

How to Pragmatize Frege

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The Priority of Propositions: A Pragmatist Philosophy of Logic, by MARÍA JOSÉ FRÁPOLLI, CHAM, SPRINGER, 2022, pp. xxiv + 255, €114.39.

María José Frápolli's new book sets the ground, as its subtitle suggests, for a pragmatist philosophy of logic. This philosophy of logic deserves this label, she says, insofar as it takes the practices of rational agents as its starting point. Moreover, she takes this to make the proposal here more faithful to the spirit of Frege's foundational project than the formalist philosophy of logic that dominated the 20th century. There are thus two intertwined aims in this book. One is to do philosophy of logic — to offer a picture of the way our inferential practices “hang together”, in Sellars' (1962/1963: 1) vivid words, that helps us throw light on them. The other is to vindicate the picture on offer as being in line with what Frege had in mind. In this critical notice, I will assess Frápolli's success in performing both tasks. My evaluation concerning one task, however, will inevitably be as intertwined with my evaluation concerning the other as the two tasks themselves are.

Frápolli presents her book as divided into three parts. The first, which comprises chapters 1–3, offers the general background. In chapter 1, Frápolli locates her project within metaphysics, as it does not deal with physical objects but with abstract objects, such as concepts. Her approach to metaphysics, in turn, is a pragmatist one in the sense specified above. Chapter 2 presents the master lines of Frápolli's proposal, which include five principles suggesting an *organic* model of propositional individuation (which she takes to be opposed to the *building-block* model) and a particular criterion for propositional identification (which takes propositions to be whatever exhibits propositional properties). Chapter 3, finally, surveys Frege's project from a pragmatist perspective. The story is that Frege needed a system that allowed him to perspicuously represent inferences, which is that of the *Begriffsschrift* (Frege 1879/1967). Although

he also let his framework cover sentences themselves, which he analyzed in terms of function and object (Frege 1891/1984) and of sense and reference (Frege 1892/1984), he always kept his wider aim in mind.

The second part of the book, comprising chapters 4–6, is devoted to Frápolli's account of the notion of a logical constant, which (Frápolli says) is one of the three intertwined notions, along with those of logical consequence and logical form, starting from which we can tackle philosophy of logic. In chapter 4, Frápolli presents what she takes to be Frege's view of the conditional, negation, and the universal and existential quantifiers, which is an *expressivist* view according to which all of these help us increase the expressive power of our language. Chapter 5 surveys and rejects two popular accounts of logical constants: inferentialism and invariance. Frápolli's own account of logical constants is provided in chapter 6. In its strongest form, this account takes logical constants to be binary predicates that take propositions as their arguments and whose function is to make the inferential connections holding between those propositions explicit.

The third part, finally, ranges from chapters 7 to 10 and applies the resulting account to a few specific issues. Chapter 7 is devoted to paradoxes, with focus on the ones generated by Goodman's (1955/1983) introduction of the term "grue", Prior's (1960) introduction of the connective "tonk", and Russell's introduction of the (unrestrained) predicate "does not belong to itself" (1908). Frápolli's strategy for dissolving the paradoxes is the same in the three cases: the term at issue does not express a true concept insofar as it is not *entrenched* in our actual practices, nor can it be. The second application of Frápolli's framework, to which chapter 8 is devoted, concerns the ongoing debate on the existence of multimodal arguments: can a nonlinguistic item act as a premise or conclusion in an argument? Third and finally, Frápolli's approach is in chapter 9 put at the service of comparing Tarski's and Frege's accounts of truth, a comparison from which Frege's emerges as victor. Frápolli's own account of truth, which she takes to be heir to Frege's, was advanced in Frápolli (2013) and is summarized in chapter 10 of this book.

Although *The Priority of Propositions* is a book of philosophy of logic, there is a lot of philosophy of language in here too. There are two reasons this is not a coincidence. First, Frápolli thinks philosophy of logic can be conceived as a branch of the philosophy of language — that dealing with those concepts that are central to our inferential practices, such as the concept of logical consequence. But second, and more importantly, Frápolli's account of *content* — maybe the central notion of the philos-

ophy of language – in terms of the logical notion of *inference* – definitely the central notion of the philosophy of logic – makes it hard to say where one discipline ends and the other begins. Many of the issues that have caught my attention most would, in fact, standardly be thought of as issues belonging to the philosophy of language.

I said Frápolli is a pragmatist philosopher of logic in the sense that she takes the practices of rational agents as her starting point, and her philosophy of language, being the other side of the same coin, should be pragmatist in this sense too. And indeed, *The Priority of Propositions* takes off with the *linguistic* practice of assertion. Frápolli takes assertion to be central, and takes Frege to take it to be central too. I think this is by itself ground enough to call Frege a pragmatist, but I also think Frápolli's reasons for assuming the primacy of assertion in Frege's thought are not always straightforward. To see this, note that, in the case of philosophy of language, we do not only have a way of tackling the discipline – *pragmatism* – but also a part of the discipline: *pragmatics*. The label “pragmatist” can thus be ambiguous between someone who has a pragmatist orientation and someone who does pragmatics, and Frápolli could be accused of confusing these two senses of the label when, in chapter 3, she collects as evidence that Frege had a pragmatist orientation passages where he acknowledges *avant la lettre* the existence of phenomena studied by pragmatics such as implicatures and presupposition [Frápolli (2022) pp. 72–74; see also Horn (2007), (2013); Karttunen (2016)]. But I think that, while his acknowledgement of these phenomena would be compatible with a non-pragmatist approach, his work in other issues in pragmatics *is* linked with a worldview that gives pride of place to the practices of rational agents.

Pragmatics is sometimes divided into *near-side pragmatics* and *far-side pragmatics* [see, for instance, Korta & Perry (2020)]. Near-side pragmatics, according to this distinction, studies those factors that are not linguistic but contribute to determining what is said through the utterance of a sentence. For instance, the speaker's location, which is not a linguistic factor, determines whether by saying “It is raining” they are saying that it is raining in Granada or that it is raining in Santiago. Far-side pragmatics, for its part, concerns ways of communicating contents that do not consist in asserting them. We can of course assert a content, as in a declarative sentence. But we can also ask whether it is true or false, as in a question, or command that it is made true, as in a directive. We can also convey the content with a lesser degree of commitment than we acquire when we assert it, as happens in cases of implicature.

In chapter 3, as I said, Frápolli brings to our attention some passages in which Frege acknowledges the existence of implicatures and presuppositions. This makes it reasonable to call Frege a far-side pragmatist in the sense specified above. Doing so does not require departing too much from the received view of Frege's thought, because acknowledging the existence of these pragmatic phenomena is compatible with abstracting from them in offering one's semantic account. What would put Frege under a new light, by contrast, would be to present him as a near-side pragmatist, something that Frápolli does not do explicitly but I think lies behind her reconstruction of Frege's philosophy. The thing is not just that Frege takes extra-linguistic factors into account when determining what is said through an utterance, although there are some hints at this in his work too. What makes him a near-side pragmatist, I contend, is the fact itself that he talks about *what is said*. "What is said" is not a semantic notion, but a notion belonging to near-side pragmatics.

To see this, note the contemporary distinction between *semantic value* and *assertoric content* [Ninan (2010); Rabern (2012), (2017)]. It is one thing what a sentence *means* in a given context and another what we *convey* by uttering it in that context. The first is an issue in semantics, while the second is an issue in near-side pragmatics; it has to do with our contribution to a practice we engage in as rational agents. When Frege talks about this, he is talking about what we do with our words, even when what we do is to express a thought. True, he seems to think that the thought we express by uttering a sentence can also be the meaning of that sentence [see Bronzo (2017)]. However, these two extensionally equivalent senses of "thought" are intensionally different, and the fact that Frege makes at least some mention to the one corresponding to assertoric content is enough to take him to engage in near-side pragmatics. Moreover, one cannot talk about the content of our assertions without taking the practices of rational agents into account. In other words, Frege's focus on what is said does not only make him a scholar of pragmatics, but also a pragmatist scholar.

There is thus a lot of Frege in *The Priority of Propositions*. More justice would have been done to the content of this book, in fact, had Frege been allowed to be part of its title, so ubiquitous his presence is throughout its pages. And yet, this is not a book about Frege; *The Priority of Propositions*, as Frápolli says, "is not a historical essay" (p. vii). Instead, Frege is for Frápolli a starting point from which to do philosophy. In this sense, Frege's role in this book might remind the reader of the one Wittgenstein had in Kripke's (1982) *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*. But,

unlike Kripke, Frápolli cannot say either that she does not “attempt to speak for (herself), or (...) to say anything about (her) own views on the substantive issues” (Kripke 1982: ix). The aim of this book is not “the presentation of a problem and an argument, not its critical evaluation” (id.). These are matters about which Frápolli cares deeply, and it would be out of her philosophical character to present puzzles and come up with imaginative solutions to them instead of wholeheartedly defending the positions she stands for.

Accepting the positions Frápolli stands for in *The Priority of Propositions*, moreover, involves a paradigm change. The paradigm she opposes in the book – one identifying logic with axiomatic calculi and Frege with a formalist – is pervasive and well-established, so there is certain danger that the book is met with incomprehension. How can anyone say logic does not consist in axiomatic calculi, many might ask, if this is just what “logic” means? But Frápolli makes the best possible job to offer the clearest and most solid formulation of the pragmatist project in philosophy of logic (and incidentally, as I said, also in philosophy of language) I know of, and those willing to understand what logic is all about would be well advised to study this book.

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