative attitude toward an object of evaluation. This is why expressivism is sometimes considered to be a variety of “non-factualism” or “non-cognitivism”.

Price describes non-cognitivism as making two claims about its target discourse, a negative and a positive one. The negative claim asserts that “these terms or statements lack some semantically characterized features: they are non-

² Price thinks that subject naturalism is prior to object naturalism because the latter rests on an assumption about language –representationalism– that the former questions. According to Price, there are good reasons to think that representationalism will not be found true from the point of view of object naturalism itself. But will science find that global expressivism is true?

³ For example, why does Price assume that language, in all its dimensions, can be investigated by science? How could scientific and moral vocabularies be articulated in a unified image of the world?

⁴ Expressivism faces several objections: the Frege-Geach problem, for instance, or the deflationist objection. Price tries to respond to some of them (see “Semantic Minimalism and Frege Point” and “Immodesty Without Mirrors: Making Sense on Wittgenstein's Linguistic Pluralism”).

referential, non-truth-apt, non-descriptive, non-factual or something of the kind” (2011f, p. 260-261). The positive claim offers “an alternative account of the functions of the language in question –for example, that it expresses, or projects from, evaluative attitudes” (p. 261).⁵ The first claim expresses an anti-representationalist point of view about the target discourse; the second one is the typical expressivist thesis about the true function of that sort of discourse.

Then traditional expressivism, so characterized, is local because it is posited for a specific region of discourse (moral discourse, for example). In this sense, local expressivism retains the idea that at least some domains of our language are representational in character. Price’s expressivism, in contrast, is global because, according to him, there is no need to maintain the idea that some parts of our language represent worldly states of affairs. According to global expressivism, then, we should stop speaking of representations altogether: we should “abandon the project of theorizing about word-world in these terms” (2011b, p. 10). There are two main ingredients in Price’s global expressivism, the anti-representationalist view about the whole language, and the thesis of functional pluralism of language. In line with the former, the function of language is not to describe or represent reality. And in line with the latter, language has many functions, even when we consider assertions alone⁶. Price thinks that global expressivism is perfectly compatible with a certain kind of naturalism –subject naturalism- and with deflationism or minimalism about semantic notions.

Now, representationalism is a conception of language and knowledge that can be understood in, at least, two different ways. In its strongest version, Representationalism (with a capital “R”) has been the target of many philosophers of different provenance, non-factualists as well as factualists.⁷ The variety of Representationalism that is the target of those philosophers is the one committed with the idea that the world is something different from the world as it figures in our (actual or possible) worldviews.⁸ Thus, in order to know whether or not our sentences or beliefs actually represent the world, we are obliged to try “to climb

⁵ See also p. 240

⁶ See p. 201-202.

⁷ See Rorty (1991), Putnam (1981), Davidson (1984), McDowell (1998).

⁸ The world so conceived is “the world well lost”, as Rorty calls it. See (1982).

outside our own minds” (1986, p. 9), in Nagel’s expression, to step outside our language so as to find out the corresponding entities which presumably make our sentences or beliefs true. However, as some philosophers have pointed out, this is absurd.⁹ We cannot leave aside our language (or our conceptual capacities associated with it) to see whether sentences and beliefs actually correspond to the world or not because, in order to understand the relevant states of affairs, we need language itself. Hence, it is useless to try to explain the representational character of language by appealing to the relations between our sentences and the world thus understood.

However, rejecting Representationalism does not necessarily entail accepting global expressivism. Price characterizes representationalism as “the assumption that the *linguistic* items in question ‘stand for’ or ‘represent’ something non-linguistic” (2011a, p. 189). Properly understood, this weak characterization allows for what may be called “representationalism” (without a capital “R”), that is, a milder variety of representationalism. As Price himself notes, the assumption seems trivial. In effect, is it not a truism that “X” (a linguistic expression) refers to X (an object)? I think it actually is. Understood in this sense, representationalism (without a capital “R”) is not a semantic theory, but just common sense. According to this common-sense view, linguistic expressions stand for or represent objects and states of affairs *such as they appear in our worldview*.¹⁰ This allows us to properly grasp what is implied in the comprehension of everyday sentences such as, “John is in the kitchen” or “There is a bottle of milk in the fridge”. In these cases, we are obviously talking about certain objects (John and a bottle of milk, respectively); and we know that these sentences are true if and only if John is actually in the kitchen and if there is actually a bottle of milk in the fridge at the moment in which the sentences are asserted.

Yet there are two important explanatory reasons for retaining representationalism. Firstly, representationalism, as I have characterized it, allows us to understand how linguistic expressions relate to action. If you understand that

⁹ Davidson (2001, p. 144), Rorty (1991, p. 6).

¹⁰ I believe that this variety of representationalism can be found in McDowell (1994), (2000), Putnam (1999) and others.

the sentence “There is a bottle of milk in the fridge” stands for a certain state of affairs; and if you are looking for a bottle of milk, you know where to get it. The sentence can guide your actions because it represents the location of the bottle.¹¹ It is hard to see both how this sense of the term “representation” could be objectionable and how one could explain the guiding role of beliefs without appealing to it. In particular, it is hard to fathom, at least *prima facie*, how the internal notion of representation developed by Price could explain how beliefs may guide actions. In effect, Price distinguishes between two different notions of representation: one external and another internal. In line with the first one, representations are mental tokens that co-vary with some external factor or environmental condition. In the second one, the internal notion of representation, is characterized as a token which counts as a representation, not in virtue of some external factor, but rather “in virtue of its position, or role, in some sort of cognitive or inferential architecture –in virtue of its links, within a network, to other items of the same general kinds” (2011b, p. 20). Whereas Price clearly dismisses the first notion of representation, he accepts the second one. It may now be conceded, of course, that representations have inferential relations with other representations; however, since Price does not ascribe them the capacity of representing external factors or environmental conditions, it is hard to see how they could guide action. If we assume that our representations do not match anything in the world, if “the entire image is free-standing” (2011b, p. 38), what reason could we have for acting in light of what they tell us? If the sentence “There is a bottle of milk in the fridge” is *only* a node within a network composed by other nodes, without any reference to something external to it, why would we have to take it as a reason for looking for the bottle in the fridge?¹²

¹¹ Anti-representationalists such as Rorty and James have claimed that beliefs and sentences are instruments for coping with reality, but it is mysterious how that would be possible without appealing to the representational character of sentences and beliefs.

¹² Likewise, it could be plausibly argued that other sorts of sentences –moral sentences, for instance- are able to guide action in virtue of their representational function. For example, given the relevant purposes, the sentence “John is honest” may guide your action in virtue of the property which is ascribed to John.

Secondly, common-sense representationalism allows us to understand how assertions and perceptions can be related to each other. In effect, if you have doubts about whether the sentence “There is a bottle of milk in the fridge” is true, you can verify it by opening the fridge and seeing whether there is a bottle of milk in it or not.¹³ In doing so, you intuitively confront the sentence in question with a certain state of affairs *such as you perceive it*. The state of affairs that the sentence “There is a bottle of milk in the fridge” stands for, when asserted, is the same state of affairs you can perceive. You can perceive it as such if you have (among other conditions) the same concepts that are involved in the corresponding sentence.¹⁴ In order for this to be the case, you need not to climb outside your own mind. The objects for which the words stand are the very objects and states of affairs you can perceive, namely, objects that constitute a part of our everyday ontology, appearing as such in our language games.¹⁵ My argument is, then, as follows. Perception discloses the world to us; it reveals to us how objects are arranged in states of affairs. By doing so, it can help us to determine whether sentences that refer to those states of affairs are true or not. This epistemic role of perception is possible only because we understand that sentences stand for the states of affairs we can perceive.

Just like Rorty, Davidson and Brandom, Price may respond to this line of thought by arguing that perception does not disclose the world to us at all.¹⁶ He could claim perception is merely a causal intermediary between our minds and reality. From that point of view, perceptual experiences would not be mental episodes with any content, but the cause of our observational judgments and beliefs. With Davidson, he could claim that to perceive that *p* is, under appropriate circumstances, to be caused (in the right way) by one’s senses to believe that *p*.¹⁷

¹³ Action can also help to verify sentences. The fact that one can do something can be a sign that the world is arranged thus and so.

¹⁴ This epistemic connection between assertions and perception plausibly explains how it is possible for empirical assertions to have empirical content. See McDowell (1994).

¹⁵ Likewise, it may be argued that a moral sentence such as “John is kind” can be verified by looking at how John behaves.

¹⁶ See, for example, Rorty (1998); Davidson (2001); Brandom (2002).

¹⁷ I am paraphrasing what Davidson claims in (2001, p. xvi).

Thus, Price could reject the idea according to which perception helps us, by means of a confrontation between sentences and the world such as it is perceived, to determine the truth-value of observational sentences, and then, he could deny that there is any reason to think that sentences stand for anything in the world.

However, the idea that perceptual experience is merely a causal intermediary between perceptual beliefs and the world is implausible for several reasons. To begin with, to perceive that *p* cannot merely mean to be caused by one's senses to believe that *p* because the phenomenology of perceptual experiences is different from the one of perceptual beliefs. In effect, while in perception the world appears to us under one or another modality (vision, touch, etc.), perceptual beliefs a-modally represent states of affairs. Secondly, some cases have been mentioned in favor of the independence of perceptual experience with respect to belief. In effect, there are situations in which we know that things are not as they look. For example, according to my visual experience, it seems to me that the two lines of the Müller-Lyer illusion differ in length even though I know that they are of the same length. In cases like this one, one is not obliged to believe that things are as they appear in perceptual experience.¹⁸ So if perceptual experience can contradict what one believes (the lines look different in length while one is having a visual experience of them, yet one does not believe that they differ in length), then it cannot be true that experience is only a causal link between beliefs and the world, as Davidson and his followers claim. If perceptual experiences can contradict beliefs, they must be mental states with their own content. Thirdly, it could be argued that, if perception did not put us in cognitive contact with the world, if perception were a mere causal linkage between our minds and states of affairs, we would not have any reason to think our judgments and beliefs are about the world at all. For if a confrontation between perceptual beliefs and the world such as it could be perceived is impossible (because perceptual experiences do not disclose the world to us), if perceptual experiences only causally (but not epistemically) mediated between beliefs and the world, how could we know what the cause of perceptual beliefs are? Without the epistemic role of perceptual experiences the world would become the incognizable source of

¹⁸ See Evans (1982, p. 123).

our sensory affections. This would reintroduce a notion of world that Rorty – another anti-representationalist- rightly considers well lost.¹⁹

Finally, the suggested idea of a confrontation between sentences and the corresponding states of affairs such as they are perceived becomes even more compelling when we consider sentences with demonstrative expressions. Let's consider, for example, the sentence "This bottle is empty", asserted in front of a certain bottle, accompanied with an indicative gesture in direction of the relevant bottle. In this sort of cases, there is no question the demonstrative expression "This bottle" stands for this bottle. If you do not grasp that relation, you simply cannot understand what the speaker means. In cases like this, to know what the speaker talks about, to know what in the world her assertion refers to, is to understand what she says. Thus, in the case of the understanding of assertions with demonstrative expressions, the relation of "standing for" between words and objects seems to be indispensable.

To sum up what I have said so far, the importance of holding on to the idea that language is representationally related to the world lies in the fact that it allows us to explain three related problems: the relation between sentences and actions when the former guide, in part, the latter; the epistemic relation between observational sentences and relevant perceptions; and how we can understand sentences which involve demonstrative expressions. In these cases, it is crucial for the objects or states of affairs that sentences stand for to be the same as the objects or states of affairs being perceived or looked for. Given a sentence about your immediate surroundings and an adequate wish, you would know (if you take the sentence to be true) where to look because you would understand that the sentence stands for a certain state of affairs in the world. Similarly, you would know that perceiving a state of affairs in the world can allow verification of the sentence that refers to it because you would understand that the sentence, if it is true, stands for that state of affairs. When sentences contain demonstrative expressions, perception is necessary not only for their verification, but also for understanding them. Understanding demonstrative expressions presupposes the idea that they stand for their referents. Of course, nothing that I have said in this

¹⁹ I develop these arguments in Kalpokas (2012), and (2014).

section cancels out our acknowledgment that some sorts of sentences do not represent worldly states of affairs. My point merely is that some kinds of sentences (for instance, empirical and perhaps moral sentences) do represent states of affairs in the world.

3. The notion of representation, as I have used it here, is neither the external notion that is used by the Representationalist, nor the internal one that Price accepts.²⁰ In my view, some parts of language actually represent objects and states of affairs in the world, sentences actually have truth-conditions and many terms refer to things in the world. But the world which is referred to and described by our expressions is the world such as it appears in our language-games, not a world that is epistemically beyond our linguistic and cognitive practices. This notion of “world” does not undermine, however, the ontological independence of reality. The physical world is what it is independently of language and of our mental states. Acknowledging this point is perfectly consistent with affirming that independent reality is inextricably connected with our actions, perceptions and linguistic practices.

Accordingly, I think that the notion of representation I am recommending could be used for solving some problems in Price’s functional explanation of the notion of truth. In effect, in “Truth as Convenient Friction”, Price defends, against Rorty, the thesis according to which the norm of truth is an additional norm to that of justification. Following the norm of truth, if Not-P, then it is incorrect to assert that P, even if one has justification for asserting P. This norm does not involve, Price thinks, a substantial notion of truth. His idea is just that whenever one is prepared to assert that P, one should also be to be prepared to ascribe fault to anyone who asserts Not-P. As Price says, “what matters is that disagreement itself be treated as grounds for disapproval” (2011d, p. 173). Two arguments support that thesis. Firstly, without a norm stronger than that of justification (for me or for us), the idea of improving my or our current commitments would be incoherent. The norm of truth creates the conceptual

²⁰ See Price (2011b, p. 32).

space for the idea of further improvement.²¹ Secondly, the norm of truth encourages such improvement by motivating speakers who disagree to try to resolve their disagreements. Without that norm, differences of opinion would be taken as differences of preference, not as a sign of the fact that the assertion of one of the speakers is objectively incorrect. The mark of the acknowledgment of the norm of truth is “the disposition to disapprove of speakers with whom we disagree” (2011d, p. 175). According to Price’s pragmatist approach, then, the essential difference that the norm of truth introduces in our linguistic practices is that it makes our linguistic practice genuinely assertoric (2011d, p. 177).²²

I agree with Price that there is a distinctive norm of truth which is different from other norms, such as that of warranted assertibility or sincerity, making disagreement matter. I also think, as he does, that the norm of truth provides an incentive to resolve disagreements. However, the crucial question is: why is this so? Why do some disagreements between assertions matter? Why do we feel that some particular disagreements must be resolved? Why do we think that some disagreements are signs of objective errors? For example, whereas disagreement over sentences such as “I like chocolate” does not normally matter, disagreement over sentences such as “The murder was committed by the butler” does usually matter. Why so? I believe there is an explanatory gap in Price’s pragmatic approach to the norm of truth. The difference established by acknowledging the norm of truth in our linguistic practices is not completely explained by appealing only to the pragmatic level of language.

At this point, it is important to realize that global expressivism makes it difficult to see how the explanation required could be provided. Indeed, according to Price, terms such as “true” and “false” give voice to “a fundamental practice of expressions of attitudes of approval and disapproval, in response to perceptions of agreement and disagreement between expressed commitments” (2011d, p. 174).

²¹ This argument can also be found in Habermas (2000).

²² Price’s argument could be reconstructed as a transcendental argument according to which the acknowledgement of the norm of truth is a necessary or constitutive requirement of our practice of assertion.

But if “true” and “false” merely express attitudes of approval and disapproval, why should we suppose that disagreements matter? Supposing I claimed sentence “P” is true, and you claimed that “P” is false. If “true” and “false” only expressed our attitudes of approval and disapproval of “P” respectively, why should we think that the other is objectively wrong about “P”? In other words, if “true” and “false” did not denote properties that we are ascribing to “P”, it could be just said that I approve “P” and you do not. Then, it would not be clear why we should not be more tolerant with this kind of disagreement.

I think what we need here is a complementary account to the pragmatic one offered by Price. My suggestion is that disagreements matter because, when we claim that “P” is true, we ascribe a property to “P” (correspondence with the world, for instance). When the relevant disagreements arise, we discuss about whether that attribution is correct or not. And correctness of the attribution matters because, if it is correct, it means that the world is as “P” says it is. In effect, when someone asserts that the murder was committed by the butler and someone else denies this, given an interest for resolving a crime, the disagreement matters because either the murder was committed by the butler or not. When someone claims that the sentence “The murder was committed by the butler” is true, and when the sentence is actually true, there really is a state of affairs in the world in virtue of which the sentence is true. Disagreement about the truth-value of the sentence matters because, if the sentence is true, the butler committed the murder. Since reality is the same for everyone, so is truth. Thus, Price’s pragmatic explanation of the norm of truth should be complemented with an account that, ultimately, connects our assertions with the world, with the state of affairs they describe. In other words, the pragmatic explanation should be articulated with a semantic one. The appeal to the semantic level explains why some sorts of disagreement give rise to discussion and research: because reality cannot be as “P” and “Not-P” claim it is at the same time.

4. I have argued so far that there is a variety of representationalism that is not only free from the usual problems of traditional Representationalism, but that is also necessary to explain the relation between language, on the one hand, and action and perception, on the other hand. Thus, rejecting Representationalism

does not necessarily entail accepting expressivism. But there is another approach involved in Price's naturalism: deflationism. In contrast with some critics of expressivism, Price claims that deflationism about semantic notions such as "truth", "reference" and "truth-condition" is perfectly consistent with expressivism. He also claims that deflationism is a complement of his subject naturalism. In effect, the subject naturalist's basic task is –the way Price defines it– to account for the use of linguistic terms in the lives of natural creatures in a natural environment. The important point here is that, according to Price, "the subject naturalist might simply find no need for an explanatory category of semantic properties and relations" (2011a, p. 194). In other words, the subject naturalist can be a deflationist about semantic terms. But why should we accept deflationism? Leaving aside the remarks I have already made in sections 2 and 3, which have attempted to motivate the need for the semantic notions that the deflationist rejects, there is a powerful argument in the literature, proposed by Boghossian (1990), which questions the consistency of deflationism. The argument proceeds as follows.

A deflationary conception of truth is the view that there really is no such thing as the property of truth that sentences or thoughts may enjoy and that would be named by the words "true" or "truth". It is typically expressed like this:

(D) The predicate "true" does not refer to a property.

The problem with this view is that –as Boghossian argues– "the denial that a given predicate refers to, or expresses, a property, only makes sense on a *robust* construal of *predicate reference*; yet on a deflationary construal, there is, simply, no space for denying, of a significant, predicative expression, that it expresses a property" (1990, p. 181). Thus, the denial that the truth predicate refers to a property must itself be understood in terms of a robust notion of reference. Otherwise, the claim that the predicate "true" fails to refer to a property would be false. So the denial that truth is robust attempted in (D) can succeed only if it fails.

Price concedes that, under Boghossian's construal, deflationism is inconsistent. However, he thinks that the deflationist could escape from the objection if she rejects the representational view of language: "So long as a

semantic deflationist simply rejects this theoretical framework, her position is not incoherent” (2011a, p. 191). Thus, according to Price, “A deflationist can consistently offer a use-explanatory account of semantic terms, while saying nothing of theoretical weight about whether these terms ‘refer’, or ‘have truth-conditions’” (2011a, p. 191). The key of Price’s response to Boghossian’s challenge to deflationism is the distinction between “*denying in one’s theoretical voice* that these terms refer or have truth-conditions (which Boghossian is right to point out that a deflationist cannot do); and *being silent in one’s theoretical voice* about whether these terms refer or have truth-conditions. A deflationist can, and indeed must, do the latter, having couched her theoretical claims about the terms involved in other terms entirely –and having insisted, *qua* deflationist, that the semantic notions do no interesting causal-explanatory work” (2011a, p. 191-192).²³ Thus, according to Price, the claim of subject naturalism is merely that “it will find no reason to say that there are [semantic properties]” (2011a, p. 193).

However, Price’s response is not convincing, for, to begin with, if Boghossian’s argument is correct, deflationism cannot consistently be formulated. If (D) expresses the thesis that defines deflationism, and if (D) cannot consistently be asserted, deflationism cannot be a theoretical option. Moreover, the strategy of “being silent” does not allow the deflationist to escape from the objection made by Boghossian, because even if the deflationist were silent about whether semantic terms refer or have truth-conditions, she would be *in fact* explaining those terms as if they did not refer or have truth-conditions. In other words, not only does the deflationist assume a theoretical view that cannot be consistently formulated, but she also takes for granted, *in her explanatory practice itself*, that deflationism is true, because she thinks that she can explain semantic terms without having to say that they refer or have truth-conditions. Thus, if she remains theoretically silent about whether semantic terms refer or have truth-conditions, she will not be able to remain practically silent about that, because, after all, she tries to explain semantic terms in a deflationary way. However, there cannot be any satisfactory deflationary explanation of semantic terms. In other words, representationalism, characterized in its minimal sense (as the mere thesis according to which words stand for non-

²³ Price repeats this answer in p. 258.

linguistic things) is mandatory, because we already have reason to say that there are semantic properties.²⁴

Price uses an analogy in order to illustrate his point. Unlike Creationists, Darwinians do not think that species were created by God. But rejecting the view that God created the species does not require accepting –Price argues– the claim that God did not create the species. The idea is simply avoiding theological vocabulary in science.²⁵ Similarly, “rejecting the view that ascriptions of semantic predicates are referential –rejecting it *as a theoretical view*– does not require –Price claims– that we endorse a *negative* claim, in which the semantic terms are employed in our theoretical voice” (2011f, p. 258). However, the analogy does not help here, because the question at stake between deflationists and non-deflationists is different from the debate between Creationists and Darwinians. In effect, to claim that God did not create the species is not inconsistent in itself, whereas to claim that the predicate “true” does not refer to a property actually is. Thus, as I have claimed, we cannot avoid certain semantic presuppositions –as Price would want– because they are engaged in our explanatory task.

Let me illustrate my point by using an analogy. Suppose that I want to reject the claim that I exist without endorsing the negative claim that I do not exist.²⁶ In doing so, could I really escape from the objection according to which it is contradictory to claim “I do not exist”? Well, in a way, I could, because I am making no claim. However, could I live as though the claim “I do not exist” were false? Obviously not, because even though I have never made that claim, everything that I do and think presupposes that I actually exist. Thus, it is completely illusory to attempt to live according to the content of the assertion “I do not exist”, even when I never make the assertion “I do not exist”. Hence, I

²⁴ Moreover, it is hard to see how the deflationist could proceed, because, given the fact that nowadays other rival theories exist, in a certain moment the deflationist will surely have to characterize her theoretical position and explain why one should adopt it. But in order to answer those questions, the deflationist cannot remain silent. As soon as she answers them, Boghossian’s argument will apply to her responses.

²⁵ See Price (p. 258).

²⁶ For the comparison between the negation of Descartes’s *cogito* and Boghossian’s argument against deflationism, see Boghossian (1990, p. 183).

think that the deflationist cannot explain semantic terms in her own vocabulary, as if she could simply avoid endorsing the negative claim that “true” does not refer to a property, because, if Boghossian’s argument is correct, the predicate “true” does refer to a property.

5. Price thinks that placement problems can be dissolved by adopting global expressivism. According to him, placement problems presuppose a category mistake. The source of that sort of error is –he claims– the unquestioned adoption of representationalism. As soon as we accept global expressivism –Price argues– not only do placement problems disappear, but we gain a much richer view of language as well. However, expressivism is a questionable theoretical view. As I have argued in § 2, it shows some difficulty explaining how language relates to action and perception. Moreover, the expressivist abandonment of the idea that sentences stand for non-linguistic items in the world, even in the minimal sense I have recommended, prevents from fully explaining how the norm of truth works in our linguistic practices (§ 3). Finally, in § 4 I have tried to show that Price has not responded to Boghossian’s argument against deflationism, which is the complementary theoretical view of Price’s sort of expressivism. Thus, I think that Price’s main argument for dismissing placement problems as mere category mistakes has been undermined. Without expressivism, placement problems can re-acquire their genuine character as problems. As I have tried to make clear, to reject expressivism entails that, in a certain sense, linguistic expressions represent non-linguistic parts of reality. This view about language is not incompatible with the recognition that linguistic expressions have many functions. The general moral to be drawn from my reflection is this: the dispute between naturalists and anti-naturalists takes place not only in language, but also in reality.

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