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Discussion: The Pragmatic Psyche

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Dascal and Horowitz¹ criticize two claims I made² about Fodor's psychosemantic project.³ One was that the semantics does not run the psyche, the other that Fodor's naturalization assumes rather than explains intentionality. The claims survive the criticisms and join forces in showing that it is because intentionality is left unexplained that the semantics appears to run the psyche.

Dascal and Horowitz agree that language-driven cognition is causally run by a mental pragmatics (p. 396). Although I chose the example of communication, my article and works cited there indicate that the pragmatic format (assumptions, alternatives, choices, tracking new data while premising the old) characterizes mental cognition in general. But isn't the work of the *language of thought* psychosemantic? From the way Dascal and Horowitz portray that work I see a dilemma shaping up. If the language of thought does *all* the work in mental cognition, then that work must be pragmatic. Dascal and Horowitz may have another horn in mind: an *implementational* work for the language of thought. This work *is* psychosemantic, but fails to run the mental show that "*ultimately* affects behavior" (p. 396). The implementing representations have causal powers in virtue of being semantic, but these are powers exercised to implement a mental pragmatics. What prevents the causal powers of representations from being functional *qua semantic* in *actual* cognition is their pragmatic interface with competing beliefs, expectations, and desires. Dascal and Horowitz insist on the semantic character of the causal *powers* of representations; I insist on the pragmatic properties of the joint *exercise* of these powers in *actual* cognition. The reason semantics cannot run the psyche is that mental states not only represent facts, but do so *in order to* remove uncertainties, solve problems, or guide actions. The latter aims are intrinsically pragmatic, although semantic relations are exploited and respected

¹ "Semantics and the Psyche," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 52 (1992): 395–99.

² "Does Semantics Run the Psyche?" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 49 (1989): 687–700.

³ Fodor, *Psychosemantics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1987).

in their pursuit. We cognize under pragmatic constraints since, being biologically goal-directed, we care about more than how the world is.

The other claim under discussion was that Fodor does not naturalize intentionality but assumes it, and naturalizes instead its success conditions. The philosophical consensus, on Fodor's side, is that the latter project also explains intentionality. To represent (or have intentionality) is to causally correlate with environmental items. Such a reduction, we are told, explains and naturalizes intentionality. If the naturalization of intentionality is an exercise in *conceptual analysis*, then analyzing its success conditions is explicating intentionality. What is missing from such an analysis is an *explanation* of the intentional character of cognition, of its place in the larger biological scheme of things, of why, in what forms, and with what consequences, intentionality has been installed by evolution. Such an explanation would specify in turn the informational tasks of intentional cognition, as they are handled by specific architectures. This is my kind of explanatory naturalization.

The problem with an analytic naturalization of intentionality is that it moves in narrow psychosemantic circles, either because it taps ordinary intuitions that have a misleading way of portraying cognition psychosemantically (e.g., she did this because she believed that); or else, and more importantly, because an exclusive concern with the success conditions of representation reveals only when semantic relations are instantiated (when causal correlations obtain). From such an angle, neither the mental pragmatics nor the evolutionary rationale of intentionality are visible. As a result, it is not visible that other informational arrangements must be in place in order for the semantics to do its work, nor is it evident that higher level pragmatic properties also enter the functional game of cognition, nor, to put things together, is it evident why semantic relations are surrounded by other informational arrangements and exploited pragmatically. Suppose now that a comprehensive mind naturalization makes these further facts visible and intelligible, and also establishes that semantic cognition is evolutionarily recent, that many species cognize without representing, that the mental pragmatics makes evolutionary sense while a pure psychosemantics doesn't, and other such uncomfortable propositions.⁴ Then psychosemanticism becomes a less plausible position, and the conceptual analysis of intentionality, which reinforces psychosemanticism, a less satisfying exercise.

⁴ See my forthcoming book, *Guidance to Goal*, for details.