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Book Review
Relativism and Monadic Truth, by Herman Cappelen and John Hawthorne

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Disputatio Vol. 3, No. 26

May 2009

DOI: 10.2478/disp-2009-0006

ISSN: 0873-626X

may also find the logical principles previously introduced. Finally, the importance of the topic and the success in dealing with it explains the relevance of the work. It should be evident from the above that Correia's book is a valuable contribution to philosophy. Doubtless, this volume is warmly recommended to anyone interested in dependence and metaphysics, to those who are new to this topic and to those whose studies are more advanced.

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Relativism and Monadic Truth, by Herman Cappelen and John Hawthorne. Oxford University Press, 2009, viii + 148 pp.

Relativism has witnessed quite a comeback in recent years, and this fact has not remained without reaction within the philosophical community. Relativism's recent success is in most part due to the new form in which it has been promoted: instead of rather foggy and metaphor-driven formulations, the new doctrine takes the form of a precise semantic theory, using familiar terms and distinctions well-entrenched in contemporary philosophy of language. This new framework has seduced a significant number of philosophers, and as a result quite a number of domains have received relativistic treatments: predicates of personal taste, epistemic modals, knowledge attributions, indicative conditionals — to name just a few.

Given that this new feature of relativism has managed to make it more powerful than its predecessors, a solid reaction to relativism has also been developed. Herman Cappelen and John Hawthorne's book *Relativism and Monadic Truth* represents one such reaction. The book aims to be a thorough defense of a traditional, anti-relativist view, while the authors' main strategy is to weaken the case for relativism by pointing to faulty evidence or dubitable semantic theses that relativists have relied on. Focusing on the case of predicates of personal taste, the authors also sketch a version of contextualism and argue that it is to be preferred to relativism, its main virtues being a better handling of the data and no departure from traditional views.

This is accomplished in four chapters, which I will briefly present in what follows. I will also make some critical remarks, with particular focus on issues raised in chapter four.

Chapter one is largely expository. The authors start by presenting the traditional view they are defending, called 'the Simple view', or Simplicity for short, consisting in the following tenets:

T1: There are propositions and they instantiate the fundamental monadic properties of truth *simpliciter* and falsity *simpliciter*.
T2: The semantic values of declarative sentences relative to contexts of utterance are propositions.
T3: Propositions are, unsurprisingly, the objects of propositional attitudes, such as belief, hope, wish, doubt, etc.
T4: Propositions are objects of illocutionary acts; they are, e.g., what we assert and deny.
T5: Propositions are the objects of agreement and disagreement.

The relativist threat to Simplicity consists in giving priority in semantic theorizing to the notions of being *true-at* and *false-at*, instead of truth and falsity *simpliciter*. Cappelen and Hawthorne (henceforth C&H) trace the development of relativism to two main sources: the framework of possible worlds semantics, with its insistence of the notion of truth-at-a-possible-world and the Kaplanian framework, with its distinction between context of utterance (the actual setting in which a sentence is produced) and circumstance of evaluation (actual or hypothetical situations in which a sentence is evaluated for truth). As widely known, besides possible worlds Kaplan has allowed times (and maybe locations) as parameters in the circumstance of evaluation, thus opposing Simplicity. From here to the other versions of relativism is just a small step: namely, allowing other unorthodox parameters in the circumstance, such as standards of taste, bodies of knowledge and so on. This move is motivated by a better explanation of the data (such as disagreement) that a Simplicity-friendly view (contextualism) cannot provide.

C&H describe the relativist as committed to three core ideas: Proliferation, Disquotation and Non-Relativity of Semantic Value and Belief Reports. The first idea is the one just mentioned: the introduction of other parameters than possible worlds in the circumstance. The second idea, Disquotation, is the introduction of a monadic truth predicate in the object language that will allow the relativist to safely appeal to the

disagreement data she relies on. The monadic truth predicate functions in accordance with the following disquotational principle:

> *DQ1*: The content *It is true that P* is true at an *n*-tuple iff the content of P is true at that *n*-tuple (13)

(by an *n*-tuple C&h mean the *n* parameters of the circumstance of evaluation at which a content is evaluated). This has the consequence that claims of the form 'It is true that O iff P' will be true at all *n*-tuples and that the relativist can now coherently make sense of sentences like 'What Fred said is true/false'.

The third core relativist idea is that although the same semantic content can be true relative to one *n*-tuple and false relative to another *n*-tuple, claims of the form 'S in C has P as its semantic value' are not relativized in such a way. In the same vein, the relativist can claim that belief reports are also not so relativized and that although a sentence like 'Apples are delicious' is true relative to a standard of taste, a belief report such as 'Sabrina believes that apples are delicious' is not. This has the consequence that under the relativist view one can assert 'A and B have contradictory beliefs' and 'A and B share a belief' without fearing that the conjunction might be false.

Having presented what they think is the best rendering of the relativist view, in chapter two C&H proceed to a detailed analysis of two tests for commonality of semantic content. One important piece of the relativist machinery is the claim that sentences containing relativistically-treatable terms have constant semantic values across contexts of utterance. One informal test employed by relativists to support this claim is what C&H call the 'Says-That' test:

> *Says-That*: Let u be an utterance of a sentence S by an agent A in context C. Suppose we can use S in some other context C' to say what A said in C, i.e., suppose 'A said that S' is true when uttered on C'. If so, we have evidence that there is a level of content in S that is invariant with respect to the differences between C and C' (…). (34)

However, as C&H conclusively argue, the 'Says-That' test is not reliable. For some expressions, such as 'left', 'nearby', 'local' or 'enemy', features of the environment in which the report is made are trumped by features of the environment of the original utterance (a phenomenon C&H call 'parasitic context sensitivity'). As an im-

provement on the 'Says-That' test, C&H consider the 'Collective Says-That' test:

> *CST-1*: Let u and u' be utterances of S by A in C and B in C'. If, from a third context C'', they cannot be reported by 'A and B said that S', S is semantically context sensitive. (44)

Now this test seems to fare better, but it is still not good enough. For there is a case to be made that a report such as 'A and B said that Naomi went to a nearby beach' (after A and B having both uttered 'Naomi went to a nearby beach' in different contexts) has the logical form

> A and B λx (x said that Naomi went to a beach nearby$_{(\text{to x})}$),

meaning that both A and B have the property of being an individual x such that x said that Naomi went to nearby beach to x. (A similar treatment is given to the relevant reading of the sentence 'John loves his mother and Bill does, too'.) We have thus a case in which the tested expression is clearly context sensitive, contrary to what the result of the test should be.

The third test C&H propose is one that constitutes a better diagnosis of commonality of semantic value and which the relativist is advised to use:

> *Agree-2*: Take two sincere utterances u and u' by A and B of a sentence S in contexts C and C'. If from a third context C'' they can be reported by an utterance of 'A and B agree that S', then that is evidence that S is semantically invariant across C, C' and C'' (…). (54)

Although not entirely without problems, *Agree* is a better test than the two before because it is hard to interpret 'agree' in such reports as distributing over the individuals in question. The interpretation using lambda-abstraction *is* available, but its only possible reading treats A and B as a plurality, which is not what we want.

In chapter three, C&H analyze and refute a couple of arguments against Simplicity, with the first of them receiving the most attention. This argument is known as 'the Operator Argument' and versions of it have been used both by Kaplan and Lewis to argue for the introduction of unorthodox parameters in the circumstance of evaluation (index, for Lewis). Although treatments of this argument have been given in the literature before (notably Jeffrey King), C&H present the

argument in a new and stunningly precise form, rendering it as follows (the argument proceeds under the assumption that an expression E combines with a sentence S to form another sentence ES — an assumption they call Sententiality):

L1. *Parameter Dependence*: S is evaluable for truth only once a value along parameter M is specified.
L2. *Uniformity*: S is of the same semantic type when it occurs alone or when it combines with E.
L3. *Vacuity*: E is semantically vacuous (i.e., it does not affect truth-value) when it combines with a sentence that semantically supplies a value for M.
L4. E is not redundant when it combines with S.
L5. By *Vacuity* and (L4), S does not supply a value for M when it combines with E.
L6. By *Uniformity* and (L5), S does not supply a value for M when it occurs alone.
L7. By *Parameter Dependence* and (L6), S cannot be evaluated for truth.

Now, their strategy to deal with this argument is to argue that different premises fail when different types of expressions are at stake. For example, they argue that *Parameter Dependence* fails for standards of precision, and for modal, temporal and locational expressions; *Uniformity* fails for temporal and locational expressions; etc. Also, one important claim is that Sententiality fails for expressions like 'in L' and 'on t' and that such expressions are better construed as verb-modifying adverbs. They accuse the proponents of the argument of having conflated Sententiality in these cases with the effect of a syntactic rule called fronting (used in getting from 'It is raining in Boston' to 'In Boston, it is raining').

Leaving aside the other issues dealt with in this chapter (such as the argument from the anaphoric 'that' to which they respond convincingly), let me say something about their treatment of the Operator Argument. I think their treatment of this argument is one of the most original parts of the book and I generally agree with their conclusion that the argument fails. However, there is something frustrating in the way C&H argue for this conclusion. As I said, their strategy is to point out in each case that there are alternatives to the claim in question. But it is quite clear that simply pointing to alternatives is not an argument that those alternative views are also *better* than the view they are suppose to replace. To reach that conclusion, one needs

to carefully compare the different views on the table. But this is quite impossible given the sketchy and underdeveloped views the two authors put forward as alternatives. So, although their treatment of the Operator Argument is very precise and thorough, their conclusion does not seem to be as firmly established as one would expect.

Now, C&H are fully aware that the arguments they address in chapter 3 are not crucial for the relativist. Some other considerations, such as certain patterns of data, have been given more weight in motivating relativism. Thus, in chapter 4 C&H proceed to analyze the disagreement data the relativist is relying on to motivate her view. As a first step towards this goal, C&H provide a contextualist semantics for 'filling' and 'disgusting' and then make some observations about the data and the way the theory provided handles them. The suggestion then is that all these observations apply equally well to the case of 'fun' and other predicates of personal taste. The chapter ends with a series of objections to relativism, amongst which being that it generates faulty predictions of contradictoriness, that it doesn't square with the factivity of knowledge, and that it runs afoul our common notion of truth.

Tackling all these objections would be impossible in the present context, but let me address some of the issues raised by the authors in this chapter. Let me first say that the observations they make about the data (especially about generics and about autocentric versus exocentric uses of predicates of personal taste) are entirely valid, and the relativist should indeed pay more attention in handling them. But there are also some claims C&H make that I don't find correct. One such claim is that, contrary to what the relativist says, contextualism does have the means to account for disagreement. The way to show this is to provide cases in which the intuition of disagreement is born out, even assuming contextualism is right. This is a common strategy in the contextualist literature, and it usually proceeds by offering a list of such cases. C&H are not different: they offer the following list to make the point (the list is not exhaustive) in connection with distinct utterances of 'That will be fun':

(i) The speaker is using 'fun' autocentrically, the hearer realizes this, but exocentrically points out that the relevant event will not be fun for the original speaker.
(ii) The speaker is claiming that the referent of 'that' will be fun for a group that includes the interlocutor. While it will be fun for the

speaker, it will not be fun for certain other members of the group. Here the interlocutor is quite within his rights to correct the speaker. Once corrected, the speaker will in that case not stick to his guns unless he feels the alleged counterevidence is faulty.

(iii) The original speaker was in fact merely expressing the claim concerning the referent of 'that' that it will be fun for him. The interlocutor misunderstands the speaker and corrects him when it is not appropriate to do so. (110-111)

Similar lists can be found in a number of contextualist authors (Glanzberg, Stojanovic, Lopez de Sa), but in my opinion, those lists totally miss the point of the relativist challenge. For the relativist's claim that contextualism cannot account for disagreement concerns not disagreement in general, but a *specific* type of case, which is *not* any of those that the contextualist proudly presents us with. One case the relativist has in mind, for example, is one in which the speaker and the interlocutor, talking about the same thing, use a predicate of personal taste autocentrically to make claims that generate the intuition of disagreement (or, in a situation closer to (ii) above, they belong to different groups that includes only one of them). Note that the issue here is not about disagreement being *faultless*, case in which the relativist could be accused of begging the question; it is simply that the intuition of disagreement in a specific case — the *relevant* case — is not handled by the contextualist (at least not without some extra theoretical material — see below). Since the relativist is thus appealing to something that the contextualist would agree with (namely, that we do have the intuition of disagreement) the point is that it is not enough for the contextualist to say that her view can account for disagreement in some cases; what she has to say is that her view can account for disagreement in the specific type of case the relativist is pointing to. A contextualist account that takes care of the relevant cases is still needed. Since the relativist can handle all the cases on the contextualist list *and* the ones he is pointing to, relativism is still to be preferred over contextualism.

To be fair with C&H, after surveying the various data they admit that after all the contextualist will have to retort to 'a dose of semantic blindness' (118). But this is not an innocent concession: having to posit semantic blindness was found by many philosophers to be quite an unattractive feature of any view. And this is all the relativist wants, because now the contextualist is committed to something that might

give her position less credit. That is not to say that the relativist herself might not have to posit semantic blindness — that might well be so; but the important point here is the need to come clear about all the theoretical underpinnings of the contextualist view. With all things on the table, the chances to evaluate and chose the right view are bigger. And once the contextualist admits that she has to posit semantic blindness, it is not clear that she is in the position of claiming an advantage over the relativist.

Now, C&H also pursue an alternative strategy: namely, to deny that there is an intuition of disagreement in the cases the relativist points to, and they offer some examples to support their claim. One of the examples given is the following: a caterer having to cook all night for a party says 'That party is not going to be fun', while a guest, excited at the prospect of meeting old friends at the party says 'The party is going to be fun'. I don't want to deny that in this case the intuition of disagreement is lacking, but I also don't think it should constitute the basis of a contextualist defense. For, it seems to me, the relativist can agree that the two sentences do not express contradictory contents for reasons having nothing whatsoever to do with the predicate 'fun'. I think a case could be made for the claim that the lack of the intuition of disagreement can be traced down to the fact that in the two occasions the expression 'the party' simply means different things. Prima facie, this claim may sound strange, so let me say a few words to support it.

Without going into details about the metaphysics of events, one reasonable thing to say regarding their identity is the following: two events composed of certain sub-events are the same if a significant part (maybe all) of the sub-events are the same. Such complex events are composed of a sequence of sub-events, each with its own features, such as duration, agents, etc. Now, it is reasonable to say that in order for 'the party' to designate the same event in the two sentences, the speakers should make reference to the same sequence of sub-events. But this doesn't seem to be the case in the example given: certainly the sub-events that the cook was partaking in are different from those in which the happy partier was. Contrast this with the telling of a joke: even if the telling of a joke consists of a sequence of sub-events (such as the telling of the first line, the telling of the second, etc.), two listeners with different senses of humor could say 'That joke was fun' and 'That joke was not fun' without eliciting the intuition that 'that joke' means different things. This kind of consid-

erations, I take it, severely shake the relevance of C&H's example. But even if these considerations prove to be on the wrong track, the following point still can be made: given the important dialectical role the example plays, the conclusion they want to draw is simply jeopardized without more being said in order to rule out the considerations mentioned.

I think *Relativism and Monadic Truth* is an important book, for I believe it lies down with outstanding clarity the kind of challenges the relativist has to respond to in order to solidify her view. Although I have not addressed other important objections C&H raise (such as the clash with the factivity of knowledge and the treatment of bound uses — objections that actually *do* have answers in the literature), I think the book overstates the troubles for the relativist and presents contextualism as the winning view a bit too hastily. At the end of the book, C&H confess that they do not expect 'the more entrenched relativists' to hop out from the trappings of a relativist picture and that the real target of the book are those 'fence-sitters and swing voters whom once can hope to prevent from becoming ensnared by it' (138). I certainly agree with the first of these claims. As for the second, once the whole picture is brought to light and a thorough examination of *both* views and their problems is given, I am not completely sure that the fence-sitters and swing voters to whom the book is addressed will be convinced so easily by the kinds of arguments offered in this otherwise rich and interesting book.

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Perspectival Thought: A Plea for (Moderate) Relativism, by François Récanati. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, x + 308 pp.

As the subtitle indicates, François Récanati's *Perspectival Thought* is a plea for 'moderate relativism,' a view that acknowledges a neglected form of context-dependency in language and thought: *situation-relativity*. The view is not entirely new: it has its roots in situation semantics and Récanati's earlier work, notably *Oratio Obliqua, Oratio Recta* (MIT Press, 2000) in which it was applied to attitude reports