Book Review
Relative Truth,
edited by Manuel García-Carpintero and Max Kölbel

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the works they are readings of, which is to say, performances of; and, by consequence, art works in their own right, apart from the literary works they are readings, performances of. And surely that seems highly counterintuitive, if not absurd. Why? (p. 76)

The author asserts that these performances are works of art and, to my understanding, he does not entirely reply to the objection. The only plausible solution he gives to this problem involves weakening his thesis and claiming that the silent readings of (say) novels *can* be performance art works.

Finally, the author seems to neglect that the reader, even if he is a performer, is also his own audience. Intuitively, this status as consumer, rather than creator, is fundamental to his being a reader. Kivy acknowledges this intuition, but to me at least, it is not entirely clear as to how his account accommodates it. If we are to abandon it in favour of a theory of literary reading with which it clashes, then that theory ought to be highly compelling.

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The book is the result of the international workshop 'Relativizing Utterance Truth', held in Barcelona in September 2005. The high quality of the essays and the varieties of approaches to an issue that is gathering momentum make this volume an essential read for everyone who wants to work seriously on relativism, especially within semantics and philosophy of language.

The overall purpose of the collection is the attempt to understand whether and how certain linguistic data that come from ordinary communication support relativism and impose certain constraints on how one should do semantics. There is a general agreement between philosophers that relativism is invoked in order to explain away certain apparent contradictions that generate in disputes about some domains of discourse — for instance, between speakers who hold apparently irreconcilable gustatory points of view — in a way that avoids the attribution of error to either side. This phenomenon is called 'faultless disagreement'; most of the essays in this collection

deal with the question whether this notion of faultless disagreement corresponds to real linguistic data or is only an illusion that a correct semantics would explain away.

Relative Truth is divided into four parts, with a general introduction by Max Kölbel. The essays in the first part present different elaborations of semantic relativism, while the second part focuses on the underlying metaphysical significance of semantic relativism. In the third part we find some possible objections, and the last part of the collection is focused on some alternative semantics to relativism.

The volume commences with Kölbel's introductory paper 'Introduction: Motivation for Relativism.' He argues that semanticists, in building their theories, often assume a principle of application that relates the claims made in a theory of semantic content for a natural language to pre-theoretical claims about that language. Without some bridging principle a semantic theory is not an empirically testable hypothesis, and any impression that some formal semantics for a natural language is intuitively correct will rely on the assumption of some such principle. Accordingly, semantics is partly motivated as an attempt to reflect the pre-theoretical intuitions that ordinary speakers have in using their natural languages. In the case of relativism, the relevant linguistic data usually invoked are the intuitions concerning faultless disagreement. Kölbel then offers a useful panoramic of the various semantic theories that have been proposed in the candidate areas for relativist treatment.

The first part of the collection, *Relativism Elaborated*, opens with Recanati's 'Moderate Relativism.' In this essay, Recanati defends the relativity of propositional truth from two classical objections, originally raised against temporalism, but that apply more generally and with equal strength to relativism. One is the objection from semantic incompleteness firstly put forward by Frege; the other is Mark Richard's claim that the objects of belief cannot be relativistic. Recanati's Moderate version of Relativism aims to address both challenges by invoking a semantic theory of the double layer of content: the *lekton* and the *Austinian proposition*. The lekton is taken to be the content that is invariant from one utterance to another of the same sentence, and so it is neutral with respect to time (place or standard). The Austinian proposition is the complete content, which varies from one utterance to another of the same sentence since it contains the time (place or standard) relevant for the truth valuation of that content.

In the last part of the paper Recanati deals with the phenomenon of faultless disagreement from a particular point of view. He suggests that, for example, 'sushi is delightful' expresses the proposition that sushi is delightful for the community to which the speaker and his audience belong. Accordingly, we can easily explain disagreement but the intuition of faultlessness is completely lost since both are speaking for the same community. But Recanati presents cases in which a speaker insists in saying that sushi is delightful, with the intention of speaking for the community, when in fact nobody in the relevant community finds it delightful at all. Recanati suggests that we should consider such judgments not as representative but as progressive, that is, as intended to shape how standards of the relevant community should be. In this kind of cases it makes sense to say that they are both right, even though they disagree, and so the intuition of faultlessness is rescued.

Predelli and Stojanovic's 'Semantic Relativism and the Logic of Indexicals,' mainly explores the consequences of rejecting what they call the *classic reduction*, according to which whenever a sentence is uttered, the circumstance relevant for the determination of truth is provided by the very conditions within which that utterance takes place. In rejecting the classic reduction, Semantic Relativism distinguishes between the interpretive parameter appropriate for indexicals and the circumstance relevant for truth. Following MacFarlane, they argue for the possibility that the parameter relevant for the interpretation of indexical expressions be distinct from that assumed as appropriate for the determination of truth. Therefore, if semantic relativism turns out to be right, the circumstances appropriate for the truth of utterances involving certain kinds of expressions, like predicates of taste or epistemic modals, may well fail to coincide with the obvious parameters of utterance, as it is predicted by the classical reduction. In the last section, they discuss some logical consequences of Semantic Relativism, and contrast them with certain results obtained by the classic approach to indexical languages.

In 'Truth in the Garden of Forking Paths,' MacFarlane wants to correct certain shortcomings of his earlier paper 'Future Contingents and Relative Truth' showing how his own original argument against the major competitor to relativism in this area, supervaluationism, can be resisted. This is done by taking into account propositional truth in a branching framework instead of considering only sentence and utterance truth. As showed in the earlier essay, it is correct to say that supervaluationism predicts the wrong retrospective assessments

of truth for past utterances of future contingents. But, MacFarlane now argues, supervaluationism can give the right account of our retrospective assessment of the truth of propositions expressed by utterances of future contingents. Since propositional truth plays the central role in our ordinary thoughts and talks, the argument from retrospective assessments is not sufficient to show that we need to relativize truth to contexts of assessment instead of adopting super-valuationism. However, MacFarlane presents a new argument that shows that the real problem with supervaluationism is its inability to account for the actuality operator. In standard (non-branching) frameworks, the actuality operator, no matter how far the world of evaluation has been shifted, returns it to the world of the context of use. Since in branching framework we don't have a unique world of the context of use, but many worlds overlap with it, we need to generalize the way in which the actuality operator works. In brief, according to MacFarlane the way in which relativism semantically treats sentences containing the actuality operator more closely matches the ordinary usages than the supervaluationists' treatment, and for this reason is preferable. Accordingly, the underlying aim of the paper is to give a compelling unified semantic account of our talk of futurity and actuality that is adequate in both branching and non-branching frameworks, dispelling all worries about the incompatibility of branching with our ordinary talk about the future. To do so, MacFarlane argues, we need to relativize propositional truth to contexts of assessment.

Bonnay and Egré in 'Margins for Error in Context' propose a modification of the Kripke-Hintikka semantics for knowledge, called Centered Semantics, devised to block the sorites paradox. The primary purpose is to dispel the incompatibility between margin for error principles applied to knowledge (roughly principles that say that if I know that a proposition holds in a context c then the same proposition should hold in a context c_1 that is only slightly different from c) and the introspection principle (approximately that if in a context c I know that p then in that very context I know that I know that p) without reaching Williamson's conclusion that we must abandon the introspection principle. Their proposal involves adding a new parameter in the circumstances of evaluation that captures what a subject of knowledge knows, thus making use of the relativist strategy. The outcome of this proposal is an asymmetry between first-order knowledge, which is subject to the margin for error principle, and

higher-order knowledge, which may also be subject to error, but the method by which knowledge is acquired is most likely not the same as that which underlies first-order knowledge.

In 'Relativism, Vagueness and What is Said,' Manuel García-Carpintero begins by considering the relevant issues in the truth-relativism debate and explaining what he considers to be the fundamental worries about certain versions of truth relativism. He distinguishes between a moderate and a radical version of truth-relativism: the former relitivizes semantic contents in a non-standard way and, although they are semantically in good standing, they cannot make sense of faultless disagreement. The latter relativizes not just contents but also the norms of speech acts and, although they may explain faultless disagreement, it appears that they are unintelligible.
In the second part of the paper Carpintero argues against the truth-relativist proposal for gradable adjectives put forward by Mark Richard in his 'Contextualism and Relativism.' The general strategy adopted by Carpintero, in order to dispose of radical truth-relativism about gradable adjectives, is to show that all the relevant data invoked in motivating truth-relativism can be addressed in a more orthodox semantic way that is in line with moderate relativism.

The second part of the volume explores some metaphysical consequences of relativism and it opens with Crispin Wright's 'Relativism about Truth Itself: Haphazard Thoughts about the Very Idea.' Wright firstly explains what, intuitively, relativism about a certain subject matter consists in, and then focuses on relativism about truth itself. According to Wright, truth-relativism becomes interesting only when everything sufficient to fix an utterance's content has been fixed, and then he goes on distinguishing two different forms of propositional truth-relativism. On the one hand, we have truth-relativism in the MacFarlanian conception as committing to a three-place truth predicate of propositions; on the other hand we have some kind of factual relativism.

According to the former view, the truth of a proposition is fixed by a circumstance of evaluation together with a context of assessment. Wright argues that this view commits one to abandon the representationalist thesis that the semantic content of an utterance of a sentence represents a state of affairs in the actual world. He claims that to *represent* is a dyadic relation between a symbolic representant and the matter that it represents; for a proposition to have the kind of content that represents something means to have the kind of content that fits a bearer to stand in a binary true-of relation. But, if we

endorse the ternary model there is nothing in the reality that a relativistic proposition represents. On the other hand, if we endorse factual relativism we preserve the representationality of propositions but we have to adopt a pluralistic conception of the actual. According to this strategy, what facts constitute the actual world depends on the relativistic standard upon which we evaluate the truth of the proposition expressed: the actual world at Eugenio, the actual world as reflected in Eugenio's gustatory standard, exists simultaneously to the actual world at Filippo. Therefore, the proposition that sushi is delightful can be true at Eugenio's world, and false at Filippo's world: truth is truth-at-a-world, and so the representationality of propositions is rescued.

In the last part of the paper, Wright draws out some consequences of the non-representationality of relativistic propositions. Firstly he focuses on the relationship between the logical form of relativistic sentences and the semantic content they express; and then he argues that relativists shouldn't appeal to mere linguistic data in order to motivate truth-relativism. Concerning the first worry, the main idea of the relativistic proposal is that utterances of relativistic sentences, like 'sushi is delightful,' express fully articulate, complete propositions, whose truth-values vary with a parameter not expressed in the logical form. But why should we assume this fact? Wright's general thought is that whenever there is a case of assessment-relativity there will be the theoretical space for supposing either that the propositions expressed by the targeted sentences contain an unarticulated constituent referring to values of the assessment-contextual parameter which feature in the relativistic account, or that they contain hidden indexicals whose values are fixed by features of the context of assessment. In both cases the result is a 'disappointingly deflationary' account of propositions, which are not only non-representational, but are also semantically incomplete and so non truth-evaluable. What are truth-evaluable are what Wright calls the explicitly relational propositions obtained from the pragmatic process of completion of the non-representational propositions with the value of the relevant parameter of the assessor: but these propositions take their truth-values absolutely and so are of no interest for a truth-relativist.

In 'Three Forms of Truth Relativism' Einheuser wants to give an alternative account, called 'factual relativism', of the data appealed to by truth relativists that is consistent with the Fregean view of propositions as having their truth-value absolutely. Factual relativism provides

a model both for the contents of assertions about subjective matters and for the states of affairs that such assertions assert as obtaining. This view articulates two main thoughts: the ontological claim that the facts relevant in the relativistic domain include in their structure a perspective; and the semantical claim that the propositional content of an utterance essentially differs from the judgment expressed by the utterance. While the judgment contains the relevant world and perspective from which it is done, the propositional content does not. Hence, when I utter, 'sushi is delightful' the propositional content expressed is the neutral content *that sushi is delightful*, while the judgment I made is that sushi is delightful in the actual world according to my perspective. When we are evaluating the propositional content of the embedded sentence we are doing so from our own perspective, but when we are evaluating the underlying judgment we should do so with respect to the world structured by the believer's perspective. Therefore, when Eugenio evaluates Filippo's belief that sushi is awful he ought to say that Filippo believes something false but that his belief is correct. The conclusion is that truth and correctness of a belief come apart in the process of evaluation of someone else belief, depending on the purposes of the evaluation.

The third part of the collection focuses on some objections to relativism. In the first essay 'Assertion, Belief and Disagreement: A Problem for Truth Relativism,' Sebastiano Moruzzi elaborates different versions of the classic self-refutation objection against MacFarlane's relativism as applied to matters of taste. He argues that a specific version of the objection is particularly challenging because it shows that relativists cannot explain how a dispute on a matter of taste can be rational. To show this, Moruzzi invites us to think about the situation in which the two parties involved in a dispute of taste come to believe the truth-relativist story about a particular proposition concerning matters of taste. In such a situation Moruzzi shows that it is impossible for the truth-relativist to explain the way we actually behave in disputes about taste and to make sense of the rationality of such disputes. Both parties know that their respective challenges cannot be met in principle unless the other party changes her standard of taste. There is no point in arguing about the truth of the proposition in question.

In his contribution 'Frege, Relativism and Faultless Disagreement' Sven Rosenkranz argues that truth-relativists in their attempt to make sense of faultless disagreement with regard to disputes of taste face

the following dilemma: either to assert is to present as being true relative to one's own perspective, in which case the relative truth of a proposition ensures the correctness of the assertion but we have lost genuine disagreement as there is no shared content on which two disputants disagree; or to assert is to present a proposition as true *simpliciter*, in which case we have a case of genuine disagreement, but faultlessness is lost. Sticking with a Fregean notion of assertion, according to which to assert a proposition is to present it as being true *simpliciter*, he argues that faultlessness is an absolute notion applying to assertions. Since faultlessness is only achieved by denying that there is genuine disagreement between two disputants, we should accordingly abandon the idea of the possibility of faultless disagreement.

Richard Dietz, in his generous contribution 'Epistemic Modals and Correct Disagreement,' argues against the standard relativist account of epistemic modals, namely the view that the only epistemic situation that is relevant to the truth-evaluation of an epistemic modal statement is the one of the assessor, which varies with occasions of its assessment. His strategy is to show that standard relativism predicts faultless disagreement scenarios that are utterly bizarre. Eugenio, a brilliant mathematician, is the speaker while Filippo, a first year undergraduate, is the assessor; Eugenio's epistemic situation is undoubtedly better than Filippo's epistemic situation with regard to the subject matter at issue (the proof of a theorem): Eugenio says apodictically 'it cannot be that p,' and Filippo, whose epistemic situation does not rule out that p, believes that it might be the case that p, and so assesses, faultlessly, what is said by Eugenio's utterance as false. According to Dietz the suggested relativist account of the scenario seems oddly strong, since from Filippo's perspective is intuitively correct to remain agnostic whether it is the case that p or not, depending on whether Eugenio has a proof that *not-p*.

Dietz then proposes an alternative account of epistemic modals according to which, by means of a case-by-case investigation, the puzzling datum constituted by faultless disagreement appearances is dispelled and a refined contextualist framework is established, which is able to give a different account of the alleged evidence for relativism.

The essays in the last part of the collection investigate some possible alternatives to relativism. In the opening essay 'Content Relativism and Semantic Blindness,' Cappelen investigates the putative puzzle between two sets of seemingly contrasting data that the relativist wants to harmonize: the phenomenon of a certain stability of the

content across contexts, and the variability of content from one context of use to another. Cappelen argues that that contrast is only apparent and due to a mistaken assumption about the relationship between semantic content and speech act content. The strategy is to present a collection of linguistic data called *Pluralistic Content Relativism* (PCR), roughly the view that a single utterance typically involves the assertion of a plurality of propositions relative to one context of interpretation, and to show that if we add PCR either to invariantism or contextualism, the linguistic data invoked to motivate truth-relativism do not favour it over the other two rival theories. In fact, once we endorse PCR it becomes clear how the phenomenon of faultless disagreement is an illusion: when you sincerely utter 'sushi is delightful' you are asserting several propositions; among them one is the semantic content *that sushi is delightful* according to which you are predicating the one-place monadic predicate 'is delightful' to sushi, and the other is the proposition *that sushi is delightful for me*. So, if Eugenio asserts 'sushi is delightful' and Filippo asserts 'sushi is not delightful' among the various propositions they express there are the propositions, say Q, *that sushi is delightful for Eugenio*, and the proposition, say R, *that sushi is not delightful for Filippo*; both Q and R can be true in both contexts of interpretations, and so we can explain faultlessness. But there is also a shared proposition, say P, *that sushi is delightful*, which Eugenio asserts and Filippo denies, and this explains the intuition of genuine inconsistency. The illusion of faultless disagreement is generated because we shift our attention from one part of the total speech act to another.

In 'Faultless or Disagreement' Andrea Iacona argues that if a dispute is a genuine example of disagreement it cannot be an example of faultlessness, and *vice versa*. He shows this by introducing a distinction between two different kinds of disputes. In the first instance the disputants use the sentences '*x* is P' and '*x* is not P' to convey subjective preferences toward *x*; both participants are faultless but they are not disagreeing. The second kind of disputes are such that expressions like '*x* is P' and '*x* is not P' are used in an objective sense, meaning that the object *x* is P (or not P) independently of the inclinations of the disputants towards it; the two discussants are effectively disagreeing but at least one of them is at fault. Iacona suggests that we can dissolve the ambivalence between objective and subjective uses of such expressions either semantically or pragmatically, and so we can easily explain away any feeling of faultless disagreement.

The volume ends with Dan López de Sa's 'Presupposition of Commonality: An Indexical Relativist Account of Disagreement'. López De Sa argues that the impossibility of indexical relativism to account for disagreement is due to its unrefined individualistic nature, according to which the relevant standard from which the content of the utterance is determined is the one of the speaker. López de Sa proposes an equally individualistic version of indexical relativism but one refined enough to explain both the intuitions of disagreement and faultlessness. In his proposal the content of a sentence, like 'sushi is delightful,' varies in the usual way in different contexts of utterance; therefore it is able to explain faultlessness. But he introduces a further component concerning the *presupposition of commonality*: the idea is that a given expression triggers a certain presupposition of commonality if an utterance of it would be infelicitous when the presupposition is not part of the common ground of the conversation. Therefore, in any non-defective conversation in which Eugenio asserts 'sushi is delightful' and Filippo denies it, the expression 'is delightful' triggers a common ground by which Eugenio and Filippo are relevantly alike and so they are contradicting each other. This further component allows the indexical form of relativism to account for the intuition of disagreement alongside an explanation of its faultlessness.

In conclusion, I believe *Relative Truth* to be a valuable and well organized collection that makes a relevant contribution in the debate on analytic relativism. One minor general criticism: I think that much more space should have been devoted to the metaphysical significance of what Crispin Wright has called 'New Age' relativism.

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