The Semantic Foundations of Metaphysics

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1. Introduction

In the first chapter of *From Metaphysics to Ethics,* Frank Jackson begins, as he puts it, 'by explaining how serious metaphysics by its very nature raises the location problem.' (1998, p. 1) He gives us two examples of location problems. The first concerns semantic properties, such as truth and reference:

> Some physical structures are true. For example, if I were to utter a token of the type 'Grass is green', the structure I would thereby bring into existence would be true ... How are the semantic properties of the sentence related to the non-semantic properties of the sentence? Where, if anywhere, are the semantic properties of truth, content and reference to be found in the non-semantic, physical or naturalistic account of the sentence?' (1998, p. 2)

> Jackson notes two possible answers to questions of this kind. The first denies that there are any such semantic properties:

> We might respond with a sceptical or eliminativist position on truth, meaning and reference. Sentences ... are a species of physical object, and we know that science can in principle tell us the whole story about physical objects. And though we are not, and may never be, in a position actually to give that whole story, we know enough as of now to be able to say, first, that it will look something like ... a story about masses, shapes, causal chains, behavioural dispositions of language users, evolutionary history, and the like ... and, secondly, that in any case it will not contain terms for truth, reference and meaning. But if the complete account does not contain truth, reference, and meaning, then so much the worse for truth, reference, and meaning, runs the sceptical response. (1998, p. 2)

Jackson constrasts this sceptical response with the response he favours, which rests on 'distinguishing what appears explicitly in an account from what appears implicitly in it.' (1998, p. 2) This is the idea that he goes on to develop in the book in considerable detail.

The case of the semantic properties deserves its prominence, I think, though for reasons Jackson himself does not mention at this point. Certain assumptions about language, naturally cast in semantic terms, are crucial to Jackson's conception of the task of philosophy in the cases he calls location problems. These assumptions underpin the most natural path to the view that there is a distinctively metaphysical problem for philosophy to address, as opposed to a problem of a broadly anthropological kind, about human linguistic behaviour—in this case, about the use of the semantic terms, 'true', 'refers', and the like.

Jackson is aware of the need for these assumptions, of course. However, I think he underestimates the work needed to justify them, and hence the extent of the threat that they pose to the foundations of his program. By making the assumptions explicit, and by arguing that we

need to take seriously the possibility that they might fail,[1] I hope to show that the foundations are in need of reinforcement; indeed, that there is a serious issue about the advisability of the enterprise, at least in Jackson's ambitious form. There's an alternative conception of what philosophy should be up to in this area—a conception, as I said, that regards the main task as more like anthropology than metaphysics. And the issue as to which is the right conception is not to be settled by philosophy, but by the science of human linguistic behaviour, broadly construed. So there is an important sense in which the anthropological viewpoint should come first.

Jackson's approach is not peculiarly at fault here. On the contrary, the linguistic assumptions in question are implicit in a great deal of contemporary metaphysics. The attraction of Jackson's program, for my purposes, is that in virtue of its clarity and would-be comprehensiveness, its semantic foundations are comparatively easy to bring into view. But most of the concerns thus exposed apply much more widely, I think.[2]

2. Deflationism and the location problem for semantic properties

Let's begin with a familiar approach to semantic notions such as reference and truth, viz., *deflationism* or *minimalism.* A number of ideas go under these headings. For present purposes, I'll take the central claim to be that truth and reference are not 'substantial' properties—not properties needed in the theoretical ontology of a mature science of human linguistic behaviour, or of a kind whose nature is properly investigated by science or metaphysics. On the contrary, say deflationists, the task of philosophy is to explain the distinctive role of the semantic *terms*— 'true', 'refers', and the like—in linguistic practice. And the function of these terms is not to refer to substantial properties, about whose nature there might be a serious philosophical question. Rather, for example, it might be that they play a distinctive grammatical role, providing a logical device for sundry purposes (e.g., for expressing infinite conjunctions, as in 'Everything Fred says is true').

Deflationist views are cousins of what Jackson calls the 'sceptical or eliminativist position' about semantic properties.[3] Like that position, one of their claimed attractions is that they make short work of metaphysical puzzles about reference and truth. For a deflationist, these puzzles rest on a philosophical confusion about the linguistic role of the terms concerned. In Jackson's terms, the claim is that if deflationists are right about the linguistic job of the semantic *predicates,* then there is no location problem for semantic *properties.*

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[1]A lot will turn on a distinction between two kinds of failure. Roughly, one involves the endorsement of the negation of the relevant semantic assumptions, the other—the more interesting, in my view—the abandonment *for theoretical purposes* of the semantic notions in terms of which the assumptions are expressed.

[2]If Jackson's approach has a distinctive vulnerability, it turns on the fact that it is intended to be comprehensive. More on this later.

[3]Nothing much hangs on how closely deflationism is related to the views Jackson has in mind, but it is worth noting this difference. Deflationism is not typically an eliminativist position—not a view that agrees, as Jackson puts it, that 'if the complete [scientific] account does not contain truth, reference, and meaning, then so much the worse for truth, reference, and meaning.' On the contrary, say deflationists, it is a mistake to look for truth and reference in the scientific account, and hence no black mark against them if they are not to be found there.

Deflationism is controversial, of course. I have defended a version of it elsewhere (Price 1988, 2003), but won't be trying to do so here—or at least not directly. Rather, I want to use the fact that deflationism is a well-recognised position in the relevant landscape, to call attention to some presuppositions of the program that Jackson advocates in *From Metaphysics to Ethics* and elsewhere. By showing that semantic deflationism would undercut an otherwise attractive foundation for metaphysics as Jackson understands it, I want to show that in its present form, the program presupposes that deflationism is false. Among other things, this will establish that the program relies on certain empirical assumptions about language, in a way which deserves more prominence than it receives in Jackson's presentation, in my view. I'll argue that these assumptions are harder to justify than Jackson takes them to be.

Jackson's own stance with respect to deflationism also deserves scrutiny, it seems to me. On the one hand, as we'll see, he oftens seems robustly realist about semantic notions, and the representationalist view of language with which they go hand in hand.[4] On the other hand, in the passage from which I quoted at the beginning, he appears to say that it is clear that a scientific account of linguistic tokens—utterances and written sentences, for example—'will not contain terms for truth, reference and meaning'. On the face of it, this sounds like a version of the deflationist claim that semantic properties have no essential role in a mature science of human language. If Jackson's view is interpreted this way, then my argument has particular bite. For as things stand, I maintain, the implicit assumption that semantic properties do have an important theoretical role is playing a crucial role in motivating Jackson's view of the task of metaphysics, in the semantic case itself as well as in others.

If I am right about the role of this assumption, there seem to be two ways in which we might try to reconcile it with the view here endorsed by Jackson, that a scientific account of the occurrence of linguistic tokens will not employ semantic terminology. The first would rely on a direct appeal to folk intuitions and practice—to folk use of the semantic vocabulary, in effect. However, leaving aside concerns we should surely feel about allowing the folk to lead us into theoretical territory where science itself declines to tread, we'll see that such an appeal is only helpful if we can *exclude* a deflationary interpretation of the role of the folk vocabulary, which is the very point at issue.

The second option (Jackson's own choice, I think) would be to argue that the semantic facts on which the assumption depends are implicit in the scientific story—the representational view is implicit in the scientific view. This option thus relies on Jackson's proposed solution to the location problem for semantic properties. As I'll argue, however, both the problem and the solution depend on the very assumption here at issue, namely, a semantically-characterised representational view of folk use of semantic vocabulary. So there's no comfort here for someone looking for a scientifically respectable reason to believe that assumption.

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[4]Later in the paper, I want to argue that various commonplace observations about language that Jackson appears to take support this view do not bear the weight, being thoroughly compatible with deflationist views.

More at the end of the paper about this apparent circularity problem, and related issues. For the moment, I'm interested simply in exploring the consequences of deflationism for the task and scope of metaphysics as Jackson understands it—in particular, for the existence of location problems. I'll need the following two observations about the commitments of semantic deflationism.

2.1 Properties thick and thin

First, deflationists needn't say that there are no semantic properties. On the contrary, to the extent that folk usage is committed to claiming that there are such properties, deflationists can concur—can speak with the folk, in effect. But the deflationist insists that once we understand the functions of the corresponding terms in language, we can see that there isn't any metaphysical problem about the nature or 'location' of these properties. As Paul Horwich says:

> [I]t is not part of the minimalist conception to maintain that truth is not a property. On the contrary, 'is true' is a perfectly good English predicate—and (leaving aside nominalistic concerns about the very notion of 'property') one might well take this to be a conclusive criterion for standing for a property of *some* sort. What the minimalist wishes to emphasize, however, is that truth is not a complex or naturalistic property but a property of some other kind. ... The point behind this jargon is that different kinds of property correspond to different roles that predicates play in our language, and that unless these differences are appreciated, we will be tempted to raise questions regarding one sort that can legitimately arise only in connection with another sort. (1998, 37-38)

A caution is needed here about Horwich's use of 'standing for'. This sounds like a semantic notion, but if so, a deflationist can't expect it to bear theoretical weight. The main point of deflationism is that semantic notions do not bear theoretical weight.

More on this potential inconsistency in a moment. In the present context, one way to avoid it is simply to note—as the rest of the passage says, in effect—that there is a loose and popular use of the notion of a property, according to which, so to speak, where go predicates, there go properties. In this sense, there is certainly a property of truth. But this use of 'property' needs to be distinguished from its use in serious science and metaphysics, precisely because these disciplines need to be sensitive to the fact that predicates may play different linguistic roles, in a way which isn't evident on the surface. Truth is thus a property in the loose, popular or 'thin' sense, says the deflationist, but not in the scientific, metaphysical or 'thick' sense.

2.2 Two ways of rejecting semantic theory

The second point relates to the kind of inconsistency just noted. Paul Boghossian (1990) has argued that irrealism about semantic properties is incoherent, because the irrealist wants to claims that terms such as 'true' and 'refers' *do not refer to anything,* or that sentences ascribing such semantic properties *lack truth values* (or, perhaps, *are uniformly false*). The essence of Boghossian's objection is that the italicised claims involve, centrally and ineliminably, the very

notions with respect to which the semantic irrealist professes irrealism. Surely this involves some sort of vicious circularity?

In the present context, our interest is in a specific form of irrealism about semantic notions, viz., deflationism, characterised as the view that these notions play no substantial or ineliminable role in linguistic theory. Against such a view, Boghossian's charge takes a more specific form. Isn't the deflationist is employing the notions concerned 'in her theoretical voice', in characterising her own deflationist view? This is precisely the inconsistency we noted a moment ago, concerning the semantic notion of 'standing for'.

But the objection is easily side-stepped. We simply need to distinguish between (i) *denying* (in one's theoretical voice) that ascriptions of semantic properties have semantic properties; and (ii) *saying nothing* (in one's theoretical voice) about whether ascriptions of semantic properties have semantic properties—i.e., simply employing different theoretical vocabulary, in saying what one wants to say about such ascriptions. A deflationist cannot consistently do (i), but can consistently do (ii). Let's call (i) *active rejection* and (ii) *passive rejection* of the theoretical claim that ascriptions of semantic properties have semantic properties. (Like passive aggression, then, passive rejection involves strategic silence.)

Here's an analogy. Unlike Creationists, Darwinians don't think that the species were created by God. Does this mean that Darwinians must use the term 'God' in their theoretical voice, as it were, in order to *deny* that the species were created by God? Not at all. Darwinians simply offer an account of the origin of the species in which the term 'God' does not appear. So *rejecting* the view that God created the species does not require *accepting* the following claim: God did not create the species. The alternative—the correct alternative, surely—is passive rejection: simply avoiding theological vocabulary in scientific contexts.

Similarly, rejecting the view that ascriptions of semantic predicates are referential— rejecting it *as a theoretical view*—does not require that we endorse a *negative* claim, in which the semantic terms are employed in our theoretical voice. Passive rejection provides an alternative, and arguably the only consistent alternative. From now on, then, I assume that semantic deflationism takes this passive form. It doesn't say that ascriptions of semantic properties *lack* semantic properties.

Deflationism thus provides a familiar and apparently coherent view, from standpoint of which the location problem for the semantic properties *seems* not to arise. It might be suggested that this impression is mistaken—that the particular form of deflationism just outlined does not escape the location problem. I'll come back to this, but suppose for the moment that deflationism does avoid the location problem, for the semantic properties. Then, as already noted, it provides a relative of the sceptical or eliminativist approach, that Jackson himself mentions as avoiding this particular location problem. Not particularly new news, in other words.

But there is newer news nearby, I think. I want to argue that semantic deflationism not only provides an example of how the location problem may be defused for the semantic

properties themselves, but also a strategy for defusing locations problems about other topics. More accurately, semantic deflationism blocks a particular route to location problems—a route which otherwise carries a lot of traffic. Blocking this route doesn't necessarily imply that there are no interesting location problems in metaphysics. There may be other ways of getting to the same place, at least in some cases. But it does suggest that such problems may be rarer than Jackson thinks, and in need of foundations he does not provide.

But does semantic deflationism even promise old news, given the constraints of the two observations made above? It is easy enough to see how the location problem for semantic properties is avoided by someone who says that there are no semantic properties, or that ascriptions of semantic predicates do not represent things as being a certain way. In these cases, of course, there can be no distinctive puzzle raised by semantic language about nature of semantic properties or 'ways of being'—or about the relation of such things to the properties or 'ways of being' talked about elsewhere. For there simply are no such things, full stop. But if a deflationist agrees that there are semantic properties, at least in the loose and popular sense, and does not actively *deny* that ascriptions of semantic predicates are representational in nature, doesn't the location problem still bite?

I'll meet this challenge by showing that the new news confirms the old news. As I said, I'm going to argue that there is one very general route to location problems which is blocked by the kind of semantic deflationism just canvassed. Having explained why such a semantic deflationism blocks an otherwise appealing route to location problems *in general,* I'll then be able to point out that the argument is self-applicable. This kind of semantic deflationism blocks the same route to the location problem about the semantic properties themselves. The new news thus grounds the old news.

3. Noncognitivism, deflationism and global expressivism

The move to side-step metaphysics in the way exemplified by semantic deflationism has a long pedigree. Its most famous incarnation is noncognitivism in ethics. Accordingly, when Jackson turns to ethics later in his book, he notes that he is assuming cognitivism. As he puts it:

> It is only under the assumption of cognitivism that ethics presents a location problem. If the non-cognitivists are right and ethical sentences do not represent things as being a certain way, there is no question of how to locate the way they represent things as being in relation to accounts told in other terms—descriptive, physical, social or whatever— represent things as being, though there will still, of course, be a need to give an account of the meaning of ethical sentences and of what we are doing when we make ethical judgements (where, of course, to make an ethical judgement better not be literally to take things to be some way or other). (1998, p. 117)

Jackson here relies on an explicitly semantic characterisation of the difference between cognitivism and noncognitivism about ethical claims. Cognitivists take ethical claims to 'represent things as being a certain way', and noncognitivists disagree. So understood, cognitivists and

noncognitivists are both relying on a non-deflationary view of the semantic properties, for they both use semantic or representationalist notions to characterise the function of ethical talk.

What, then, is the impact of adopting deflationism? Exploiting the distinction introduced earlier between active and passive rejection, I want to argue that deflationism about the semantic properties entails a view sufficiently close to noncognitivism in ethics to defuse metaphysics in precisely the way that noncognitivism itself does—by ensuring that it is not the case that 'ethics presents a location problem' (or, more exactly, by defeating an influential reason for thinking that there is a location problem).

If I am right, the point has wide ramifications. Nothing hangs on the fact that the case in question is that of ethics. Quite generally, then, semantic deflationism blocks a certain route to location problems. As I've stressed, this does not mean that there could not be other routes to the same metaphysical issues. But there seem no candidates of the required generality on offer in Jackson's program, and none in the offing. The upshot is that on Jackson's conception, metaphysics seems to rest on 'thick' semantic foundations: in particular, on a non-deflationary view of semantic properties.

In arguing that deflationism favours a view close to noncognitivism, I'm swimming against the tide. Many writers have suggested that deflationism is an enemy of noncognitivism. If truth is minimal, the thought goes, then it is easy for sentences to be truth-evaluable, and implausible to claim that moral claims are not truth-evaluable. Versions of the argument may be found in McDowell (1981), Boghossian (1990), Wright (1992), and Humberstone (1991). The argument is endorsed by Jackson himself in Jackson, Oppy and Smith (1994), a paper proposing an escape route for noncognitivism, relying on the argument that minimalism about truth need not imply minimalism about truth-aptness, and that it is nonminimalism about truth-aptness that matters for the noncognitivist's purposes. I'll return to this issue later. For the moment, I'm arguing that the noncognitivist does not need saving. In important respects, semantic deflationism already represents victory by default.

In my view, then, the orthodox view is almost completely wrong-headed. To see why, note first that noncognitivism normally makes two claims about its target discourse, one negative and one positive. The negative claim says that these terms or statements lack some semantically-characterised feature: they are non-referential, non-truth-apt, non-descriptive, non-factual, or something of the kind. The positive claim offers an alternative account of the functions of the language in question—e.g., that it expresses, or projects from, evaluative attitudes. We might say that the negative claim is *anti-representational,* the positive claim *expressivist.* [5]

What is the effect on such a combination of views on deflationism about the semantic vocabulary in which the negative claim is couched? Clearly, the negative claim must be

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[5]I stress that this use of the term 'expressivist' is to some extent a term of art. For example, disquotationalism about truth is expressivist in these terms, but doesn't rest on idea of expressing a psychological state. The defining feature of an expressivist view, in this sense, is that it theorises about the use of language without employing semantic properties in its theoretical ontology.

abandoned. But this doesn't imply that, *qua* theoreticians, we must endorse its negation (i.e., endorse cognitivism). On the contrary, what's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. If semantic terms can't be used in a 'thick' sense, they can't be used on either side of a (thick) dispute as to whether evaluative claims are representational. Recall the Creationist analogy. If the term 'God' has no place in science, then science neither affirms nor denies the sentence 'God created the universe'. The point of the example was that in cases like this, *not affirming* is not the same as *denying*.

So what is the effect of deflationism on noncognitivism? It is to deflate the negative claim, while leaving intact the positive claim—the noncognitivist's expressivist account of the function of the terms in question. Contrary to received wisdom, then, semantic minimalism is a friend and not an enemy of expressivism. If we take it that the expressivist's core claim is that the key functions of the judgements in question are not representational functions, then deflationism about the key semantic notions is a *global* motivation for expressivism—a global reason for thinking that whatever the interesting theoretical conclusion about the function of a class of judgements turns out to be, it cannot be that they are referential, or truth-conditional. For deflationism amounts to a denial that these notions *have* an interesting theoretical role.

One important point. The kind of expressivism thus supported by semantic minimalism is, crucially, *global* expressivism. The orthodoxy is right, in my view, to think that deflationism poses a problem for *local* varieties of noncognitivism, or expressivism—views that are expressivist about some topics but representationalist about others. If representationalist vocabulary has no theoretical role, it can't be used to characterise the linguistic territory that, from a local expressivist's point of view, lies on the other side of the fence. The whole point is that deflationism implies that there can be no such territory, and hence no such fence. So deflationism does indeed make *local* expressivism unstable—but because it implies global expressivism, not because it implies global cognitivism!

4. Does global expressivism avoid location problems?

Semantic deflationism thus implies the view I've called global expressivism.[6] In the form outlined in §2 it also *exemplifies* such an expressivism. Recall that a crucial feature of that form of deflationism—the feature that enabled it to side-step Boghossian's objection—was that its rejection of the representational view of ascriptions of semantic properties was *passive,* rather than *active.* As a theoretical view, in other words, it makes no recourse to the semantic notions themselves.

At the end of §2, I noted that it might be claimed that this version of semantic deflationism does not, after all, avoid the location problem for semantic properties. After all, it does not deny that there are semantic properties, or that such ascriptions represent things as being

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[6]I emphasise again that the term expressivism here means nothing more than that the views in question theorise about language in non-representational terms. See also O'Leary-Hawthorne & Price (1996) and Price (2004a, 2004b).

a certain way. On the contrary, it *allows* that there are semantic properties, at least in the loose and popular sense. And it *says nothing* (of a theoretical nature) about whether ascriptions of semantic properties represent things as being a certain way. (No doubt it allows this too, in the loose and popular sense.)

An analogous suggestion carries over quite generally to my modified form of noncognitivism—the view that keeps the expressivist account of the functions of the part of language in question, while dropping the negative claim that that language is not representational. So now we face the question deferred in §2. Does this view avoid the location problem?

As foreshadowed in §2, my claim is not that semantic deflationism provides an all-purpose defeater for location problems. Rather, I claim that deflationism blocks a particular route to such problems—albeit an important route, which otherwise provides a powerful and widely-applicable theoretical motivation for taking such problems seriously. My claim rests on a distinction between what I'll call *ontologically conservative* and *ontologically non-conservative* ways of theorising about language. Of course, any way of theorising about language is going to have some ontological commitments—plausibly, at the very least, commitments to speakers, to speech acts of some kind, and probably to various environmental factors (to help to explain, for example, why such speakers produce such speech acts on such occasions). The distinction between ontologically conservative and ontologically non-conservative theories lies elsewhere. At a first pass, putting the matter in Carnapian terminology, it turns on the question as to whether linguistic theory picks up the *internal* ontological commitments of the linguistic frameworks *theorised about.*

Recall the analogy I used in §2 to illustrate the difference between active and passive rejection of a theoretical notion, the use of the notion of creation in biology or cosmology. Assuming for the sake of the example the principle 'no creation without a creator', any theory which describes some or all of the entities within its ontology as *created* will thereby incur an ontological commitment to something (possibly) additional—i.e., to the existence of one or more creators. For any X such that our theory entails that X is created, the theory thus raises the question 'What is the Y, such that X is created by Y?' In one sense, this is a trivial point, turning simply on the fact that 'is created by' is relational in form. The bite comes from the fact that as exemplified in Creationism itself, this relation is ontologically non-conservative—it relates biological and physical entities to something not itself part of the biological or physical realm.

Semantic relations have an analogous effect in linguistic theory. If we say as linguistic theorists that the term X *stands for* something, then our linguistic theory itself commits us—in general, at least, though we might want to allow for cases of referential failure—to the existence of something, Y, such that X stands for Y. The question 'What is the Y, such that X stands for Y?' is thus a question pressed on us by linguistic theory—even if the Y at issue is something not normally regarded as part of the required ontology of linguistic theory, such as a prime number, or a moral property.

This is what I mean by saying that semantic relations make linguistic theory ontologically non-conservative. Ascribing semantic relations to a body of linguistic utterances commits linguistic theorists to an ontology which mirrors, via the semantic relations in question, the internal ontological commitments of the domain in question.[7] As I put it elsewhere (Price, 2004a), semantic relations thus provide a bridge, or ladder, that leads our theoretical gaze from words to things.

It is easy to see how this gives rise to location problems. We find ourselves saying, in our theoretical voice, that terms such as 'good', 'seven', 'cause', 'belief' and 'truth' do the job of *standing for* something. Naturally, we want an answer to the question 'What do they stand for?' which meets various theoretical desiderata—fitting with the other kinds of things we are inclined to say about speakers, their environments and their capacities, for example. Hence, given our starting point, a pressure towards naturalistic answers—towards location problems.

Semantic deflationism generates no such pressure, however. Because it simply doesn't ascribe to semantic terms and sentences such relational properties as *standing for, referring to,* or *being made true by,* it raises no such issues about the items at the 'world's end' of such relations.

Now a crucial question. Does ontological conservatism require that we reject the representational view actively, affirming in our theoretical voice that the terms in question are non-representational? Or is passive rejection sufficient? A moment's reflection shows that passive rejection is all we need. The ontological non-conservatism of representational approaches is generated by their explicit employment of semantic relations. So long as these relations are simply *absent* from our theoretical vocabulary, no such 'extra-linguistic' ontological commitment arises.

Thus the use of semantic notions in linguistic theory generates location problems, by rendering the theory in question ontologically non-conservative. Semantic deflationism blocks this path to location problems, even in the passively non-representational form canvassed in §2. The kind of global expressivism which results from such semantic deflationism provides a global bar to this route to location problems. Moreover, the point is self-applicable, in the way mentioned earlier. That is, this form of semantic deflationism blocks this semantic route to location problems about the semantic properties themselves just as efficiently as it blocks them about other topics.

5. A reductio?

The argument that semantic deflationism deflates location problems might seem to provide a *reductio* of semantic deflationism. For isn't it obvious that there are some legitimate location problems, e.g. for chemical properties in relation to those of physics? Doesn't the argument imply that if deflationism were true, we wouldn't need to worry about the relation of chemistry to physics (perhaps, and surely absurdly, because chemical language and physical language 'are simply in different lines of work')?

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[7]Again, this needs to be qualified to allow for the case of systematic referential failure.

But the argument implies no such absurdity. It simply implies (as in any case seems highly plausible) that our reasons for being interested in the relation of chemistry to physics don't depend on a lot of implicit linguistic theory. In exhibiting the sense in which chemistry and physics are in the same line of work, we can't simply rely on the claim that they are both representing how things are. If we are semantic deflationists, that characterisation is both too thin and too broad to do the work that metaphysics requires of it. (Less metaphorically, relying on representational notions in this way would be incompatible with the central tenet of semantic deflationism, that the semantic properties do no significant theoretical work.)

There's one familiar story already on offer about how the required justification might go, in the case of chemical properties. It's the story proposed by David Lewis, in his account of theoretical identification in science (Lewis 1970, 1972). Here, the unifying thread is provided by fact that the theories to which the method is applicable are causal in nature—they are all in the business of ascribing causes and effects. *Modulo* some (perhaps controversial) assumptions about causation—e.g., that all causation is ultimately physical causation—this provides a theoretically substantial sense in which all such theories are in the same line of work.

Lewis's program applies to theoretical entities characterisable in terms of their causal role. In taking over some of the key ideas of Lewis's program, however, Jackson is explicit that he wants to generalise beyond the causal realm. As he notes, his proposed 'moral functionalism' differs from Lewis's psycho-functionalism in that in the case of moral functionalism, the 'principles are not causal principles.' (1998, p. 131) What, if anything, plays the role of causation in the wider program? It turns out that *so long as we are not deflationists,* semantic notions will do the trick. To see how this goes, let's consider an abridged version of the two programs.

Consider first Lewis's model. Let A be a theoretical term in some scientific theory, and let M(A) be a full specification of A's causal role. (x)M(x) is then the Ramsey sentence that results from M(A) by replacing all occurrences of 'A' by a bound variable, and (!x)M(x) is the version that says that that there is a unique realiser 'of the A role'.

Let's suppose that we have reason to think (!x)M(x) true. What do we now know about A? We have the following definite description:

A is the unique x such that M(x).

How, according to Lewis, do we now address the question 'What is A?', or 'How do we locate A with respect to the entities described by physics?'? We find, or convince ourselves that in principle we could find, some physical entity D that satisfies the Ramsey sentence for A—i.e., such that D is also the unique x such that M(x). A and D then satisfy the same definite description, and are hence the same entity.

What grounds our confidence that there is some such D to be found, at least in principle? If we follow Lewis, it is a thesis about causation—the thesis of 'the explanatory adequacy of

physics', as Lewis puts it at one point. Taken together with the fact that M(A) encodes the causal facts about A, this gives us what we need.

Thus our confidence that there some such D to be found *does not rest on a semantic thesis.* Although I used a semantic notion a moment ago—I wrote 'some physical entity D that *satisfies* the Ramsey sentence for A'—it is clear, I think, that this use is inessential, and thoroughly compatible with a deflationary view of semantic properties. (Indeed, I went on to gloss what I needed to say without using the notion.)

But what happens if we want to generalise Lewis's program beyond the realm of things with causes and effects?[8] In this case we won't in general have definite descriptions in causal terms. But we will have them in semantic terms—descriptions of the form

B is the (unique) x that satisfies the Ramsey sentence (!x)N(x)

(where N(B) is our theory of some such notion B).

Problems of uniqueness aside, it is (relatively) trivial that we can form the Ramsey sentence for a given term B in this way. And hence there can be no objection to our proceeding to ask the question 'What is B?' by asking

What is the (unique) x that satisfies the Ramsey sentence (!x)N(x)?

What is non-trivial, and dependent on a non-deflationary account of satisfaction, is the view that this is anything other than asking

What is the (unique) x such that N(x)?

and that this question has anything other than a trivial answer—'Why, it is B, of course!'[9]

Non-deflationary semantics holds out a promise of a more interesting answer. It gives us a potential handle on the identity question, in precisely the way that causation does in the Lewisean case. That is, it gives us—at least if combined with semantic naturalism of some kind—a new sort of question to investigate: What is the (natural or physical) thing that *stands in this semantic relation* to the Ramsey sentence? If deflationists are right, however, there can be no new theoretical question of this kind—and no material with which to fashion a semantic principle supporting physicalism, analogous to Lewis's principle of the explanatory adequacy of physics.[10]

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[8]Or when we want to apply it to the causal terms themselves, for that matter.

[9]Note that to say that the question 'What is B?' has no non-trivial answer is not to say that there is no non-trivial theory in the vicinity. There may well be a non-trivial account to be told—in non-representational theoretical vocabulary—about how the speakers in question come to talk in B terms.

[10]In effect, this point simply reiterates the contrast drawn in §4 between ontologically nonconservative and ontologically conservative modes of linguistic theory.

For the moment, the main point is that the fact that deflationism provides a global challenge to Jacksonian metaphysics does not imply, absurdly, that the kind of questions such a metaphysical program raises are never appropriate. It simply implies that extra work is needed to show that they are appropriate, in any particular case—work which could otherwise be done by semantic notions. But in the cases that would otherwise generate an obvious absurdity, such as that of chemical properties, we have a reasonably good idea how the extra work should go. Arguably, Lewis has done it all for us.[11]

6. Is deflationism obviously false?

I have argued that *if* semantic deflationism is true, then there are likely to be fewer genuine location problems than Jackson imagines. One might concede this conditional claim, and yet argue that its antecedent is obviously false. One might argue, in other words, that it is uncontroversial that much of language is 'substantially' representational, in the way apparently denied by semantic deflationists. In *From Metaphysics to Ethics* and elsewhere, Jackson often makes observations about language which might be taken in this spirit. For example:

> Why do foreign-language phrase books sell so well? Because they help us find food, shelter, museums and airports when we travel outside our own language communities. Our need for them highlights what is anyway obvious: much of language is a convention-generated system of representation.
> Although it is obvious that much of language is representational, it is occasionally denied. I have attended conference papers attacking the representational view of language given by speakers who have in their pockets pieces of paper with writing on them that tell them where the conference dinner is and when the taxis leave for the airport. How could this happen? I surmise that it is through conflating the obviously correct view that much of language is representational with various controversial views. (1997, 270)

For my part, I agree with Jackson that there is a sense in which it is obvious that much of language is representational, and a sense in which it is controversial. Roughly, the obvious sense is the loose and popular sense, which simply tracks folk usage. The non-obvious sense is the theoretical sense, in which representational and semantic notions are called on to do various sorts of theoretical work, in philosophy and elsewhere. As we'll see, Jackson's own examples establish that what is obvious in the former sense need not be obvious in the latter—there are cases which are clearly representations in the loose and popular sense, about which, as Jackson himself emphasises, it is a live theoretical issue as to whether they count as representations in the theoretical sense.

Once it is conceded that the popular sense and the theoretical sense come apart in this way, and that the latter is non-obvious, it is open for a deflationist to suggest that there might turn out to be no legitimate theoretical sense—no relevant notion of representation that survives into mature theory about language. Jackson's appeals to what is obvious and uncontroversial about

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[11]In other contexts I would myself be inclined to contest this argument, maintaining that causation is in various ways unsuited to bear this sort of metaphysical weight (being too anthropocentric and too contextual, for example—see Price 2001). But here my interest is in the contrast between this causally-grounded approach to metaphysics, and a more general, semantically-grounded, approach.

language seem intended to block this possibility. However, once a wedge has been driven between the obvious and the non-obvious issues—between the loose sense in which language is undoubtedly representational, and the controversial theoretical sense—the former has lost its authority as a guide to theory, and cannot exclude thoroughgoing representational deflationism. Or so it seems to me.

In order to make it clear that I'm not relying on judicious choice of examples, let me reproduce some more of Jackson's illustrations of the representational character of language:

> We use language to tell our community and our later selves how things are. Telling how things are requires representational devices, structures that somehow effect a partition in the possibilities. For we say how things are by saying what is ruled in and what is ruled out. (1998, p. 53)

> [T]ypically we know something useful ... and are giving voice to this knowledge when we classify happenings as examples of grooming behaviour, pain, rational inference, and so on. For only then can we explain the manifestly useful information we give about what the world is like each other and to our later selves, through diary entries and notes on fridges, when we use words like 'pain', 'grooming behaviour', 'electricity bill', 'belief', 'rational', and so on. (1998, pp. 64-5)

> Consider what happens when I utter the sentence, 'There is a land-mine two metres away.' I tell you something about how things are, and to do that is precisely to tell you which of various possibilities concerning how things are is actual. ... The sports section of any newspaper is full of speculations about possible outcomes, conveyed by sentences that discriminate among the outcomes in a way we grasp because we understand the sentences. Again, we find our way around buildings by reading or hearing sentences that we understand like 'The seminar room is around the corner on the left.' There are many different places the seminar room might be located, but after seeing or hearing the sentence, and by virtue of understanding it and trusting the person who produces it, we know which of the possibilities is actual. (1998, pp. 71-2)

The representationalist vocabulary in these examples is, as Jackson intends, unremarkable and uncontroversial. But it remains equally uncontroversial, surely, when we substitute examples like these:

> What Jane told you *is true*
>
> David Wenham's new performance *is superb*
>
> It is *probably* going to rain on Friday
>
> You *should* take an umbrella
>
> It's *possible* I'll be *able* to get to the party
>
> *If* I get there, *then* I'll be a little late
>
> The delay last week was *caused* by late arrival of the inbound aircraft

In notes on fridges and in pockets, all of these sentences may be used to 'partition the possibilities', provide 'manifestly useful information', and so on. All of them provide examples of things we may learn by understanding and trusting people who say these things. On the face of

it, in other words, they all have all the features that Jackson takes to characterise representational uses of language.

Yet the italicised parts of these claims pick out elements with respect to which expressivist explications are already reasonably well known. In each case, in other words, we have some idea of how a *theoretical* account of the function of relevant terms might proceed, without employing representationalist vocabulary *at the theoretical level.*

Jackson himself notes some possibilities of this kind. He notes that it is controversial whether ethical claims and indicative conditionals are genuinely representational—in such cases, noncognitivism is an arguable position. But it seems to me that in admitting this possibility in particular cases, and yet continuing to maintain that in general, our intuitions about the representational character of language are a good guide to theory—a good reason for thinking that much of language is representational, in a theoretical sense—Jackson is guilty of a kind of double standard. 'Thick' representational character simply can't be obvious in one case and yet not obvious in another, without some (obvious and obviously relevant!) difference in the surface phenomena.

The tension in Jackson's position here is masked, I think, because the sort of noncognitivism he has in mind is the orthodox variety, which includes *among its theoretical claims* the assertion that the language in question is non-representational. Thus his imagined opponents about the status of ethical claims and indicative conditionals are people who agree that much of the rest of language is representational. From this standpoint, it is easy to overlook the more radical opponent, who—as a semantic deflationist—claims that none of language is representational in a substantial theoretical sense. But Jackson himself acknowledges the gap between what theory tells us about language and what we can read off its surface. Once in play, this gap serves the purposes of the more radical opponent just as well as it serves those of the conventional opponent. (If anything, in fact, it serves the the radical opponent better, because unlike her more conventional colleagues, she does not have to explain why surface structure is a guide to underlying function in some cases but not others.)[12]

7. Truth-aptness to the rescue?

As noted earlier, Jackson, Oppy and Smith (1994) offer noncognitivists a response to the standard charge that minimalism about truth vindicates cognitivsm. They argue that minimalism

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[12]When Jackson mentions the claim that indicative conditionals do not have truth-conditions, he offers what might perhaps be read as an objection to deflationism. He considers the suggestion that it is a trivial matter that indicative conditions have truth-conditions, because it is trivial that 'If it rains then the match will be cancelled' is true iff if it rains then the match will be cancelled. (Clearly, this is the sort of thing deflationists are keen to say.) Jackson responds that 'this is a grammatically fine, but the issue is not about grammar.' (1998, p. 117)

Jackson is right, of course, that grammar can't be the end of the story. But it doesn't follow that semantic properties provide the appropriate theoretical vocabulary to tell the rest of the story—to say what lies behind the grammar, so to speak. Hence it is open to a deflationist to maintain that it is a trivial issue whether indicative conditionals have truth-conditions, or are representational—of course they do, and are. What isn't open, in this case, is to deny that there are further theoretical questions to be raised about such conditionals, in non-representational terms.

about truth is compatible with non-minimalism about truth-aptness, and that the latter is what the noncognitivist needs. I have suggested that this is a cure for a non-existent disease. In the respects that matter, minimalism about truth is a friend rather than an enemy of noncognitivism. At least, it is a friend of expressivism, in the broad sense identified above—the view that accords the semantic and representational notions no 'thick' role in linguistic theory.

It might be objected that deflationism about truth-aptness is in any case highly implausible. After all, the application of the terms 'true' and 'false', and related marks of the declarative or assertoric use of language, are very prominent features of language. How likely is it that they don't 'track' some theoretically significant underlying characteristic of the speech acts concerned? Such a characteristic—call it the *truth-aptness basis,* or TAB, for short—will be what makes those speech acts truth-apt, in one important sense of the term. And once we've found it, won't we have found a substantial distinguishing mark of the representational uses of language?

No, because the argument rests on an equivocation—a kind of use–mention confusion, in fact. Does 'truth-apt' mean 'such as to be *treated* as truth-evaluable—i.e., such that competent speakers *apply* the terms 'true' and 'false' to the sentence in question? Or does it mean 'such as to be capable of *being* true or false'? From an anthropological perspective it does seem plausible (let us suppose) that there is some property TAB underlying the declarative use of language, including the use of the terms 'true' and 'false' in conjunction with some kinds of utterances but not others. So it is plausible, as we might put it, that being *use-of-'true'-apt* is a substantial theoretical property, waiting to be investigated. But being use-of-'true'-apt does not imply being *representational.* It merely implies being *treated as 'representational'*. (Compare: religious studies, in it's anthropological incarnation, does not require theological ontology.)

We can confirm this diagnosis by noting that there is no guarantee whatsoever that TAB itself be representational in nature. In the next section I'll sketch an account with this character. The crucial point is that the underlying property that determines truth-aptness—TAB, as we put it—need not involve any 'word–world' surrogate for a semantic relation, of a kind which would be useful to metaphysics, or ground a 'thick' representational view of language.[13]

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[13]The argument criticised here is not that of Jackson, Oppy and Smith (1994). Their strategy is different. They suggest that sentences acquire truth-aptness by being conventional expressions of truth-apt mental states, viz., beliefs. And they argue 'that it is not a minimal matter whether or not a state is a belief.' There is a sense in which this is relatively uncontroversial, I think. Roughly, it is a parallel to the sense in which it is uncontroversial, or at least plausible, that there is some property TAB that underlies the fact that certain speech acts get cast in declarative form. But as in that case, there is no guarantee that this property is representational in nature (rather than, say, a matter of the place of the state in question in a certain internal architecture).

Jackson, Oppy and Smith also defend non-minimalism about beliefs by appealing to certain folk intuitions or platitudes about belief. These platitudes do have a representationalist character. For example, they speak of the 'truism about belief that it is a state designed to fit the facts' or 'designed to fit the way things are.' (pp. 296-297) As in the case of the various intuitions and platitudes that Jackson offers in support of a representational view of language, it seems to me that these psychological platitudes have two interpretations, one obvious and one controversial. The obvious reading doesn't challenge deflationism and global expressivism.

8. The expressivist alternative[14]

Let's think about the biological functions of the mental states we call beliefs, setting their (apparent) semantic properties explicitly to one side. Or rather, let's simply take advantage of the fact that the semantic properties do not appear explicitly in an account of the functional roles of the states in question, and neglect the familiar problem of how to fashion representational content from such functional materials. Let's begin somewhere familiar, in other words, with the idea that there is some functional characterisation of our cognitive lives, in which intentional and semantic terms do not explicitly appear. (In fact, this familiar place is just a rough psychological analogue of what, in a passage quoted at the beginning, Jackson asked us to find plausible with respect to language, viz., a scientific account in which semantic terms do not appear.)

How did it serve our ancestors to develop a psychology rich enough to contain such mental states? What role did those states play in increasingly complex lives? It is plausible, in my view, that there is no single answer, appropriate for all kinds of beliefs. Perhaps the function of some beliefs can be understood in terms of the idea that it is useful to have mental states designed to covary with certain environmental conditions, but for many, the story is surely more complicated. Consider causal or probabilistic beliefs, for example, which manifest themselves as dispositions to have certain sorts of expectations (and hence to make certain sorts of decisions) in certain sorts of circumstances. Plausibly, there's a interesting story to be told about the biological value of having an internal functional organisation rich enough to contain such dispositions.

Or consider some of the other cases in which expressivism has often seemed appealing—universal generalisations, indicative and subjunctive conditionals, modal and moral claims, and so on. In each of these cases we have some sense of what the associated beliefs enable us to *do,* which we couldn't do otherwise—some sense of the distinctive role of the states in question in the psychological architecture of creatures like us. Suppose we get to this point without explicitly invoking the idea that states we are talking about have representational contents. Then we have the beginnings of an understanding of what these various kinds of states do for us—why it's useful to develop a psychological architecture rich enough to contain them—but no understanding of why they manifest themselves as *commitments.* Why do we take them to be truth-evaluable, for example, or expressible in declarative form?

This issue can be approached in the same explanatory spirit, I think. With respect to the various functionally-characterised states we've described, we want to consider the question, why do we give voice to *those* mental states in *that* form? And notice a *prima facie* puzzle. If our account up to this point has emphasised the fact that the states in question have various different functions, it may seem odd that states with different functions all get expressed in a similar way, as truth-evaluable declarative judgements.[15]

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[14]This section overlaps to a considerable extent with §9 of Price 2004b.

[15]In contrast, a representational view has it easy at this point. The commonality of linguistic expression reflects the commonality of representational function. But the bump in the rug then shows up somewhere else, when functional differences need to be explained in terms of differences in representational content.

However, it isn't difficult to find a place to start. Plausibly, many of our psychological states are such that it is often advantageous, with respect to those states, that we tend to towards conformity across our linguistic communities. A prime function of assertoric language seems to be that it facilitates and encourages such alignment. It leads us to 'express' or give voice to our psychological dispositions in ways which invite challenge by speakers with contrary dispositions. And 'That's false' and 'That's true' are markers of challenge and concession, respectively.[16]

As ordinary speakers, we don't understand that this is what assertoric language is for—we just do it, as it were, and from our point of view, we seem to be 'saying how things are'. But the function of this practice of 'saying how things are' is the one in the background—the function of altering our behaviourally significant commitments much more rapidly than our individual experience in the environment could do, by giving us access to the corresponding states of our fellows (and much else besides). At any rate, that's one kind of thing that assertion seems especially well-suited to *do.* Moreover—and for the moment this is the crucial point—it is something it can usefully do in application to commitments with a wide variety of functional roles of their own (none of them representation as such).

The suggestion is thus that assertions are intentional expressions of psychological states with a variety of (non-representational) functions within the internal psychological architecture of the speakers concerned—or better, within the complex network of relations involving both these internal states and the creatures' external environment—a variety obscured in their expression, when they take on what Wittgenstein calls the 'clothing' of assertoric language.[17] Clearly, there has to be common clothing internally, too. Roughly, the states in question come to participate in a belief-like or rational cognitive architecture, and an important set of issues concerns the relations of precedence between thought and talk at this point. Does belief, or at least full-blown rationally-governed belief, rely on internalising the dialogical structures which come with the development of assertoric language?

Leaving these issues of priority to one side, the proposal is thus that representational language and thought is a tool for aligning commitments across a speech community (and, perhaps, within a single head). But though in one sense a single tool, it is a tool with many distinct applications, corresponding to the distinct primary functions of the various kinds of psychological states that take advantage of it—that facilitate their own alignment by expressing themselves in assertoric form.[18]

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[16]Of course, the details of this need to be spelt out rather carefully—especially if we want to avoid simply helping ourselves to the representational notions. See Price (1988, 1990, 2003).

[17]A major themes of the early sections of the *Investigations* is that philosophy misses important distinctions about the uses of language, distinctions hidden from us by 'the uniform appearances of words.' (1968, #11) As Wittgenstein puts it later, 'We remain unconscious of the prodigious diversity of all the everyday language-games because the clothing of our language makes everything alike.' (p. 224).

[18]This kind of multifunctional explanatory structure exists in other places in biology. As I have noted elsewhere (Price 2004b), a good example is the human hand. If we say that the function of the hand is *manipulation,* and leave it at that, we miss something very important: we miss the underlying functional diversity. On my reading,

Another of Wittgenstein's analogies fits this functional architecture particularly nicely, I think:

> It is like looking into the cabin of a locomotive. We see handles all looking more or less alike. (Naturally, since they are all supposed to be handled.) But one is the handle of a crank which can be moved continuously (it regulates the opening of a valve); another is the handle of a switch, which has only two effective positions, it is either off or on; a third is the handle of a brake-lever, the harder one pulls on it, the harder it brakes; a fourth, the handle of a pump: it has an effect only so long as it is moved to and fro. (1968, #12)

In my view, assertions are much like handles. Handles connect various functionally-distinct bits of machinery to the muscles of our hands and arms, and to the brains that control them. Assertions connect various functionally-distinct psychological states to the external and internal cognitive machinery that allows the states concerned to be up-dated on the fly.

As I've stressed in other work, this approach leads to a very different view from Jackson's of the phenomena that he takes to give rise to location problems. Jackson and I begin in the same place, I think, with an interest in making sense of a range of distinct 'packets' of linguistic usage—talk of semantic properties, talk of ethical properties, and so on. And we'll agree, presumably, in accepting what science tells us about such talk—as Jackson puts it, in the passage I quoted at the beginning, 'a story about masses, shapes, causal chains, behavioural dispositions of language users, evolutionary history, and the like'. But then Jackson takes a theoretical move that I want to resist. He takes the talk to be representational, and is led by the path we've described to an issue about the various worldly relata of the semantic relations thus in question. Having framed the problem in those terms, he is then rightly troubled by the resulting ontological plurality, and faces location problems.

By contrast, my expressivist approach stays at the level of the 'story about ... behavioural dispositions of language users, evolutionary history, and the like'. In particular, it investigates the functions of the linguistic usage in question, and associated psychology, in non-representational terms, and then tries to account for the representational 'clothing' in the way just described. There's no location problem as such. Instead there is an issue of the same cardinality, so to speak, about the various functions of the various groups of terms and concepts—semantic terms, ethical terms, and the rest. However, this is a problem about human psychology and linguistic behaviour—a broadly anthropological problem, as I put it earlier—not a problem in metaphysics. And of course we expect human behaviour to be functionally pluralistic. So we have unsurprising plurality, in a familiar and scientifically-tractable place, in place of the concerns that motivate Jackson's 'serious metaphysics'.

Wittgenstein makes a closely analogous point about assertion—a point in which representation plays the role of manipulation, as the notion whose homogeneity needs to be challenged.

9. What if deflationism is false?

Let's recap. So far I've been trying to highlight the semantic presuppositions of Jackson's program, by exhibiting the effects on the program of assuming semantic deflationism. I haven't argued for semantic deflationism as such, though I have defended it against two objections: first, that in the light of my own argument, it would lead to the absurd consequence that there are no location problems whatsoever; and second, that its falsity is in any case obvious, something that can be read off from what we all know to be true about language. For all I've said so far, however, deflationism may nevertheless be false. Wouldn't Jackson's metaphysical program then be out of the woods? No problem with semantic presuppositions, surely, so long as they are true?

I want to close by mentioning two reasons for pessimism—two reasons for thinking that metaphysics grounded on semantics isn't out of the woods, even if we reject deflationism about the semantic properties. These reasons take us back to some concerns I touched on at the beginning.

For the first problem, I'll do little more than allude to an excellent discussion of a closely related issue by Stephen Stich, in the first chapter of *Deconstructing the Mind* (Stich, 1996). Stich is concerned with eliminativism about the notions of folk psychology—belief, desire, and so on. He notes that many philosophers take the eliminativist thesis to be that the terms 'belief' and 'desire' *do not refer.* In other words, they take the thesis to be couched in these semantic terms. But if that's what eliminativism is, Stich argues, then in order to assess it we need a theory of reference—a theory capable of guiding our judgement about whether these terms actually do succeed in referring to anything.

Stich argues that this leaves metaphysics in an unenviable position. For one thing, it leaves it hostage to the almost inevitable indeterminacies in a scientific theory of reference. In other words, it means that we can't decide whether eliminativism is true until we sort out the issue between competing theories of reference—and that's likely to mean 'never', given the nature of scientific theory. (The threat of deflationism lurks in the background here, of course, but we are now leaving that aside.)

Even worse, in would seem that in crucial cases, the metaphysics needs to *precede* the theory of reference. In order to decide what relation reference is, we need to be able to examine typical cases. In other words, we need to be able to study the various relationships that obtain between words or thoughts or the one side, and the items to which they (supposedly) refer on the other. But how can we do this in the case of 'belief' and 'desire', while it is up for grabs whether these terms refer to anything? In order to know where to look, we'd have to know not only *that* they refer, but also *to what.* To put this in terms of the location problem: If we need reference to locate belief and desire, we'll find that we need to locate reference, before we can put it to work. Yet we can't locate reference until we've located its worldy relata.

Thus we have two problems for eliminativism, if it is to rely on semantic relations such as reference. (Let's call the first the 'referential indeterminacy problem' and the second 'the

precedence problem'.) It's clear, I think, that both problems arise not simply for eliminativism, but for any metaphysical view that relies on reference in this way. In other words, both problems apply just as much if the question is 'What is belief?', if this is to be understood as 'To what does the term 'belief' refer?', as they do to the question 'Are there beliefs?', understood as 'Does the term 'belief' refer to anything?'

Quite apart from the threat of deflationism, then, there are reasons for doubting whether metaphysics can rest on semantic foundations. Stich's own response to the problem is simply to abandon semantics, and ask the questions in material form: 'Are there beliefs?', in place of 'Does the term *belief* refer to anything?' However, while this certainly seems the right move in some cases—folk psychology might be more controversial than Stich thinks, perhaps, but chemistry isn't, for example—it's clear that Jackson can't follow Stich down this non-semantic path. To do so would be to abandon the global semantic route to location problems. In my view, then, Jackson's program remains vulnerable to Stich's objections, even if we ignore deflationism.

10. The circularity issue

Stich's objection applies to the use of semantic notions in the metaphysics of other topics. It argues, in effect, that even if not deflationary, these semantic notions aren't up to the job. It's not that they won't bear the weight, but rather that they can't tell us where the weight is born—which is what we want to know in metaphysics—in advance of an answer to that very question. The semantic legs connect thought and talk to the ground. So we can investigate the ground by following the legs to their feet. But we can't distinguish the real legs from rivals, until we know where the feet are actually located.

But what about the legs themselves? Is there an additional problem about using these semantic props to investigate themselves—to ground the metaphysics of the semantic properties themselves? I think that there is an additional problem. Let's go back to §5. There, I compared the role of the semantic notions in Jackson's program to that of causation in Lewis's program. Lewis's technique for theoretical identification proceeds in two steps. The first step constructs a Ramsey sentence, to give us a definite description of the theoretical entity or property in question, *couched in causal terms.* The second step turns to science, to discover what it is—couched in other terms—that fulfills that definite description. In setting out to take the second step, we display our confidence in some principle about causation—for example, that all causation is grounded in physical causation.

In §5 we noted that so long as we can help ourselves to 'thick' semantic notions, there is a global variant of this program. In this case, our definite description of our target entity or property tells us that it is the thing or property that satisfies or makes true the description encoded in the non-semantic part of the Ramsey sentence. Formally speaking, this works fine so long as our target entity or property is not itself semantic in nature. Whether it is really any use in

metaphysics is another matter, the matter we've just raised.[19] Formally, however, there's no problem.

But consider what happens when our targets are the semantic properties and relations themselves. Here the technique is surely disallowed, because in this case the construction of the Ramey sentence is supposed to eliminate the semantic terms. This brings us back to the circularity noted at the beginning. Whatever the role that semantic properties play in grounding the location problem for other kinds of properties, they surely can't play that role on their own behalf. Semantic properties cannot bootstrap metaphysics, on other words, but need to be assumed as primitive brute facts. Thus representationalism becomes a kind of surd for Jackson's program, both essential and inaccessible to its methods.

The trajectory from metaphysics to semantic primitives thus goes something like this. Metaphysics begins with an interest in the nature of things. Semantics seems to guarantee a new mode of description of those things, and a new mode of enquiry: describe the things in question as the *referents* of our terms, the *truth-makers* of our sentences, and set out to seek these semantic relata. Scaling-down the ladder metaphor, semantic relations thus come to play the role of white canes, for metaphysicians who take us to be the victims of a kind of world-blindness.

As we have seen, deflationists argue these semantic canes are not sufficiently substantial to do the job.[20] And Stich argues, in effect, that even if they are sufficiently substantial, they are too ill-constrained to be useful to metaphysics—there are too many competing canes, and we don't know where a given cane leads unless we are already acquainted with what lies at the far end of it. Setting Stich and deflationists aside, however, the circularity concerns remain. These arise, from this perspective, when we try to use our white canes to guide us to themselves—i.e., when we set out to investigate (or 'locate') the semantic properties.

There are a number of forms the concern might take. The one just mentioned objects that in the case of the semantic terms themselves, we can't avail ourselves of the generalised Ramsey-Lewis program, in which semantics plays the role that causation does for Lewis himself. As noted, it might be suggested that this is something metaphysics needs to live with. Perhaps semantic properties need to be accepted as 'brute primitives'.

However, this primitivism amounts to philosophy's *imposing* a view about the functions of human language. This alone should surely concern naturalists, but all the more so if we agree with the remarks of Jackson I quoted at the beginning, to the effect that semantic properties are likely to be no part of the 'surface' scientific story about language. It is bad enough if the semantic categories claim a prior entitlement to a seat at the scientific table, but worse still if they have no other credible reason to be there.

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[19] One reason for being doubtful whether it helps is Quinean. What it relies on, formally speaking, is simply semantic ascent, and as Quine emphasis, that takes us nowhere new. Cf. Blackburn on Ramsey's ladder, in *Ruling Passions.*

[20] My aim has been not so much to side with deflationists on this point, but to use the fact that this kind of metaphysics is vulnerable to this charge to highlight the role of the semantic presuppositions in question.

We have seen that for Jackson himself, the claim of the semantic properties seems to rest on the proposal that they are implicit in the scientific story. There's no comfort here for a naturalist bothered by primitivism, however, because in the case of semantic properties, as in other cases, Jackson's conception of the task assumes a representational view of semantic vocabulary in question. Hence it assumes precisely what such a naturalist is seeking reason to accept.

These issues are admittedly very difficult, and it would be premature to insist that there's no non-vicious way to complete this circle, whether in a form acceptable to naturalists or otherwise. Still, in the absence of further clues as to how the solution might go, I think that there are serious grounds for concern. Representationalism seems to operate as kind of transcendental foundation for Jackson's program (and, though perhaps less explicitly, for much of contemporary metaphysics). If so, then at the very least this is something that needs to be clearly acknowledged—issued like a natural health warning, to would-be followers of this philosophical path. Novices should be told that there are alternatives.

With those alternatives clearly in view, we could proceed to consider what seem to me the hard and important questions in this area. Are these circularities inevitably vicious, from a naturalistic perspective, or should we regard representationalism as a coherent and open question, a matter to be settled by future science? Without alternatives in view, the possibility that representationalism is deeply incoherent looks disastrous, a kind of scepticism that philosophy cannot afford seriously to entertain. With alternatives, it simply looks like a fascinating (possible) philosophical discovery, viz., that semantic properties are too 'queer' to be part of a scientific account of language.

11. Philosophy without ladders

Representationalist philosophy has been to this point before, I think. Semantic relations seem an essential ladder for serious metaphysics, but a ladder which is itself unreachable by its own rungs. Serious metaphysics thus seems close to the point that Wittgentein reaches at the end of the *Tractatus,* when he offers us a view of the relation between language and the world that can't be talked about—a view inaccessible by its own lights. (There are other similarities, too, I think. Jackson's generalised Ramsey-Lewis structuralism seems to offer us at the level of theories, or perhaps conceptual clusters, what Wittgenstein's picture theory of meaning offers us at the level of sentences: a view in which linguistic structure mirrors ontological structure, via semantic mappings.)

Famously, that (early) Wittgenstein urged us to kick away the ladder. Whatever he meant by that, he later advocated something less paradoxical. He turned away from the kind of philosophy that required such a ladder. Rather than climbing it and kicking it away, his later recommendation seems to have been to avoid it altogether:

> I might say: if the place I want to get to could only be reached by way of a ladder, I
> would give up trying to get there. For the place I really have to get to is a place I must

> already be at now. Anything that I might reach by climbing a ladder does not interest me. (*Culture and Value,* p. 7e in Winch translation)

The nature of Wittgenstein's later philosophy is a matter for much dispute, of course. Under at least one interpretation (Price 1992, 2004b), however, it is close to what I have called global expressivism—a view that sees the right question, everywhere, as a question posed in non-representationalist terms. What are creatures like us doing with *this* bit of language? As I have emphasised elsewhere (Price 1992, 1997, 2004a) this is a thoroughly naturalistic viewpoint. Wittgenstein thus becomes a kind of pragmatic naturalist, interested in explaining our use of philosophically puzzling concepts—value, causation, modality, meaning, or whatever—in terms of their role in our cognitive and practical lives.

Another of Wittgenstein's later themes is that philosophy is a kind of self-help therapy, whose role is to help us to overcome our own philosophical cravings—the craving for metaphysics, for example. In my terms, this therapy takes a specific form. Its goal is to cure the delusion that we are world-blind, to correct the particular form of philosophical hypochondria that leads us to believe that there is a problem that semantic white canes can solve. The key to the cure is to see that the delusion results from imbibing an unhealthy combination of naturalism and representationalism. Some philosophers [21] recognise that this combination is unhealthy, and seek relief by abandoning naturalism. Some think that this is Wittgenstein's prescription. But in my view the right choice, and arguably Wittgenstein's choice, is the other one. We should keep the naturalism and dispense with the representationalism.

Either way, the question of status of the semantic properties well deserves the prominence that Jackson's book accords it, even if for reasons that he himself does not highlight. For naturalists, in my view, this question is the watershed between two radically different conceptions of the task of a scientifically-grounded philosophy. On one side lies metaphysics; on the one other, scientific anthropology and the study of certain aspects of human linguistic behaviour and psychology. Though Jackson turns the wrong way at the divide, in my view, his book provides the best existing map of the territory on that side. We expressivists—comparatively lonely, these days, on what remains the shady side of the ridge—should surely hope for a Jackson to call our own.

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[21]E.g., perhaps, Paul Boghossian (1990), and Galen Strawson (?).

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