

## Précis of *Insensitive Semantics*

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Insensitive Semantics (I) has three components: It defends a positive theory; it presents a methodology for how to distinguish semantic context sensitivity from other kinds of context sensitivity; and finally, it includes chapters critical of other contributors on these issues. In this Précis, we outline each component, but before doing so a few brief ‘big picture’ remarks about the positions defended in *IS* are in order:

- An important motivation for *IS* is our opposition to a growing trend in contemporary philosophy towards various versions of ‘contextualism’ (not just in the philosophy of language, but also in epistemology, ethics, philosophical logic, metaphysics and linguistics). This trend, we argue, is fundamentally mistaken, both in its methodology and in its substance. Zoltan Szabó, commenting on *IS*, articulates this component of our view as follows:

...appeals to context sensitivity have become ‘cheap’—the twenty-first century version of ordinary language philosophy’s rampant postulations of ambiguity. Not only is this ‘the lazy man’s approach to philosophy,’ it undermines systematic theorizing about language. The more we believe context can influence semantic content, the more we will find ourselves at a loss when it comes to explaining how ordinary communication (let alone the transmission of knowledge through written texts) is possible (Szabó 2006)

This is an excellent articulation of the central motivation behind *IS*.
- At the same time, arguments and data adduced in favor of massive context sensitivity are not easy to dismiss. *IS* provides a *Neo-Gricean* framework for interpreting them; we introduce a theoretical framework and methodological principles fundamentally different from those that underlie Grice’s distinction between conversational implicature and what is said. Yet our goals are the same: to explain the data about context sen-

sitivity in a way that leaves room for a systematic (and largely context *insensitive*) semantics.

- If we're right, the study of speech act content and semantic content are sharply distinct areas of investigation. Failure to separate them is the main source of a misguided commitment to contextualism in contemporary philosophical discussion.

In what follows, we present our positive theory, our central methodological claims, our central critical points, and we end with an elaboration on one of our positive theses, namely, Speech Act Pluralism.

### 1. The Positive Theory

Our positive proposal is presented in the last four chapters of *IS*. It is motivated by the methodological and critical chapters preceding them, but can be presented independently, as we will do here. As the subtitle of *IS* indicates, we defend two views: Semantic Minimalism and Speech Act Pluralism. We'll say something about each and then elaborate on three important auxiliary theses.

#### *Semantic Minimalism*

Semantic Minimalism is the view that there is a level of content minimally influenced by context. In summary form, it is the view that for an utterance *u* of a well-formed sentence *S* in a context *C*, if you fix the referents of the obvious indexical/demonstrative components of *S* (the Basic Set of context sensitive expressions with which Kaplan begins 'Demonstratives' (1989), give or take a few contextuials) and if you disambiguate the ambiguous expressions, then what you end up with is a proposition.<sup>1</sup> We call this proposition the minimal semantic content of *u*.<sup>2</sup>

Take, for example, this utterance *u*: *Rudolf has a red nose*. We claim that once you fix the referent of 'Rudolf', say, to Rudolf, then you can describe the proposition *u* expresses, i.e. the proposition *that Rudolf has a red nose*. This proposition will be expressed by every utterance of 'Rudolf has a red nose' in which 'Rudolf' refers to Rudolf.

Though this might seem obvious, it is controversial and not unsurprisingly many philosophers would dispute what we just said. Stanley and Szabó (2000), for example, advocate the view that 'nose' is a context sensitive expression. Many philosophers, including Travis (1985, 1989, 1996) and Szabó (2001), argue that 'red' is. Almost all philosophers defend the view

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<sup>1</sup> We also require that vague expressions be precisified, but this is inessential to our view and was done mostly in reply to opponents; see our 'Reply to Korta and Perry' below.

<sup>2</sup> We elaborate on this choice of terminology in 'Reply to Korta and Perry' below.

that quantifiers are context sensitive. In general, Semantic Minimalism is opposed to *any* view that postulates semantic context sensitivity beyond Kaplan's Basic Set, whether it be 'know', 'nose', 'red', 'could', 'possible', 'some', 'no', or any other of a variety of expressions philosophers, for various reasons and with differing agendas, classify as semantically context sensitive.

There's a summary of the arguments for Semantic Minimalism on pp. 150ff.

### *Speech Act Pluralism*

According to Speech Act Pluralism (SPAP), every utterance of a sentence says a plurality of things. What an utterance says is massively context sensitive. It depends not only on the context of utterance, we argue, but also on the context of the interpreter (see Auxiliary Thesis (b) below).

The intended contrast is with Speech Act Monism, according to which each utterance says only one thing.<sup>3</sup> Almost every philosopher since Frege has been committed to Speech Act Monism, wittingly or not.

Here's an example of the kind we use to motivate Speech Act Pluralism (from our 1997): Imagine an utterance of (3).

3. A: At around 11 p.m., I put on a white shirt, a blue suit, dark socks and my brown Bruno Magli shoes. I then got into a waiting limousine and drove off into heavy traffic to the airport, where I just made my midnight flight to Chicago.

According to SPAP, (4)-(6) are all true descriptions of what's said by an utterance of (3) (note that (4)-(6) semantically express all different propositions):

4. A said that he dressed around 11 p.m., went to the airport and took the midnight flight to Chicago.
5. A said that he dressed before he went to the airport.
6. A said that he put on some really fancy shoes before he went to the airport.

The extent to which (4)-(6) will seem natural depends on the circumstance of the report; so arguments for SPAP are accompanied by small stories that describe the context for the report. Having argued that these reports are liter-

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<sup>3</sup> For the record, our commitment to SPAP came long before our commitment to Semantic Minimalism. We first publicly advocated SPAP in our 1997 'On an alleged connection between indirect quotation and semantic theory'. Our Semantic Minimalism did not surface explicitly in print until a few years ago.

ally true (and not just appropriate or warranted), SPAP proponents conclude that in uttering (3), A (literally) said the complement clauses of (4)-(6). And that's just a tiny sample of what was said in uttering (3). In §4 below we elaborate on this view in ways that we did not in *IS*.

Arguments for Speech Act Pluralism are presented in Chapter 13.

### *Three Auxiliary Theses*

Speech Act Pluralism and Semantic Minimalism are the two main views defended in *IS*. The rest of the book consists of arguments about semantic methodology, criticisms of alternatives, and responses to criticisms of our positive views. (In Chapter 11 we respond to the objection that some of our minimal propositions aren't real propositions and in Chapter 12 to the objection that they are psychologically unreal—a theoretical spinning wheel.) There are, however, three corollaries to our positive views worth highlighting:

#### *Corollary (a) - Surprising Semantic Invariability:*

We speculate that even terms such as 'tall', 'fast', and 'ready' are semantically context *insensitive*. We make this suggestion not because it is central to Semantic Minimalism (as some critics suggest), but because the evidence indicates that they are. Those who disagree need to explain away the data. If that explanation is forthcoming, nothing in Semantic Minimalism *requires* a commitment to surprising semantic invariability. We go wherever the data lead us.

#### *Corollary (b) - Denial of Context of Utterance Centrism:*

We claim that what speakers say with an utterance *u* of a sentence *S* in a context of utterance *C* is, in part, determined by features of the contexts in which *u* is interpreted. On this view, context sensitivity is not just sensitivity to the context of an utterance, but also to the context of interpretation.

#### *Corollary (c) - Denial of First Person Authority over what's said:*

One consequence of (b) is that speakers don't have access to all of what they say with a single utterance. Speakers need not know anything about the contexts from which their utterances are interpreted. Nonetheless, these contexts are in part determinants of what they say.

## **2. Methodology**

We make three central methodological claims in *IS*:

#### *Methodological Claim (a) - Denial of MA/the Speech Act Conception of Semantics:*

Since our 1997 paper, much of our work has involved criticism of a thesis that we call MA. In *IS* we formulated MA as:

MA: A theory of semantic content is adequate just in case it accounts for all or most of the intuitions speakers have about speech act content, i.e. intuitions about what speakers say, assert, claim, and state by uttering sentences.

We deny MA. It is a principle, we argue, that confuses semantic content with speech act content. Tacit, and sometimes explicit, acceptance of MA has, we argue, led philosophers to postulate more semantic context sensitivity than there is. Indeed, acceptance of MA implies, we argue, that context sensitivity is ubiquitous, i.e. that the Radical Contextualists are right. In this respect, recent work by Salmon has, from a very different perspective, come to the same conclusion (Salmon 2005). (Though we use the label 'MA', we wish we had used Salmon's more informative label, 'The Speech Act Conception of Semantics'.)

It is the denial of MA that enables us to combine Speech Act Pluralism with Semantic Minimalism. If you endorse MA, you cannot maintain both Speech Act Pluralism and Semantic Minimalism—the massive context sensitivity of what's said would imply that semantic content is massively context sensitive as well.

*Methodological Claim (b) - Rejection of Context Shifting Arguments:*

Context Shifting Arguments (CSA) require us to consider two utterances of an unambiguous, non-vague, non-elliptic sentence *S*. If the consensus intuition is that what's said or expressed by, or that the truth-conditions and so possibly the truth-values of, these two utterances differ, then CSA concludes *S* is (semantically) context sensitive (or at least you have evidence that it is). Appeal to CSA's are ubiquitous in the philosophy of language. As soon as you relinquish MA, these arguments must, we argue, be given up as well. They are uniformly bad. It is bad methodology, based on a tacit or an explicit acceptance of MA, to appeal to such arguments.

*Methodological Claim (c) - Good Tests for Context Sensitivity:*

We do *not* claim there are *no* interesting or informative connections between intuitions about speech act content and semantic content. One way to exploit intuitions about *what is said in uttering S* in order to locate its *semantic content* is to identify tests that help the theorist focus on the speech act content that a wide range of utterances of *S* share or with the content you can grasp if your knowledge of the context of utterance is

minimal. A second strategy we use is to see whether the expression in question behaves like classical context sensitive expressions (such as ‘I’ and ‘you’) in certain respects. We exploit such strategies in Chapter 7.

### 3. Criticism

There are two important critical theses in *IS*:

- a. Moderate Contextualism is an unstable position: consistent Moderate Contextualists should become Radical Contextualists.
- b. Radical Contextualism is empirically inadequate and internally inconsistent.

We discuss these in turn, but first an explanation of the labels ‘Moderate Contextualist’ and ‘Radical Contextualist’:

- *Radical Contextualism* is a tradition that traces back to the Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Investigations*, on through Austin, and is today represented by a wide range of philosophers, some of whom call themselves Relevance Theorists,<sup>4</sup> some Neo-Wittgensteinians, some Sellarsians. We call them all Radical Contextualists. These theorists all hold some version or other of the view that every single expression is context sensitive,<sup>5</sup> and that the peculiarities of members of the Basic Set of context sensitive expressions are of no deep theoretical significance.
- *Moderate Contextualism* tries to steer a middle course between Semantic Minimalism and Radical Contextualism by minimally expanding the Basic Set. Some Moderate Contextualists come to semantics with an agenda from, e.g., epistemology or ethics and claim that expressions of particular importance in their field (e.g. ‘know’ or ‘good’) are context sensitive. Others are serious semanticists committed to MA and are led from MA to Moderate Contextualism via Context Shifting Arguments.

#### *a. Instability of Moderate Contextualism*

In Chapters 3-6, we argue that the arguments invoked by Moderate Contextualists inexorably lead to Radical Contextualism. No consistent Moderate Contextualist can remain moderate. In this regard, the Radical Contextualist is more consistent than the Moderate Contextualist.

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<sup>4</sup> Cf., e.g., Sperber and Wilson (1986); Carston (2002) and Recanati (2004)

<sup>5</sup> Different ways of characterizing their views: Every sentence is context sensitive, if the only context sensitivity you take into account is that due to expressions in the Basic Set, you won’t get a proposition or anything truth-evaluable.

*b. Radical Contextualism is empirically false and internally inconsistent*

In Chapters 7-9, we argue that Radical Contextualism is empirically inadequate and internally inconsistent. It is empirically inadequate because it cannot account for the ways in which we share contents across contexts. We bring this out by various thought experiments involving ways in which we talk about contents across contexts.

#### **4. Further Elaboration on Speech Act Pluralism**

There's one feature of SPAP we did not emphasize in *IS* that we would like to sketch here: namely, that SPAP follows naturally from the fact that speech acts are acts. We hope once this is clear support for SPAP will be enhanced.

We begin, then, with the entirely common place view inside the philosophy of action that any piece of behavior can, under the right circumstances, evince a plurality of acts. Donald's finger moves. It does so because he moved it. With that movement he also flipped the switch, turned on the light, alarmed the burglar, frightened a young girl; and panoply of other acts. Did he achieve all this with a single finger movement? The customary answer is 'Yes'.

It's true that the philosophical community divides on how best to characterize this plurality. But the issues here are universally recognized as metaphysical—namely, how best to individuate actions (and other events)? Kimeans say Donald performed as many distinct acts as are co-incidental with his single bodily movement; Davidsonians, in contrast, speak of the finger movement as constituting a single action, but admitting of multiple distinct and unequivalent action descriptions. As with SPAP, these distinct descriptions might be entirely independent of each other: it is surely possible for someone to move his finger without, for example, turning on a light, or alarming a burglar. As Davidson once so aptly put it, 'We never do more than move our bodies: the rest is up to nature'.

Sometimes our acts are more tightly connected. There cannot be a loud singing without a singing. The Kimean insists, though, that even here the acts are distinct, while the Davidsonian insists they might be two descriptions of the same act.

In short: everyone who writes on action agrees that a single bodily movement, like a finger's moving, can instantiate a plurality of actions or at least admit of a range of distinct and independent action descriptions.

We see right away, then, a strong connection between SPAP and standard views about action attributions. Sayings are, after all, things we do—speech acts we perform. Movements of our larynx, lips, tongue and the other relevant articulators are bodily movements and under the right circumstances constitute actions we perform. Just as with other bodily movements, utterances,

feliculously performed, can constitute a plurality of actions (or admit of a multitude of independent descriptions).

The connections run deeper: Take Donald's turning on the light. Is this an act he *intended* to perform? Well, if he formed the intention to turn on the light, his act is surely one he intended to perform, and if carried out 'in the right way', he performed it intentionally.

What about his flipping the switch? Well, although it is an act he performed, he may not have intended to. Just the same, since it was an act he had to carry out to turn on the light—which let's suppose was his ultimate goal in moving his finger—it is an act many theorists conclude he performed intentionally (assuming it was carried out in 'the right way').

What about alarming the burglar? This is an act he did and, suppose, that in virtue of so doing he brought about the burglar's arrest. In that case, although his act is not one he intended and not one he even performed intentionally, still it is his act and that explains why he (and no one else) can be credited for it.

We are moving quickly into areas where controversy abounds—but the main points we hope are clear. There is a respectable area of philosophical research that struggles to settle on when an agent's bodily movements constitute action, and for any particular action what determines whether it is intended, unintended but intentional or unintended and unintentional. Of immediate interest to us here is that these very same issues arise when the domain is speech acts proper. Since speech acts are acts, none of what follows should surprise.

When John intended to tell you he thought Bill's lecture was awful, he can do so by uttering a sentence with the exact opposite meaning—e.g. he might utter 'Bill's lecture was great'. If his utterance is layered with the right degrees of sarcasm, he can still succeed in saying that Bill's lecture was no good. Sarcasm is a feature of John's behavior over which he has some authority but other external circumstances beyond his control can also determine which acts his movements perform.

If no burglar is present when Donald flipped the switch, it is impossible for him to alarm the burglar. If the electrical wiring is damaged, it is impossible to turn on the light. Likewise, when you utter 'Smith's murderer is insane', nodding in Stanley's direction, your utterance can say that Stanley is insane.

Furthermore, an act might be Frank's pushing your grandmother into a lake in 1970 because Ann, whom Frank pushed, later gave birth to Mary, who in turn gave birth to you. Point: circumstances absent at the time of the initial behavior can still shape what it is an agent does. Likewise, John's utterance of 'Bill's lecture was great' can later be correctly reported as saying that your grandfather gave a good lecture, even though Bill was not your

grandfather when John made his utterance. Circumstances after that utterance influence what is said.

In sum: with a single bodily movement an agent can instantiate a plurality of acts: Some determined by events caused by the initial bodily movement; some determined by constituents of the initial bodily movement; some determined by events that occur after the initial bodily movement but not causally related to it; some intended; some though not intended are still intentional; and some neither intended nor intentional. These are but some ways in which a plurality of acts can be generated by a single bodily movement. The same, not so surprisingly anymore we hope, extends to speech.

With a single utterance a speaker can perform a plurality of speech acts: Some determined by constituents of the initial utterance; some determined by events that occur after the initial utterance but are causally unrelated to it; some intended; some though unintended are still said; and so it goes.

To the extent that the facts about action in general are uncontroversial, the parallel ones for speech acts should be as well. But it is just this galaxy of facts that constitutes Speech Act Pluralism.

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## Replies

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### Reply to Bach

We are in the curious position of disagreeing with Bach about what exactly we disagree about. As we see it, his characterization of our disagreement introduces largely irrelevant terminological issues; and these in turn cover up the fact that he simply hasn't replied to our central criticism. We start with two failed attempts to characterize the disagreement, and then move on to what is central.

#### *First Failed Characterization of Disagreement: Propositionalism*

Bach thinks our fundamental disagreement is over something he calls Propositionalism. He says:

- (1) C&L accept Propositionalism, the fancy version of the old grammar school dictum that every complete sentence expresses a complete thought. C&L suppose that if a sentence doesn't express a proposition on its own, it needs the help of context.

We, supposedly, endorse (1), whereas Bach does not. That, according to Bach, is the clash. Note, however, that when he attributes (1) to us—the allegedly central premise in all of our arguments—he provides not a single reference to *IS*. There's a simple reason for this: nowhere in *IS* do we endorse (1). Not a single argument in *IS* depends on our endorsing or rejecting (1). We can remain neutral on that issue. Bach seems to think our alleged endorsement of (1) is what *explains* (or underlies, in some tacit way) our disagreement with him. It is not. The source of our disagreement with Bach is the arguments we give in *IS* (and spell out below)—and not an underlying commitment to anything like (1).

#### *Second Failed Characterization of Disagreement: Incompleteness without Context Sensitivity*

Bach also attributes to us a commitment to (2):

- (2) Sentences cannot be semantically incomplete without being context-sensitive Or: If a sentence is semantically incomplete, it is context-sensitive.

We're not sure what he has in mind here. We think it is something like (3):

- (3) If a sentence's semantic content is non-propositional, then an appeal to context is required to determine a complete proposition.

We *do* endorse (3) (at least for the cases Bach has in mind when he talks about propositional radicals), though no argument in *IS* depends on our doing so. Indeed, as far as we can tell, Bach also endorses (3). He never suggests anything *other* than context (broadly construed) takes interpreters from a propositional radical to a proposition. So, there's no disagreement about (2) so interpreted. More generally, we just don't see how his talk of incompleteness as a 'form of context sensitivity' has any bearing at all on this debate, except as a purely terminological proposal. That said, there are real disagreements between us. One is particularly important.

*Real Disagreement: The Slippery Slope of Incompleteness*

At the centre of Bach's theory is his conviction that the semantic content of a range of sentences is what he calls *propositional radicals*; these are 'incomplete' propositions (Bach 1994).<sup>1</sup> In Chapter 5 of *IS*, we argue there's no principled way to determine when a well-formed sentence expresses a propositional radical and when it expresses a complete proposition. This is our central disagreement with Bach. We argue that all the reasons he provides for thinking 'Nina had enough' expresses a propositional radical (not a complete proposition) should lead him to say 'Nina had enough pasta' expresses a proposition radical (not a complete proposition).

Why is this important? Not because of a bizarre preference for the view that 'Nina has had enough' expresses a proposition. We couldn't care less. What we *do* care about is how to avoid Radical Contextualism—a view that holds *all* sentences fail to express (complete) propositions, i.e. all sentences are incomplete in Bach's sense. He thinks only some are, e.g. 'Nina has had

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<sup>1</sup> Bach objects to our talk of 'incomplete propositions', he says: 'Sentences, not propositions, can be complete or incomplete, depending on whether or not their semantic contents are propositions. An incomplete proposition is no more a proposition than a sentence fragment is a sentence or a rubber duck is a duck.' This strikes us an entirely terminological issue, one on which Bach apparently has changed his mind. In his (1994), he says: '(1) and (2) illustrate two different sources of propositional incompleteness: constituent and structural underdetermination. In (1) an additional propositional constituent is needed to complete the proposition...' This is just one of many examples from that article. If he now wants to avoid 'incomplete propositions', that's fine; we were discussing his view using his earlier terminology.

enough'. He denies 'Nina has had enough pasta' is. Radical Contextualists disagree. They claim that Bach's arguments for *some* sentences being incomplete generalize. We are very much interested in how to avoid siding with the Radical Contextualist. We have a choice:

- i. Find a principled distinction between 'Nina has had enough' and 'Nina has had enough pasta', i.e. a criterion by which the former is incomplete and the latter complete; or
- ii. Endorse the view that both express propositions.

If you abhor Radical Contextualism, these are your *sole* options. We are aching for Bach to reveal to us how to implement proposal (i), but he won't. Absent a revelation, we must either embrace Radical Contextualism or endorse (ii). Since Radical Contextualism is incoherent, we opt for the latter.

Nothing in Bach's reply helps us with our choice. Here are three passages where he tries to respond to the challenge:

It is not easy, as I have pointed out with a variety of examples, to determine which sentences are semantically complete and which are not. But this does not suggest that all are or that there is no distinction to be drawn.

This passage reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of the dialectic. The claim is that the considerations and intuitions Bach invokes in defense of the incompleteness of 'A is ready' generalize. We, and the Radical Contextualists, claim Bach's examples generalize. In §4 of his reply Bach presents our concern. But *nothing* he says there responds to the worry.

He gets a bit closer to answering us when he says:

The issue is whether any such question *has* to be asked and answered for a proposition to be yielded, albeit one goes beyond the sentence's semantic content.

We agree (though, of course, this isn't the only relevant question, but put that aside). He continues:

It has to only if the sentence is semantically incomplete, in which case what the speaker means, assuming this must be a proposition, *has* to go beyond sentence meaning.

This is the closest Bach comes to providing a criterion for isolating incomplete sentences. He seems to be saying: *A sentence is incomplete just in case what the speaker means has to go beyond the sentence meaning*. This, of course, raises the question of what it is possible for speakers to mean. As far as we can tell, there's no answer to this question other than: *You can't mean a proposition radical. What a speaker means must be a complete proposition*. But if that's his reply, we're locked into a rather tight circle: Draw the complete/incompleteness distinction by an appeal to what speakers

can mean; Characterize what speakers can mean by an appeal to the complete/incomplete distinction.

To see how dubious this is, compare the following cases: According to Bach, 'Nina has had enough' is incomplete (and cannot be speaker meant) while 'Nina has had enough pasta' is complete (and can be speaker meant). Here's why Radical Contextualists deem this distinction bogus: they ask us to compare the following kinds of cases:

- She's buys food wholesale for an import firm: she's bought 689 tons of pasta the last week. She's had enough pasta.
- She's an investment banker, who buys pasta futures; she's had enough pasta.
- She's a chef making a dish that consists of pasta, seafood, and cheese. She's had enough pasta.

The Radical Contextualist claims there's nothing all these cases have in common. So, 'Nina has had enough pasta' is incomplete as stands; Nina can't have had enough pasta *simpliciter*. Now ask: does it help to be told that a speaker can mean *that Nina has had enough pasta*, but not *that Nina has had enough*? Of course not! Anyone who's convinced, for reasons given above, that 'Nina has had enough pasta' fails to express a complete proposition, will also be convinced you can't mean *that Nina has had enough pasta simpliciter*. That follows directly from its being incomplete. Anyone who thinks S is incomplete will also think this is a reason for thinking that what the speaker means must go beyond the meaning of S.

In sum: incompleteness leads to contextualism, 'like marijuana to heroin or masturbation to blindness'. And the solution, as Nancy Reagan saw years ago, is simple: Just say 'No'!

*Postscript on an Inconsistency in Bach's Position: Propositionality of Complement Clauses*

Bach endorses principle (B):

- (B): If the semantic content of a sentence is capable of being true or false, a possible content of thought, and the possible content of an assertion, then that sentence expresses a proposition; otherwise, it expresses only a proposition radical.

This strikes us as blatantly inconsistent with Bach's advocacy of incompleteness. The following are meaningful sentences:

- a. Jack claims that Nina has had enough.

- b. Jack believes that Nina has had enough.
- c. Jack doubts that Nina has had enough.

If (B) were true, then either ‘Nina has had enough’ should express a proposition or (a)-(c) are false. The claim that they are false is clearly counter-intuitive and would be in need of extensive justification. So, we don’t see any way in which (B) can be endorsed by Bach.

### **Reply to Hawthorne**

In Chapter 7 of *IS* we rely crucially on tests for how speakers share content across contexts. We claim these tests can be used to gather evidence both for and against claims about an expression being context sensitive. Many philosophers now rely on these and related tests—Hawthorne (2003) being early proponent (cf. also Egan, Hawthorne and Weatherson (2004), Lasersohn (2006), Macfarlane (2004), Richard (2004), and (arguably) Stanley (2005)). In his reply, Hawthorne raises interesting challenges to our use of such tests. We agree that the issues are important and that thinking them through will help clarify the nature of the evidence they provide. But we disagree with him about whether the challenges he raises threaten anything we assert in *IS*. We see Hawthorne’s comments as one more stage in an active research program of which *IS* is a part.

#### *Hawthorne’s Examples: ‘left’ and ‘nearby’*

Hawthorne uses the expressions ‘left’ and ‘nearby’ to test our indirect disquotational reporting test. According to this test, if an expression *e* is context sensitive, it should not be possible to indirectly report a particular use of *e* in a context *C* in arbitrary contexts *C'* by disquoting it. The first person pronoun ‘I’ is a bona fide context sensitive word and as a matter of fact we cannot accurately and arbitrarily disquote its use in any context. More specifically, we are unlicensed to report an utterance of ‘I am *F*’ by a speaker *S* in *C* in an arbitrarily different *C'* with an utterance of ‘*S* said that I am *F*’.<sup>2</sup> We hope this is obvious. On this test Hawthorne comments:

Suppose Ernie is in New York City and I am in Birmingham. Ernie says ‘A nearby restaurant has good Vietnamese food’. I can report this by saying ‘Ernie said that a nearby restaurant has good Vietnamese food,’ even though I am far away from him. Suppose that Ernie is facing me. A car goes to Ernie’s left and my right. Ernie says ‘The car went left’. I can say ‘Ernie said that the car went left’, even though my orientation is radically different to his

Assuming ‘left’ and ‘nearby’ are context sensitive, with distinct utterances picking out distinct directions and locations, if the data

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<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 7 for further elaboration on these tests.

are accurate, we are left with a choice, Hawthorne says. We can either relinquish the test or endorse the view that ‘left’ and ‘nearby’ are semantically invariant. The latter option, says Hawthorne, is ‘horrible’, so the test should go.

Five comments on Hawthorne’s discussion of these cases:

1. *‘Left’, ‘Nearby’ and note 1 of IS*: On the first page of *IS* we mention so-called contextuals with ‘left’ and ‘nearby’ being two. We add them to Kaplan’s (1989) Basic Set of context sensitive expressions (i.e. we do not advocate invariantism about them), but in the first footnote of *IS* we say: ‘To be honest, we have our doubts about so-called contextuals; and it’s probably no accident that they did not occur on Kaplan’s (1989) original list. We will let you decide for yourself after you have read our book.’ When we wrote *IS* we were, quite frankly, befuddled by contextuals. Our sense was that the data about their usage were messy. Cleaning up the mess was not central to *IS*, and so, we never returned to the issue. Hawthorne’s reply has clarified the source of our confusion. Before turning to it (in §§4-5 below), some comments on the data and Hawthorne’s claim that the data should lead us to ‘give up’ our tests are in order.

2. *Why ‘giving up tests’ is not an Option*: Hawthorne thinks these examples should lead us to ‘give up the tests’. First a brief comment on why this is not an option. We never presented our test as necessary or sufficient for context sensitivity. Rather, we describe them as providing ‘evidence’ that expressions are context sensitive (see, e.g., (p. 89), where we introduce the tests);<sup>3</sup> ‘the challenge’, we say, ‘is to explain away or challenge this data (or show that the test is no good)’ (p. 96; also p. 99).<sup>4</sup> The test is, if you like, a procedure for collecting data—data that has got to be explained (away) by *any* theory. Applied to ‘left’ and ‘nearby’ our claim is this: if you can disquotationally report utterances of ‘left’ and ‘nearby’ in relevantly different contexts (for more on ‘relevantly different contexts’ see below) and you *don’t* want to claim they are context sensitive, then you either have to explain the data away (i.e. present a theory that accounts for them without holding they are semantically stable) or challenge the data (i.e. claim that the intuitions are faulty in some way). This is exactly how Hawthorne proceeds. He presents two explanations—exactly what we claim should happen in such circumstances. His data couldn’t lead us to ‘give up’ the test. On the contrary: they strengthen our resolve in it.

3. *Diagnosis of Hawthorne’s Examples*: First, notice: we can disquotationally report uses of ‘I if the right circumstances are in place, i.e. if the reporter is identical to the original speaker. For the test to be applicable, it is essential that the contexts of the report and the reportee be *relevantly differ-*

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<sup>3</sup> Pagination is to *Insensitive Semantics* (2005) unless otherwise noted.

<sup>4</sup> For further discussion of this see our ‘Reply to Critics’ in *Mind and Language* (2006).

ent, i.e. that the relevant contextual features should be different in the contexts of the report and the reportee.

So what are the contextually relevant features for, say, ‘nearby’? Maybe the answer is something like this: the character of ‘nearby’ determines that an utterance of ‘nearby’ in a context C refers to a location salient in C, but that location needn’t be the location of C (i.e. it needn’t be the location where the speech act occurs). It is whatever location is salient in C, and that could be the location of the reportee—if, for example, that location is made salient in indirectly reporting her.<sup>5</sup>

Hawthorne’s examples can then be understood as examples in which we can disquotationally report utterances containing ‘nearby’ because the relevant contextual features in the two contexts (i.e. the salient location) are the same. If this is the correct diagnosis, all the examples show is that when the same location is salient in two contexts, C and C’, you’ll be able to disquotationally report utterances of sentences containing ‘nearby’ from C to C’ (or the other way around). But this is no more surprising than being able to disquotationally report utterances of sentences containing the first person pronoun when the reporter is the same as the reported speaker.

According to this suggestion, ‘nearby’ refers to whatever location is salient in the context of utterance, and if your intuition is that Hawthorne’s disquotational reports are true, that is because the location of the reportee has become salient in the context of the report. Further support for this diagnosis is provided by imagining examples in which the salient locations differ in the context of the report and the context of the reportee, and hence blocks the disquotational report. Consider this variation in Hawthorne’s example (i)-(ii):

- i. Ernie says to John, walking on 7<sup>th</sup> street in NY looking for a restaurant: *A nearby restaurant has good Vietnamese food.*
- ii. John, walking around Birmingham looking for a restaurant, reports Ernie’s utterance to his friends by saying: *Ernie says that a nearby restaurant has good Vietnamese food.*

(ii) is intuitively false, and the above account provides an explanation: in the context of (ii) it is the location of the report (i.e. the location where the indirect report is uttered) that is salient—the search for a restaurant in Birmingham has made Birmingham the salient location.

5. *Mixed Quotation*: Hawthorne says that “many ‘say that’ reports have a feel of ‘mixed quotation’”—where only a part of the report directly quotes

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<sup>5</sup> This is close to a possibility Hawthorne considers when he says: “And there is an easy explanation of this: ‘Ernie is nearby’ is true relative to a contextually relevant location that is supplied by context, but the *relevant location need not have anything to do with the location where the utterance is made.*”

(and so mentions) a part of the utterance reported. Applied to ‘left’ and ‘nearby’, his idea is that they are within non-articulated quotation marks, even though the rest of the report is indirectly quoted (and therefore, used). Properly understood his examples should be rewritten as:

- (1) Ernie said that a ‘nearby’ restaurant has good Vietnamese food.
- (2) Ernie said that the car went ‘left’.

Hawthorne concludes that ‘the first test is a terrible test for context-dependence, unless we can screen off ‘mixed quote’ readings’—because the test works only if we can ensure we are dealing with genuine indirect reports.

Three comments:

- a. Hawthorne tries to motivate the mixed quote strategy by an appeal to examples of true reports like ‘Mary said that she went to Harvard, but not Harvard’—where the speaker pronounced the tokens of ‘Harvard’ differently. Here, we agree, that something like mixed quotation is in play, but there is this difference: the import of the examples need not survive under translation. Suppose we have,

Mary said that she likes tomatoes and not tomatoes.

with different pronunciations indicated. We could not translate this example into, say, German since the relevant pronunciations would be lost. This indicates that the last case is a real instance of mixed quotation (or at least mentioning). Nothing like this is going on in the ‘nearby’ and ‘left’ examples. This is further evidence for denying mixed quotation status to Hawthorne’s examples

- b. The mixed quote strategy is motivated by Hawthorne’s sense that many ‘says that’ reports have ‘the feel of mixed quotation’. That might be, but as a general claim, this is irrelevant. Suppose the situation is this: There are clear cases of indirect reports, there are clear cases of mixed quotation, and there are some borderline cases—cases where it’s hard to tell which it is. The mixed quote strategy would be well motivated just in case we have reason to believe that the relevant cases fall into the latter category. Our sense is that the relevant cases are *not* borderline cases. Consider an example involving ‘nearby’: Imagine answering a ringing payphone on the street, and a woman’s voice says: ‘There’s a river nearby’, then she hangs up. Asked what the caller said, you reply: ‘The woman on the phone said there is a river nearby’ It seems perfectly *possible* that the speaker intended to use ‘nearby’ and not to talk about

“nearby” and that in so doing, she succeeded in saying something true (if our earlier diagnosis (of the character of ‘nearby’) is correct, that’s what we would expect). This case, it seems to us, generalizes. The relevant kinds of cases do not *need* to have the ‘fell of mixed quotation’ (this, again, isn’t to deny that it *can* have that feel, i.e. can be uttered with such intentions.)

We’re worried this ends up just as a clash of intuitions. There is, however, a rather simple procedure for testing whether your intuitions go with Hawthorne or us: *try doing it*. If there are hidden quotation marks in an indirect report, the speaker must intend for the quotation marks to be there, since the speaker’s *intentions* are an important (if not the sole) determinant of that fact. So, the test is simply to try to utter the relevant sentences without quotation marks. If you succeed in this test, you have pretty good evidence that the mixed quote strategy is not well motivated.

- c. A second point about the mixed quote strategy: In the entire literature on mixed quotation, since we introduced the term in (1997b), there’s a consensus that mixed quotation is *also* indirect quotation—in particular, the indirect quotation you get by removing the quotation marks. Indeed, many have argued that the sole semantic content of a mixed quotation is the indirect quotation you get by removing the quotation marks. If this is the correct theory of mixed quotation, the problematic indirect report is still asserted. So the presence of the alleged tacit quotation marks would make no difference.

In the interest of full disclosure, we should mention that we are currently in the search of an alternative to the standard view. As a result, we are well positioned to say that it is extremely hard to find one. Hawthorne, presumably, also does not endorse the standard view, so he owes us a positive theory. Absent such a theory, the mixed quote strategy is difficult to evaluate.

*Variety of Tests: Agree, suggest, claim, propose, doubt, reject, etc.*

Hawthorne asks: ‘the authors run the test using the verb ‘say’. But why are they so preoccupied with this verb? It seems to me to be at least somewhat instructive to try out some other verbs.’ He goes on to consider the verb ‘agree’. Two quick comments:

- a. It’s false that we focus on ‘said’ exclusively in *IS*: throughout we use a variety of terms, such as ‘assert’, ‘claim’, ‘state’ ‘ask’, and

'order'. We even briefly discuss 'agree' in Chapter 8, but we did not run the tests on them. The reason we did not is that 'say', 'assert', 'claim', 'state' seem to work more or less the same way with respect to the tests. We therefore thought whatever results culled from these would provide an important notion of content. These verbs, after all, are central for our descriptions of the content of others' speech acts. That probably accounts for their prevalence in the literature since Frege. We are unaware of anyone from Frege through Grice through Kaplan up to the present who thinks that 'agree' is a good verb for identifying content.

- b. What should we conclude, however, if 'agree' yields different results from 'say', 'assert', 'claim', etc.? We're not sure. It's an interesting question, and we plan to pursue it in further research. If 'saying' and 'agreeing' come apart, it will tell us something important about the relationship between attributions of contents and their evaluations. Just what (a form of relativism or something else?) we will suspend judgment on. (See our 'Reply to Critics' (2006) and our 'Shared Content and Semantic Spin' (ms) for further reflections in this issue.)

#### *Conflicting Tests: What to Do?*

*IS* offers another test for context sensitivity—the collectivity test—according to which, if true (simultaneous) utterances of sentences 'a if F' and 'b is F' are collectable into a third context C" with a true utterance of 'a and b are F', then 'F' is context *insensitive*. If it can't be truly collected, that's evidence 'F' is context sensitive. Hawthorne says: 'Despite the authors' apparent convictions, their tests do not work in harmony'. In particular, he suggests, our collective description test yields a different result when applied to 'left' and 'nearby' than our indirect disquotational report test does.

Two quick comment: a) We're unconvinced the two tests conflict: for reasons given above, the disquotational report test, as Hawthorne applies it to 'left' and 'nearby', does not instantiate the tests we proposed (both of his own proposals for why we get the context insensitive result implies that the test has been improperly applied). b) If it should turn out that various tests for context sensitivity provide conflicting evidence, we don't see that as a reason for giving up one of the tests. What you do is proceed as in all such cases: you try to develop theories that reconcile the data or you check the evidence again. Think of the diagnosis of the 'nearby' example as an illustration of how to proceed (so, of course, is Hawthorne's mixed quotation suggestion, if you find it convincing.)

*'The Appropriate Lesson': Don't Conflate Kaplan's Paradigm Indexicals with the More General Phenomenon of Context Dependence*

Hawthorne says '...we should all by now have learnt not to conflate Kaplan's paradigm indexicals with the more general phenomenon of context-dependence.' Later he says '[t]he appropriate lesson is this: context-sensitive terms are not alike with regard to the kinds of triggers and signals that allow us to smoothly shift contexts within a single conversation.' We are not committed to the idea that all context sensitive terms are alike with respect to the kinds of triggers and signals that allow context shifts within a conversation. We try, throughout *IS*, to remain neutral about which mechanisms determine the semantic value of a context sensitive expression and the ways in which context determines semantic values. The examples elicited by Hawthorne do not convince us our neutrality was mistaken.

*Hawthorne on the 'Awfulness' of Invariantism about 'left'*

Hawthorne says:

Why is semantic invariantism about 'left' so awful? Suppose I am facing you. You say, truly 'The balloon is going left'. I say, truly, 'The balloon is going right' and 'The balloon is not going left'. If we assume there is no context-dependence, then it seems that the following sentences, as uttered by me, should be true:

The balloon is going left and right

The balloon is going left and not going left

The authors do want the semantic content of utterances to connect in interesting and informative ways with our ability to use language. But if sentences such as those above were semantically true, then it is very hard to see how semantic competence is going to provide much of a basis for anything else.

For reasons given above we're not semantic invariantists about 'left', so we will shift to a similar example (one we *are* invariantists about), consider first an utterance *u* of 'A is red' (where the outside of A somehow is salient in the context of utterance). Suppose *u* is intuitively true (because A is red on the outside). Consider next an utterance *u'* of 'A is not red' (where the inside of A somehow is salient in the context of utterance). Suppose *u'* is intuitively false (because A isn't red on the inside). We do not want to infer from this that A is both red and not red, nor that 'red' is context sensitive. Instead, our explanation is that our intuitions about the truth-values of these utterances track the salient speech act content of *u* and *u'*—not the semantic content of the sentences uttered. The salient speech act content of *u* might be *that A is red on the outside*, and the salient speech act content of *u'* *that A is red on the inside*. These can both be true. The semantic content of *u* is *that A is red* and the semantic content of *u'* is *that A is not red*. These can't both be true.

Chapter 11 of *IS* is entirely devoted to an explanation of why we don't think it is the semanticist's job to present a theory of what it is to be red, and therefore, why it is not the semanticist's job to tell you which one of *u* and *u'* is semantically true. We say these are metaphysical questions, and not semantic, and we give a very long argument for why.

*Hawthorne on Semantics, Metaphysics and Ordinary Speakers' Intuitions*

Hawthorne asks rhetorically, if 'ordinary people don't know' what it takes for objects to be red,<sup>6</sup> '...is it really very likely that metaphysicians are going to be able to settle the matter?' We have no idea how likely it is that *any* metaphysical (or philosophical, for that matter) question will ever be settled. What we are sure about is that if there's an answer to be had, it won't be found by consulting speaker's intuitions about when what's said by utterances of 'A is red' or 'A is red on the outside' are true. Nor will it help to look for a faculty of peculiarly semantic intuitions.<sup>7</sup> That would be awful methodology for many reasons. No one, we hope, thinks you'll discover the conditions under which something is *F*, by asking people about their intuitions about when 'A is *F*' is true. Whether the answer to these questions will be found by someone who labels herself a 'metaphysician' or not, we should probably have remained neutral about.

*Cappelen and Lepore on Semantic Content*

One final, but important remark on this issue: it is not true that we give *no* guidance for how to get at semantic content. Reading Hawthorne's remarks one might get the impression we think semantic content is a mysterious and illusive feature of sentences that we never come into cognitive contact with. That's not our view. All of Chapters 7 and 12 are attempts to show how to focus on semantic content. The guidance we give, however, counsels us not focus on the kinds of examples Hawthorne discusses. Our two primary pieces of advice are these:

Think about how to interpret utterances of *S* under conditions of 'ignorance', i.e. when you know little or nothing about the context of utterance. That will force you to remove 'contextual influence'.

Think about collective reports: what utterances of *S* across many contexts of utterance share; this is reflected in what we call collective reports, i.e. reports of the form 'They all said that *p*', when 'they' refers to speakers variously situated who have all uttered *S*.

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<sup>6</sup> Hawthorne's example is 'left', since we're not invariantists about 'left' we changed the example—we do this to illustrate the general strategy we use for responding to this kind of object.

<sup>7</sup> In this respect, our view is aligned in obvious ways with Williamson's defense of the epistemic theory of vagueness (see Williamson (1994, esp. Chapter 7).

The examples Hawthorne employs for eliciting intuitions about semantic content are not like this. They are single utterances accompanied with stories about particular contexts of utterance. If we're right, this is not how to access semantic content. The contextual stories block our access to the semantic content.<sup>8,9</sup>

### Reply to Korta and Perry

#### *Terminology vs. Substance*

In Chapter 10 of *IS* we say:

A huge chunk of the current debate about these issues is distorted by a peculiar obsession with how to use the words 'semantic' and 'pragmatic.' We emphatically don't care about these terminological issues. We do, however, think the debate about these issues has reached such an elevated stage of confusion that it is advisable not to frame it in terms of the 'semantic-pragmatic' distinction. ...If someone would like to use the word 'semantic' for something other than what we use it for, we're ok with that.

We're worried Korta and Perry (K&P) are trying to lure us back into a 'debate' about how to use the terms 'semantic' and 'minimalism'. We didn't use 'pragmatic' in *IS*, but we kept 'semantic'—we considered dropping it as well just in order to avoid a terminological 'debate'. Our plan was to call the level of content we focus on 'Filbert Content' (on the assumption that no prejudices surround this term). Unfortunately, it's too late to pursue that strategy.

In what follows we amplify on the terminological debate and the motivation for our choices. We then turn to more substantive issues.

#### *Why we use 'Semantic Minimalism'*

First, some trivialities about definitions that are common ground between K&P and us: Definitions of, say, 'semantic' and 'minimalist', are neither right nor wrong. They are either useful or not. The question, then, is whether our definitions are useful, given the aims of *IS*. Recall, our central opponent in *IS* are Radical Contextualists—those who claim context sensitivity is ubiquitous in natural language in this sense: If you take the standing meaning of unambiguous words, filling in the semantic values of context sensitive

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<sup>8</sup> Hawthorne asks whether our view of semantic content prevents 'the semantic content of utterances to connect in interesting and informative ways with our ability to use language'. All of Chapter 12 is devoted to just this very question (in the form that it has been asked by Carston (2002), Recanati (2004) and Stanley and King (2005)). Since Hawthorne doesn't discuss Chapter 12, we're not sure where our disagreement lies.

<sup>9</sup> We hope these remarks also clarify how we accommodate the 'quasi-logical concerns' Hawthorne discusses at the end of his comment. Limitations of space prevent us from pursuing those issues here.

expressions, then *what you wind up with fails to express a proposition*. Radical Contextualists call the view they oppose, i.e. the view that you *do* end up with something propositional, ‘Semantic Minimalism’ (see, for example, Carston (2002), Recanati(2004), and Travis (1985, 1986, 1996). We thought, perhaps mistakenly, it would simplify communication and clarify the debate were we to adopt their terminology. Since it is *they* who call the view they deny ‘Semantic Minimalism’, we thought it would be a useful and polite strategy to adopt their terminology.

Here’s how Recanati motivates his use of the term ‘minimalism’:

According to minimalism, the truth-conditional content of a sentence is not identical to its conventional meaning, but it departs from it *only when* the sentence itself, in virtue of its conventional meaning, makes an appeal to context mandatory in order to provide a value for some indexical expression or free variable in need of saturation. (Recanati (2006); see also (2004), and Carston (2002))

For Recanati, ‘minimal’ indicates that the level of content he has in mind is *a level of assertable content minimally influenced by context*. The notion we describe satisfies these conditions. This, we think, is where substantive disagreement with K&P kicks in.

#### *K&P’s on Semantic Content as Stable Content (1)*

K&P object to our claim that the minimal semantic content of a sentence S is that which utterances of S share cross contextually. We say, ‘[t]he semantic content of a sentence S is the content that all utterances of S share. It is the content that all utterances of S express no matter how different their contexts of utterance are. It is the minimally shared content.’ We also characterize semantic content as ‘stable content’. In response K&P say:

... C&L emphasize their broad agreement with Kaplan, so this use of ‘content’ is rather odd; for Kaplan the content is what *changes* with context; the character remains the same and is what is grasped by someone ignorant of context.

In a related passage, they ask about clauses (c)-(e) in our characterization of minimalism (see K&P’s paper):

What are clauses c) through e) doing in an exposition of semantic *minimalism*, a description of the ‘content’ that all utterances of a sentence *share*? The clauses c), d) and e) all pertain to factors the *differentiate* the content of English sentences as used by different people at different times, or with different intentions about which meanings of ambiguous expressions they wish to employ, and the standards of precisification for vague expressions. Something has gone awry, and the basic idea of semantic minimalism has slipped away.

In other words, what we call the (minimal) semantic content of S varies insofar as the semantic values of members of the Basic Set of context sensitive

expressions vary; the meanings of ambiguous expressions vary; etc. So, we shouldn't say that semantic content is *stable*.

*Reply to K&P's First Objection*

To understand why we characterize our level of content in this way it is crucial to keep in mind the context in which it is presented—this is central to understanding the difference between K&P's view and our own. *In IS we are arguing against someone who says that every expression is context sensitive and that there is no way to guarantee contextual stability—every expression in the language is like 'I' and 'now' and 'you' (with some difference in the manner in which the semantic value is fixed in a context of utterance). On this view, if you fix the semantic value of the members of the Basic Set, disambiguate ambiguous expressions, and precisify vague expressions, you still don't end up with something that expresses a proposition. Our opponent adds these latter clauses because she wants to make explicit that the context sensitivity she's claim is ubiquitous is distinct from typical indexicals and demonstratives, and ambiguity and vagueness.* It is in response to this view that we say: no, there is a level of content—we call it minimal semantic content—of the kind characterized by (a)-(d) on our list. Of course, we realize that it is not stable with respect to the values of indexicals and demonstratives, ambiguous and vague expressions, etc. We took this to be obvious, given the extensive discussion of these issues in *IS*, but we now see that, taken out of context, our remarks about the stability of this level of content might be misconstrued.

Three further points on this issue:

1. We take this level of content to be important because it is the first level of content that's *propositional*: it is the sort of thing that can be asserted, claimed, believed, etc. The alternative notion suggested by K&P is, however, not assertable (or if it is, no one ever asserts it, see further discussion of this point below).
2. We also took this level of content to be important because it is can be shared by speakers across contexts (again, assuming you keep the semantic values of members of the Basic Set fixed). If 'John said that S' is true, then John said the content of S; If that content is the proposition that *p*, then John asserted the proposition *that p*. It is possible for others to also assert *that p*. The alternative levels of content suggested by K&P cannot be so shared (see the discussion below).

3. Our minimal contents can be evaluated as true or false, or interesting or unjustified or.... Maybe, the alternative suggested by K&P can be as well, but never, as a matter of fact, is (see discussion below).

With that said, we are perfectly happy to agree that there are many different levels of content; and you can call those levels of content whatever you want. In Chapter 13 of *IS* we defend Speech Act Pluralism. This is the view that any utterance of a sentence *S* expresses a plurality of distinct propositions. This sits well with the idea that there are distinct levels of content such as those K&P call ‘reflexive’ contents. Perry’s work can be seen as an attempt to characterize some of these levels and explain its cognitive significance. In this sense, we see Perry (2001) as directly complementary to our own. In the spirit of pluralism, we tend to say: the more the merrier.<sup>10</sup>

#### *K&P on Semantic Content as Stable Content (2)*

Their second objection they register is that the Radical Contextualists (and those using their terminology, e.g. C&L) have overlooked (or ignored) an even more minimal level of content. K&P have two proposals for what should be called ‘minimal’ content. The first (which is the one we’ll focus on, though our point applies also to the second) is what Perry (2001) calls content<sub>m</sub>. They say:

Let *u* be an utterance of ‘I am tired’ in English, the meanings of the words and the mode of composition involved are given, but not the speaker, time, etc. The Content<sub>m</sub> of *u* is:

- (1) *That the speaker of u is tired at the time of u.*

(1) is what we call a *reflexive* content of *u*, since it puts conditions on *u* itself

Content<sub>m</sub> gets at the vision behind C&L’s basic idea: it is what all utterances of the same sentence have *in common*.

In other words, if we were really looking for what utterances of a sentence *S* have in common, we should have looked at something like what Perry (2001) calls Content<sub>m</sub>, and not what we call Minimal Semantic Content.

Here are five comments on Perry’s notion of Content<sub>m</sub>:

- i. If this is about what ought to give the label ‘minimal’ to, we’re happy to do so. We’ll call our level of content, then, Filbert Content.
- ii. It is common ground between our opponents and us that simple and complex expressions have characters. So, a level of content phrased

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<sup>10</sup> This is not to say we don’t have doubts about the role and function of the levels of content that Perry (2001) tends to focus on. See above.

entirely at the level of character is irrelevant for the debate we're engaged in. (See above.)

- iii. We extremely puzzled by K&P's claim that (1) 'is what all utterances of the same sentence have in common'. Reflexive contents, such as  $\text{Content}_m$ , can never be shared by two utterance of the same sentence S: Two utterances  $u$  and  $u'$  of S will have different  $\text{Contents}_m$  because they will refer to different utterances;  $u$  will include a reference to  $u$  and  $u'$  to  $u'$ . There is no way, therefore, that  $\text{Content}_m$  can get 'at the vision behind' our basic idea. There is, of course, a general rule that tells us how to generate the  $\text{Content}_m$  for each utterance of 'I'm tried': *For any utterance  $u$  of 'I'm tried',  $u$  is true just in case the speaker of  $u$  is tried at the time of  $u$ .* But this is a rule that tells you how to generate truth conditions for particular utterances; it isn't itself a set of truth conditions for any particular utterance; its instantiations do that.
- iv. Consider reactions such as: 'John said that too', 'I thought that was what you said', 'I doubt that's true'. 'That's interesting', 'That's funny'. These are never used to refer to what K&P call  $\text{Content}_m$ . We never refer to propositions *about* utterances and express agreement, disagreement, etc. about them. We might use such mechanisms to pick out propositions, but we don't treat them as the assertable contents. When someone asserts 'I'm tired' he not making an assertion about his own utterance! When you doubt what you said, or reaffirm what you've said, or change your mind, etc., the attitudes you express are not about  $\text{Content}_m$ .
- v. To grasp what Perry (2001) calls  $\text{Content}_m$ , reflective contents, we need to refer to the relevant utterance. We're confused by how K&P thinks this should be done to reach the level of reflective content. In (1) and (2) in K&P's reply there's a name for the relevant utterance, 'u' and 'u'' respectively. So, is it a condition on grasping that  $\text{Content}_m$  that we have a name for the utterance? Presumably not, because later he uses expressions such as 'the note', i.e. a definite description, in presenting  $\text{Content}_m$ . We worry about this for a couple of reasons:
  - a. In some cases it seems unlikely to us that we will ever be able to have a singular term referring to the relevant utterance because we will have no idea what the relevant utterance is. Our worry can be brought out by thinking about the interpretation of written or otherwise recorded speech acts. To make things

simpler, we'll tell you something interesting (i.e. this is not an example but rather a real speech act): *We think this is a good time to travel to Buenos Aires*. To grasp the  $\text{Content}_m$  of this speech act, you need to refer to the relevant utterance. Ask yourself (i.e. you, the reader, should ask yourself this question): What's the relevant utterance? Here's the history of this speech act: One of us thought up the example, made some notes on a napkin, transferred those notes to his computer, sent it to his co-author; the co-author, in turn, rewrote the draft, and we went back and forth a few times. Then it went to PPR, then to the printer, then the proofs, etc. You get the point. There is, in such cases, no clear utterance to refer to—there's no one event that can be singled out as 'the utterance'. Hence, there's no way you can grasp  $\text{Content}_m$ .

- b. Putting this issue aside, sometime it looks as if K&P want to allow descriptions of the relevant utterance to enter into  $\text{Content}_m$ , i.e. we don't need a name for the relevant utterance (they allow 'the note' to be sufficient for picking out the utterance). If this is their view, then there will then be indefinitely many  $\text{Content}_m$  for any utterance  $u$  (since there are indefinitely many ways to describe the relevant utterance, each of which is non-equivalent to the other, e.g. 'the utterance that originated this token', 'the utterance that made Perry send a token to the publisher who then produced this token', etc.). There will be one  $\text{Content}_m$  for each possible description of the utterance. If this is so, then two issues arise: first, there's no such thing as 'the reflective content' since there's no such thing that is unique. Second, it is again unclear whether two people will grasp the same  $\text{Content}_m$  if they utilize different descriptions of the relevant utterance.

#### *K&P on Grasping Semantic Content*

K&P says:

Suppose you find a note  $n$  that reads 'I am tired.' You don't know who wrote it, or when, but you assume it is written in English. On the C&L account you *do not* grasp the semantic contribution of the sentence, for you do not have the information necessary, on their theory, to grasp 'the proposition semantically expressed'. But of course you do ...

There's no substantive disagreement between us here: On our use of 'semantic content' you can't grasp it; on K&P's, you can. So, this is purely termi-

nological. We are not denying there is a level of content characterized exclusively by an expression's character.

*K&P on Reporting Indexicals with Unknown Referents*

K&P continue:

...and you can report it: Note *n* is true iff the person who wrote it was tired at the time he wrote it.

Ask yourself whether having found this note would you say: the writer claimed that the writer of the note was tired at the time of writing it. Of course, you *could* do this—we doubt anyone has ever done it (we know of no non-philosophical example of an indirect report where a singular term is used to refer to a particular utterance in this way, but our Speech Act Pluralism predicts that someone could do it. Again, there is no real disagreement between us.

**Reply to Stainton**

Stainton concludes his comments: '...if the distinctions I have laid out are accepted, we may find a place for an enlightened language theorist who grants many of Cappelen and Lepore's insights, including in particular their cogent arguments for T1-T5'. Here, in sum, is what we think about his attempted reconciliation:

- a. If all there was to Enlightened Contextualism was CC1-CC4, as elaborated by Stainton, we doubt many of those we argue against in *IS* would belong in this category. Were they to limit their claims to CC1-CC4 so interpreted, they would have to give up central parts of their theories they have defended over a long period of time.
- b. On a closer reading of Stainton's reply, there turns out to be more disagreement than what CC1-CC4 elicit. Substantive disagreements remain (beyond those mentioned by Stainton).

Stainton did not convince us we are in more agreement with our opponents than we thought. What we thought was common ground remains; what we thought was in dispute remains. Nor are we convinced we are in any kind of substantive agreement with Stainton. Since this is not the place to engage in a serious comparison of Stainton with other contextualists, our focus will be on our disagreements with his position as outlined in his reply. He does not argue for his views there; his goal is to describe areas of agreement. In response, we point out what we take to be important areas of disagreement.

### *Disagreement #1: Context Sensitive Expressions*

We claim that the only (semantically) context sensitive expressions are those in Basic Set (characterized on pp. 1-2 of *IS*). On Stainton's interpretation, our only claim here is that these are the only 'speaker-context magnets'. He thinks that we think this is compatible with holding that there are context sensitive expressions in this sense: '...the expression's in-context reference is *somehow* relative to a feature of the utterance context: its extension changes in some fashion even while holding 'the evaluation world' constant.' This is not our view. We don't think any expression other than those in Basic Set changes its extension from one context to another. That's why we are inclined to include expressions such as 'left' and 'nearby' (though see our 'Reply to Hawthorne'). Stainton notices that we disagree on this point. He says: 'I would argue given space that T1 is false on sense (1b): there are context sensitive expressions that aren't speaker-context magnets.' We wish we had given us that argument, because we include that claim in our understanding of what Stainton thinks of as our T1. That is, T1, as we construe it, is *incompatible* with denying 'on sense (1b).'

### *Disagreement #2: Truth-Conditionality*

Stainton attributes T2 to us: 'Once referents are assigned to these basic and obvious items in a (declarative) sentence, that sentence has *truth conditions*.' He thinks the 'enlightened contextualist' can accept T1 if 'truth condition' is interpreted as 'Tarskian truth-conditions'. We're a bit at a loss here since we have no idea what 'Tarskian truth conditions' are, *if* they are distinct from truth conditions. If what he means is that we endorse the view that "Nina has had enough pasta' is true iff Nina has had enough pasta' is true, then this is correct. This, of course, is what Radical Contextualists like Travis (1985, 1989, 1996) and Bezuidenhout (2002, 2006) deny. What we mean by sentences having truth conditions is nothing as theoretical as what Tarski had in mind. We don't mean to be committed to any particular truth theory or any particular theoretical framework for deriving truth conditions. We simply mean that these specify conditions the satisfaction of which is both necessary and sufficient for the truth of the sentence. Our theoretical neutrality is expressed by our dual appeal to truth conditions and propositions. When we say in *IS* that a sentence S has truth conditions we also say it expresses a proposition. The neutral formulation we use is: 'S expresses the proposition that p, and is true iff p'. This appeal to proposition cannot, we take it, be captured by Stainton's interpretation of T1, but it is an important component of our position. We do not mean our theory to require a certain semantic framework for thinking about truth conditions. We do have our theoretical sympathies, but nothing in *IS* should depend on these.

*Disagreement #3: 'Relativized Truth Conditions'*

Stainton's CC2 says that sentences typically do not have truth conditions, even once relativized. He explains 'relativized truth conditions' as follows:

...a disambiguated expression type has truth conditions only if it is true or false—it partitions the worlds—relative to a set of previously established parameters. Example parameters include speaker and addressee (for 'I' and 'you'), objects, times and places demonstrated (for 'this', 'that', 'then' and 'there'), utterance time (for 'now', 'today', 'yesterday', and tense), place of utterance (for 'here'), and world of utterance (for 'actual').

If we understand what Stainton has in mind with his use of 'parameter', this is another point of disagreement. As we argue in *IS*, once these parameters are fixed, we get a full fledged proposition, something capable of being true or false. Again, Stainton doesn't tell us why sentences lack truth-conditions in this sense (his sense (2b))—that's not the goal of his comment. His goal is to lay out areas of agreement and disagreement transparently. Given that this is his goal, all we will do here is indicate that we didn't intend our claim to be simply his (2a) if that's understood as compatible with denying (2b).

*Disagreement #4: Missing Linguistic Ingredients*

We're not sure why Stainton thinks the issue of unarticulated constituents or 'missing linguistic ingredients' belongs in a discussion of the different senses of 'truth condition'. This, it seems to us, has to do with the object evaluated, not with the nature of the evaluation. That issue aside, this is a fundamental disagreement between the position in *IS* and Stainton's enlightened contextualist, one worthy of more than the parenthetical remark Stainton affords it. This issue is at the core of our objection to Moderate Contextualism in Chapters 3-6 and of Radical Contextualism in Chapters 7-9. Again, if this disagreement remains between the enlightened contextualist and us, we don't see that much has been gained.

This also has implications for how to understand Stainton's claim that his enlightened contextualist can agree with T1 interpreted as (1e). We are not really in agreement about T1 so interpreted because Stainton presumably thinks that what has truth conditions in this sense is the sentence with the additional linguistic parameters. He, presumably, thinks the surface structure of 'Nina has had enough' has missing linguistic ingredients. We don't. So when he says he agrees with us that 'Nina has had enough' has 'Tarskian truth conditions', he presumably thinks it is this sentence *suitably enriched* that has truth conditions. But that's *not* our view. We think it has truth conditions without any addition. Again, this is substantive disagreement. In saying this, we are assuming that Stainton does not hold the view that 'Nina has had enough' *without* the 'missing linguistic ingredients' has Tarskian truth conditions. We don't see how that view is tenable (if the linguistic ingredi-

ents really are missing, they would have to be added for the sentence to have truth conditions; otherwise, we don't know what's meant by saying they are 'missing').

*Disagreement #5: Asserted Semantic Content*

Stainton attributes T3 to us: 'T3: This truth-conditional content is asserted when the sentence is used'. If this means that we think the semantic content is asserted, that's a correct description of our view (though, this is something we have gone back and forth on—in our 1997 we denied it; other speech act pluralists). On Stainton's view, this is true only on the 'report-oriented' sense of assertion, and not on the intention-oriented sense of assertion. We doubt, however, that there's a clear distinction between these two senses of 'assertion'. Some reports have as their aim to capture speaker intentions, and on our view, our intuitions about what Stainton calls the 'intention-oriented' sense of 'assertion' are derived from such reports. As we see it, the distinction Stainton is getting at is one within the report-oriented sense. It's a sub-set of these—the reports you get in contexts where you care especially about speaker intentions.

But that is not our main disagreement with Stainton over assertion. Our main disagreement is about whether the semantic content, as we understand it, is something the speaker intends to assert. On our view, it is. On Stainton's, it is not. Our argument for this is simple: speakers intend to say what their words mean. As a result, they intend to assert the semantic content of the sentence they utter.<sup>11</sup>

*Disagreement #6: 'on-line processing' and minimal propositions*

Finally, in CC5 Stainton says: 'The so-called 'minimal proposition' is not psychologically relevant.' This, he says, 'is true on sense (4b): where there is a minimal proposition, it doesn't generally play a part in occurrent on-line processing.' Stainton thinks this is a position we would be willing to endorse. It is not. The entirety of Chapter 12 of *IS* is devoted to a discussion of what we call the 'psychological argument' against minimal propositions. We discuss Carston and Recanati's argument to the effect that minimal propositions lack psychological reality. In reply, we note that they *do* have a role: they serve as a guard against the ubiquitous mismatch of contextual information. Speakers and audiences typically perceive the context of utterance in importantly radically different ways, and the minimal propositions serve as a guard against that lack of shared context. Stainton's interpretation of this is that we only claiming that the minimal proposition is 'at the agent's cognitive disposal: it can be accessed; it can be made consciously

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<sup>11</sup> The complications here have to do with irony and other such speech acts, but we leave those aside for the moment, since they are not at the centre of our debate with Stainton.

available; it could be used in processing.’ To hold that they have this property is compatible with denying they are ‘psychologically relevant in interpretive situation’, i.e. that the ‘agent occurrently makes use of’ them in the context of utterance.

We are not sure how Stainton knows what information plays this second role and why he is convinced that minimal propositions don’t. Since we don’t know enough about language processing or what’s meant by ‘occurrently makes use of’ we will suspend judgment. Suffice it to say, our suspicion is that were this notion made precise, it would either include our minimal propositions or exclude them together with whatever Stainton thinks plays this role. But at this point, that’s speculation on our part.

In conclusion, we don’t see a great deal of hope for resolving any of these issues simply through further elaborations of the terms used in framing the debate. This is no doubt an important exercise, but the issues are simple to understand. What’s needed is not a deeper understanding of the terms used in phrasing the problems, but, rather, a better understanding of the evidence and improved theoretical frameworks for interpreting this evidence.

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