



Book Review

Perspectival Thought: A Plea for (Moderate) Relativism, by François Récanati

Julien Dutant
University of Geneva

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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.

Dan Zeman

LOGOS — Universitat de Barcelona

C/ Montalegre, 4-6, 4090, 08001, Barcelona

dan_zeman@yahoo.com

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

and metarepresentation. It is also partly familiar from the current discussion over semantic relativism. However, Récanati's book stands out of the recent literature on two counts. First, it provides a comprehensive relativist framework in which earlier foundational debates between Arthur Prior, Gareth Evans, David Lewis, David Kaplan, John Perry, Jon Barwise and others are resituated and illuminated. Second, it goes beyond philosophy of language to rest its case mostly on considerations drawn from the philosophy of mind, namely the application of the relativist framework to perception, memory, imagination and 'perspectival' thought in general. The resulting work is deeply original (including with respect to Récanati's earlier work) and deals in detail with a wealth of issues.

Récanati's 'moderate relativism' consists in three main ideas: (1) situation-relativity, (2) aligning the content/situation distinction on the content/force one, (3) free shiftability. Each of the book's three parts roughly centres on one of these. The first part introduces Récanati's relativist framework within philosophy of language. The two others apply it to philosophy of mind.

Situation-relativity is introduced in part I. Its cornerstone is 'Duality,' an idea encapsulated in Austin's slogan that 'it takes two to make a truth' (34). Truth requires a content to be evaluated *and* a circumstance or situation with respect to which the content is evaluated. On the Duality view, this implies that *the primary bearers of truth-value are content-situation pairs*. Following Barwise, Récanati calls such pairs *Austinian propositions* (45).

If the content is a classical proposition the 'situation' component of the corresponding Austinian proposition seems superfluous. A classical proposition can be evaluated with respect to *reality* itself. (That is what being a 'classical' proposition is. For instance, if reality consists in just one world, a function from possible worlds to truth-values will be a classical proposition.) Since there is just one reality, the situation component appears trivial: we may just as well treat the classical proposition itself as the bearer of truth-value. That this is not so, however, is shown by example from Barwise and John Etchemendy (50). Watching over a game of poker, the speaker utters 'Claire has a good hand now,' while Claire is not in fact among the players in that game; though as it happens, she plays in some other part of the town and does have a good hand. Evaluated with respect to the entire actual world, the speaker's utterance is true. Yet the utterance concerned a particular situation, the one the speaker was

looking at. And if evaluated with respect to *that* situation, the utterance is not true. This explains our ambivalence about the truth of that utterance. So even if we grant that the utterance expresses a classical proposition, it is not trivial to specify a situation to evaluate it.

Duality consequently imposes a distinction between two levels of content, *explicit* vs. *full* content (42-46). *Explicit* contents are the first element of content-situation pairs. Full contents are the content-situation pairs themselves, that is, Austinian propositions. In Barwise and Etchemendy's example, the explicit content is the proposition that Claire has a good hand now. However, its full content is that that proposition is true *of the situation perceived*.

Once we accept Duality, it becomes natural to consider explicit contents as properties of situations. And the more specified the situation, the 'thinner' the explicit content can be. For instance, the explicit content of 'it is raining' can be a constant but time-relative proposition that is true at some times but false at others (44). Stoics attributed such contents to tensed sentences, and called them *lekta* (39); Récanati borrows the term for the explicit-content component of Austinian propositions (46). *Lekta* can in principle be further relativized so as to be true at some locations but not others ('It is raining' evaluated at Murdock or at Palo Alto (222)), at some domains but not at others ('All students are French' evaluated at some group or at other (50)), at some persons but not others ('I am Hume' evaluated at Hume or at Heimson (110)) or at some perspective but not others ('the salt is left of the pepper' evaluated at one side of the table or the other (84)).

Duality provides a framework in which Récanati locates a range of views and debates, including his own 'moderate relativism.'

First, relativism is in principle neutral on the literalism-contextualism debate (3,7). In *Literal Meaning* (Cambridge UP, 2004), Récanati framed the latter around the question whether the mechanisms generating the intuitive content of utterances are strictly semantic ('saturation') or pragmatic ('free enrichment') in nature. But in his relativist framework, intuitive contents are just explicit contents, *lekta*. So the framework introduces an entirely distinct layer of context-dependency, namely the situation. The views still intersect in practice, because saturation, modulation and situation-relativity are alternative accounts available for any particular case of context-sensitivity (8-9). But at the theoretical level, Récanati's relativism and his contextualism have only in common their rejection of the idea that all context-sensitivity reduces to 'saturation.'

Second, *relativist* views are those who acknowledge situation-relative *lekta*. Among them Récanati distinguishes the ‘radical’ from the ‘moderate.’ On moderate relativist views, the full contents of utterances and thoughts are Austinian propositions that have *absolute* truth. Even when its *lekton* is incomplete, an utterance is associated to a situation of evaluation and thereby gets a complete content and an absolute truth-value as in the orthodox Fregean picture. By contrast, on ‘radical’ relativist views an utterance need not be tied to a particular situation of evaluation. Consequently, some utterances are not absolutely true or false but only have truth and falsity relative to points of evaluation (40-41). Récanati’s ‘moderate’ and ‘radical’ versions of relativism thus correspond to John MacFarlane’s ‘non-indexical contextualism’ and ‘relativism’ respectively. MacFarlane is the main proponent of the latter; the former covers views like those recently put forward by Peter Laserson, Max Kölbel and Stefano Predelli. Arthur Prior, Michael Dummett, David Kaplan, Brian Loar and David Lewis can also be retrospectively characterized as moderate relativists (the first three on temporal propositions, 44-45, 48, the latter two on *de se* propositions, 109-112, 118).

Third, moderate relativism further branches into two versions (41, 113). On the “two-level” version, *lekta* are context-independent contents of representation. In the case of utterances, they are the meaning of sentence types — like Kaplan’s characters (47). In the case of thoughts, they are narrow psychological contents (117). We have just two levels of content, *lekton* and Austinian proposition. Such a picture is suggested by Dummett and endorsed by Lewis (40, 47, 118). By contrast, on the ‘three-level’ version, *lekta* are context-dependent contents — like Kaplan’s contents (47-48). Roughly, they are the content one gets after filling in the value of indexical items. They may still be relative: for instance, on Kaplan’s view, an utterance of ‘it is raining here’ has a place-specific but temporally neutral content, *i.e.* a temporal proposition. Context-dependent *lekta* are thus distinct both from the context-independent content of the representation type and from the full, Austinian content of the representation token. This ‘three-level’ picture is endorsed by Barwise, Kaplan and Récanati himself (47-48, 113-114).

Récanati simply sets aside radical relativism, and devotes most of Part I to a discussion of arguments from the philosophy of language over (1) relativism *vs.* orthodoxy and (2) the three-level (Barwise-Kaplan) version *vs.* the two-level (Dummett-Lewis) one. Arguments

over relativism are discussed through a detailed review of the debate over temporal propositions: Frege-Evans' objection to the very idea of incomplete propositions (37-38, 43-46), the claim by Jeffrey King and others that temporalism makes sense only if tenses are operators (55-65), Mark Richard's idea that temporal propositions cannot be objects of belief (78-81). Récanati finds the objections inconclusive. Additionally, he rejects Max Kölbel's and Peter Laserson's *pro*-relativism argument based on cases of 'faultless disagreement' on matters of taste and puts forward an alternative, non-relativistic, treatment of such cases (90-91). By contrast, Récanati advances two considerations in favour of relativism: it better reflects what Patrick Blackburn calls the 'internal perspective' we have on time (65), and (following Prior and Dummett) it preserves the modal and temporal 'innocence' of non-temporal and non-modal fragments of language (67-71).

On the two- vs. three-level issue, Récanati takes up the debate between Robert Stalnaker and Kaplan vs. Lewis over middle-level context-dependent contents (104-119). First, he rejects Stalnaker's idea that they are needed as the intuitive content of speech acts (105): as Lewis argues, such a notion is straightforwardly definable from the context-independent content of the sentence (106). Second, Récanati rejects Barwise's claim that they are needed as the narrow content of attitudes (116): as Perry points out, context-independent content is better suited to that role (115-117). Récanati delays his own case for the three-level picture until Part III (216-217), where he draws on the application of the relativist framework to perception.

As I understand it, Récanati's argument for the middle level (roughly, Kaplan's contents) is that it is needed to draw the distinction between those elements of a situation which are represented (e.g. the object of perception) and those which affect the full Austinian content without being represented (e.g. the subject of perception and her location) (216-217). But I fail to see the force of the argument. Just as intuitive speech act content is definable from the context-independent content (as Récanati concedes to Lewis, 106), the above distinction is straightforwardly drawn from that content: namely, the represented elements are just those to which corresponds an indexical item in the representation. There is no need to introduce an additional level in which indexical items are replaced by elements of the situation themselves — though I agree that there is no harm in doing so (217).

Part II proposes to 'align' the *lekton*/situation distinction with the content/force distinction (125-129). The idea is that the force of an

utterance, or the ‘psychological mode’ of a thought, is what determines the situation with respect to which the utterance or thought content is to be evaluated (23, 128). For instance, Récanati agrees with Searle that when I make a promise, the promise is satisfied only by a future situation brought about by me (127), and that when I perceive that there is a flower, the perception is veridical only if there is a flower in the situation that causes my perceptual experience (130-131). However, contrary to Searle, Récanati denies that these aspects of the truth-conditions are part of the explicit content of the utterance or thought. Rather, they are contributed by the mode’s selection of a situation of evaluation (132-135).

The idea draws a boundary between *explicit vs. implicit* representation: elements of full content that figure in the *lekton* are explicitly represented; those contributed by the mode’s selection of a situation are implicitly represented (23, 145-146). Récanati applies this to perception (135), episodic memory (138-142) and proprioception (146-148). The content of an episodic memory is the same time-neutral content as that of the original perception; the fact that it concerns a past situation is not part of its content, but results from the memory mode. Similarly, proprioception delivers ‘person-neutral’ propositions such as *being hot*. The self is not explicitly represented in such thoughts; rather, the ‘internal mode’ ensures that these contents are self-attributed (146-147). Since, as a matter of physical fact, information received on that mode can only be about oneself, such thoughts are immune to error through misidentification (147). (Récanati’s ‘implicit *de se* thoughts’ thus correspond to Loar’s, Chisholm’s and Lewis’ accounts of *de se* thought (176); but he distinguishes them from ‘explicit *de se* thoughts’ in which the subject thinks of himself in a first-person way but through an explicit self-referential concept (as in Evans’ and Perry’s accounts, 176-177).)

Part II extensively argues that Récanati’s ‘implicit *de se*’ provides a better account of immunity phenomena than Searle’s and Higginbotham’s ‘reflexivist’ alternatives which account for all self-referential aspects of thought in terms of explicitly self-referential content (145-194).

Situation-relativity is also put to use in an account of first-person imagination (195-210). First-person imaginings are states with person-relative contents, without explicit representation of oneself. This explains how we can visualize something unperceived (216n) and how

we can imagine being Napoleon without imagining ourselves being Napoleon ('quasi-*de se*' imagination 204-206).

Part III centers on free-shiftability. In part II, relativism was used in an account of *egocentric* thought: relative contents were always to be evaluated at one's present situation. Quasi-*de se* imagination introduces the notion of *free shiftability*: the possibility for thoughts to be evaluated in a heterocentric situation. For instance, if my son in Murdock tells me on the phone 'it is raining,' I may entertain the place-neutral content that it is raining, as long as its situation of evaluation is fixed to be Murdock and not my current location (279).

Free shiftability raises several worries. First, Perry argues that the relevant situation has to be explicitly represented if it is not provided by the thinker's current environment (225). Récanati agrees, but replies that it need only be represented in some *other* thought of the subject (226). Second, Manuel García-Carpintero puts forward a proliferation worry (200): do we need a 'mode' for each place we are able to think about? To this Récanati replies by the suggestion that all free shifts are handled by a single mode, namely the *anaphoric mode*, which fixes the situation of a thought to be *the situation the subject is currently attending to* (201, 284). While the reply is cogent, it shows that Récanati's substantially revises the traditional notion of mode: the distinction between 'anaphoric' vs. 'egocentric' thoughts cuts across the distinction between beliefs, desires and other attitudes. Third, Devitt points out that on the free-shift view, thoughts with identical contents may fail to have identical cognitive significance: while my son and I entertain the same place-neutral thought that *it is raining*, I am not disposed to take an umbrella (227-228). Récanati replies that this difference is accounted by the difference in *mode* between the two thoughts (287).

Récanati's reply to Devitt apparently assumes that the difference in mode entails *inferential encapsulation*: my place-neutral beliefs concerning Murdock should somehow be kept inferentially isolated from my beliefs about my current location. If that is so, far from being 'very different' from operators (278), Récanati's situation-shifting modes are just like operators except that they do not embed — that is, a thought can have only one. This is quite consonant, however, with Récanati's suggestion that the 'anaphoric mode' is a proto-operator (288-289).

Récanati's book covers foundational ground in a dense and thought-provoking manner, and will repay close study to anyone interested in linguistic and mental representation.

Julien Dutant
Department of Philosophy
University of Geneva
rue de Candolle 2
1211 Genève, Suisse
julien.dutant@unige.ch