

Global Anti-Representationalism?

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1. Price: Subject naturalism vs. Object naturalism
2. Price: Global vs. Local Expressivism
3. Price: Subject naturalism via global expressivism.
4. Representationalism: The concept of representation plays a fundamental explanatory or expressive role in semantic theory.
5. *Methodological pragmatism*: The point of introducing a notion of semantic content or meaning is to explain or at least codify central proprieties of the *use* of expressions with those contents or meanings.
6. Wilfrid Sellars (“Counterfactuals, Dispositions, and the Causal Modalities”): the “tendency to assimilate all discourse to describing,” is primarily “responsible for the prevalence in the empiricist tradition of ‘nothing-but-ism’ in its various forms (emotivism, philosophical behaviorism, phenomenism). . . .”

[O]nce the tautology ‘The world is described by descriptive concepts’ is freed from the idea that the business of all non-logical concepts is to describe, the way is clear to an *ungrudging* recognition that many expressions which empiricists have relegated to second-class citizenship in discourse are not *inferior*, just *different*.
7. Anti global-representationalism is weaker than global anti-representationalism.
8. Rorty’s first claim is that we should realize we have been driven to a philosophical impasse when we find ourselves committed to representations characterized by a sort of intrinsic epistemic privilege that is magical in virtue of its supposed intelligibility independently of the role the representings in question play in our actual reason-giving practices.
9. The forces that push representationalists towards semantic and epistemological foundationalism in the form of commitment to sensory, logical, or semantic givenness (i.e. analyticity) ultimately stem from concern with the question of what it is to *understand* representations as such, what it is to grasp representational content, what one must *do* to count thereby as taking or treating something in practice *as* a representation, as pointing beyond itself in this distinctive intentional way.
10. (Semantic-epistemic) *entanglement thesis*: meaning and understanding are co-ordinate concepts, in the sense that neither can be properly understood or explicated except as part of a story that includes the other. Meanings are what one in the first

instance understands, and talk of meaning in isolation from talk of what it is to grasp or understand that meaning is idle.

11. *Semantic atomism*: the semantic contents of at least some episodes, states, and expressions can be made sense of one by one, each independently of all the others.

12. *Semantic nominalism*: The semantic paradigm is the designation relation between a name and its bearer (what it is a name of), or between sign (signifier) and signified. *All* varieties of the representing/represented relation are to be assimilated to that model.

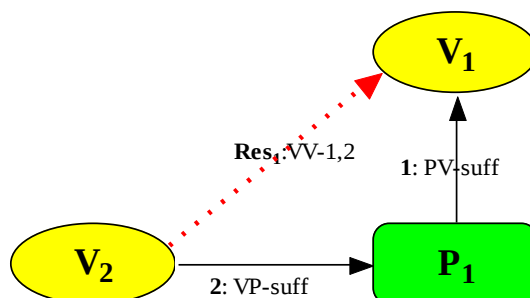
13. Methodological pragmatists are obliged to take the category of sentences as *semantically* fundamental, precisely because of their *pragmatic* priority.

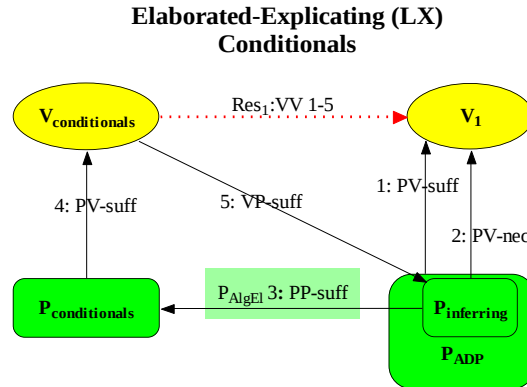
14. These arguments do not rule out making essential use of representational vocabulary in semantics, so long as the account meets at least three conditions.

- An account must be offered of the uptake or grasp of representations as such--what one has to *do* to count thereby as taking or treating them *as* representings of some represented things. That is a normative status: according to things a distinctive kind of *authority* over the correctness of one's claims, thereby making oneself *responsible* to them. For that is what it is to take it that one is talking or thinking *about* them.
- The account must be consistent with the pragmatic priority of sentential contents.
- It must acknowledge the way the semantic content of some expressions, states, or episodes is essentially related to that of others, to which one might or might not be committed. Semantic representationalism invites and encourages the denial of these insights, but it does not *entail* them.

15. The expressive role I take to be shared by both classical and modal logical vocabulary and normative vocabulary is one possible role picked out from a structured space of possibilities. Here are two representative expressive roles vocabularies can play (see *Between Saying and Doing: Towards an Analytic Pragmatism* [OUP 2008]):

**Meaning-Use Diagram #1:
Pragmatic
Metavocabulary**





16. The sort of expressivism about logical, modal, and normative vocabulary that consists in understanding them as LX for every ADP (autonomous discursive practice) is essentially, and not just accidentally, a *local* expressivism. Not all vocabularies can play *this* particular expressive role. Autonomous discursive practices *must* contain vocabularies playing *other* expressive roles.

17. One of the vocabularies I am a local expressivist about is representational vocabulary itself. I am a certain kind of deflationist about the representational dimension of intentionality itself.

18. The vocabulary I am interested in is the natural language vocabulary that expresses the idea that besides what we say or think, there is also what we are talking or thinking *about*. What distinguishes the ‘of’ and ‘about’ that express intentional directedness (the representational dimension of thought and talk) from the ‘of’ of “the pen of my aunt” and the ‘about’ of “the book weighs about five pounds”? I think it is their use in *de re* ascriptions of propositional attitude. To understand the representational dimension of discourse, then, we need to understand what is made explicit by *de re* ascriptions of propositional attitude.

19. Segregating some expressions within the scope of a *de re* operator, such as ‘of’ or ‘about’, is a way of making explicit that responsibility for using *those* expressions to specify the content of the claim ascribed is being undertaken, along with the ascribing claim, rather than attributed, along with the ascribed claim. Thus if I say “Kant came to believe of his loyal and long-suffering servant Lampl that he was conspiring against Kant,” I make it clear that the specification of Lampl as “loyal and long-suffering” is one that *I* am taking responsibility for, *not* one I am attributing to Kant as part of the attitude I am ascribing to him. The pragmatic expressive function that determines the semantic content of representational vocabulary is marking the crucial distinction of social perspective between commitments (assertional and identificational=substitution-inferential) that are *attributed* and those that are *acknowledged* or undertaken.

20. The representational dimension turns out to be ubiquitous. *Every* vocabulary can be used in expressing commitments that can be both attributed and acknowledged. Every vocabulary can figure in *de re* ascriptions, and so be talked about in representational vocabulary. So representational vocabulary makes explicit an essential and ubiquitous

dimension of conceptual content. This is a kind of global semantic representationalism, underwritten by a *local* expressivism about representational vocabulary itself.

21. What I am advocating is a *soft* global semantic representationalism. For it is an account of the *expressive* role of representational vocabulary that shows the same expressive function that makes it ubiquitously available to express a crucial dimension of conceptual contentfulness also *disqualifies* it from playing a fundamental *explanatory* role in an account of the semantics of at least some discursive practices. For the expressive role characteristic of representational vocabulary (like that of logical, modal, and normative vocabulary) can itself be fully specified in a social, normative, inferential pragmatic metavocabulary that does *not* itself employ representational vocabulary.

22. Does this sort of deflationary *explanatory* anti-representationalism about what representational vocabulary expresses entail a global explanatory anti-representationalism? I do not see that it does. For it might well be that although representational vocabulary need not be used in specifying the use of representational vocabulary itself (because its expressive role can be fully specified in a non-representational, social-normative-inferential pragmatic metavocabulary) nonetheless in order to specify the proprieties governing the use of ordinary empirical descriptive vocabulary, its distinctive expressive role requires specification with the help of a representational semantic metavocabulary.

23. Once one has freed oneself from the idea (and the auxiliary hypotheses that enforce the association) that semantic representationalism need take a nominalist or atomist form, must fail to appreciate what is special about sentences, or has to enforce a disconnection between semantic issues of meaning and epistemic ones pertaining to understanding, representational vocabulary can be understood as performing an important, indeed essential, expressive role in making explicit a discursive representational dimension of semantic content that necessarily helps articulate every autonomous discursive practice.

24. We do not need to *use* the concept of representation in order to understand what we are *doing* when we use the concept of (discursive) representation. It does *not* follow (even in the context of collateral commitments to methodological pragmatism and to semantic-epistemic entanglement) that the use of ordinary empirical descriptive vocabulary, which plays quite a *different* expressive role from that of logical, modal, normative, or representational vocabularies, is not best explained by appeal to a semantics that is couched in representational terms.

25. I think we do not know how the possibility of offering a certain kind of pragmatic metavocabulary for a vocabulary relates to the kind of semantic metavocabulary it is amenable to. In this case, the question is, what does the possibility of offering a social-normative-inferential pragmatic metavocabulary specifying the expressive role of representational vocabulary say about the possibility of *also* offering an explanatorily representationalist semantics for it, or for other vocabularies? We have not yet sufficiently explored (and so do not now know enough about) the relations between pragmatic metavocabularies and semantic metavocabularies, for vocabularies playing very different expressive roles to be able to answer to this question.