Review of

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Review of *Relativism and Monadic Truth*

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1 Introduction

Truth relativism is once again hotly debated in philosophy. Not the old and much attacked claim that *all* truths are relative, but the claim that *certain* important kinds of truths, in certain important kinds of *discourse*, are relative. Typical kinds are discourse about matters of taste, about humor, about morals, about probabilities, about what might have been, about knowledge, and about the future. Herman Cappelen and John Hawthorne's book *Relativism and Monadic Truth* is thus a timely anti-relativist contribution this debate. However, their target is wider than these modern forms of relativism. The main culprits, in their opinion, are the fathers of what has today become a widely accepted way to deal with at least modal and temporal linguistic phenomena, i.e. David Lewis and David Kaplan. Although these authors didn't think of themselves as relativists, the central role they attached to *relative propositions* — entities that in addition to a world need a time, or a location, or some other index, in order to have a truth value — is what C&H are criticizing. According to them, this very idea is a false start, almost a category mistake: propositions are true or false *simpliciter*, not relative to something.

Whether truth is relative or not depends on what one takes as truth bearers. If they are *sentences*, or *occurrences* of sentences, or *utterances*, one might consider having a *language* as a parameter; cf. Tarski's notion 'true in L' in [11]. But this relativization is fairly uninteresting; we may as well *fix* the language.[1]

[1]It might be interesting if it were frequently the case that the same sentence belonged to

When the truth bearers are sentences in a formal language, we are also familiar with the notion 'true in a model $\mathcal{M}$', which may *seem* relative. But it isn't. The model just specifies the meanings of the (non-logical) atomic expressions, again something which belongs the given interpreted language.

These issues, fortunately, are irrelevant to C&H, who focus on what most people take to be the archetypal truth bearers, i.e. *propositions*. One thing that most people agree on concerning propositions is that although linguistic means can be used to *express* them, propositions are not language-specific.[2] The same proposition can be expressed by different sentences or utterances in the same language, but also in different languages. What theorists disagree about, however, is whether propositions are relative to worlds, times, and other indices.

How does one establish if a certain notion is relative or not? Put slightly differently, how does find out whether a property or relation has more arguments than it seems to have? There appears to be no well-established method. One may appeal to a distinction between linguistic and metaphysical form, or between surface form and LF, or between arguments and adjuncts, or between 'being about' versus 'concern'. But although some cases are fairly clear, many are still debated, and *truth* is one of these.

C&H's book consists mainly of a wealth of counter-arguments *against* familiar arguments, mostly from the recent literature, that truth has some extra parameter. They spend less space on positive support for their own claim, which is that truth is monadic, and that this is *not* a technical issue, it is what emerges "when one carves linguistic and psychological reality at its joints." (p. 3) In our opinion, the collection and discussion of arguments is the main asset of the book. The lack of positive support could be seen as one of its problems. We'll come back to this, after overview of its contents.

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different languages. Although this happens, it is not very frequent for natural languages (in contrast with the logicians' use of (partially) uninterpreted languages).

[2]Unless you are a Whorfian linguistic relativist, but this version of relativism is not discussed by C&H.

2 The book

So many arguments are discussed in this book that it would be impossible to even mention them all here. We focus on the ones we think raise the most interesting issues.

2.1 Chapter 1

Chapter 1 presents the view to be defended, smartly called *Simplicity* (Who could be against it?) and the kinds of arguments against Simplicity the book aims to rebut. Simplicity is characterized by T1–T5, which say that propositions are: true or false *simpliciter* (T1), the semantic values of sentences in contexts (T2), the objects of propositional attitudes (T3) and of illocutionary acts (T4), as well as of agreement and disagreement (T5). Although one may introduce relative notions of truth, e.g. in possible worlds semantics, these are *less fundamental* than absolute truth. Two further important properties of propositions are mentioned: *Contingency* is the claim that a proposition which is (absolutely) true *could have been* (absolutely) *false*; *Temporality* says that some true propositions *will be false* (or *have been false*). Both are said to be perfectly compatible with Simplicity, although the authors realize that, especially in the case of Temporality, this is not quite trivial; see below.

The rest of the chapter is about relativism and its motivations. Lewis and Kaplan style relativity to worlds, times, etc. is only sketched; it is the focus of Chapter 3. The bulk of Chapter 1 discusses recent more far-reaching relativisms due to Kölbel, Lasersohn, MacFarlane, Egan, and others. Three characteristic traits of such relativism are identified: *Proliferation*, *Disquotation*, and *Non-relativity of semantic value and belief reports*.

(a) Proliferation is the idea that if we already accept with Lewis and Kaplan that truth is relative to at least worlds and times, truth *simpliciter* is already abandoned. Therefore, adding a few further parameters, such as assessors or standards, is not a radical step.

(b) Disquotation is about how relativists can deal disquotationally with truth

in the object language. The fact that speakers pass effortlessly from *It is cold* to *It is true that it is cold* doesn't make object language truth monadic for the relativist. Relativization to, say, an assessor enters on both sides of the disquotational scheme: The proposition *that it is true that it is cold* is true for Aristotle iff the proposition *that it is cold* is true for Aristotle, and similarly for other kinds of relative propositions.

(c) Non-relativity of semantic value and belief reports is, first, the position that although certain (utterances of) sentences express contents that are relative to, say, a standard of taste, the semantic claim that such a sentence expresses such a content is not itself relative to standards of taste. This is clearly the position taken by modern relativists. Second, C&H extend this non-relativity to belief reports. And it does seem reasonable that the claim that Tim believes that apples are delicious is not itself relative to Tim's or anyone else's standard of taste. *Prima facie*, however, the relativist could take such non-relativity in two ways. She may construe Tim's belief object as *thick*: that apples are delicious according to Tim's standard. Or it may be *thin*: the proposition that apples are delicious according to x. C&H argue that relativists must choose the thin alternative: otherwise they cannot say that when two people disagree about taste, they have *contrary beliefs*.

It is not quite clear if features (a) – (c) *define* relativism as C&H are using the term. Also, their account is "in part normative" (p. 9); a reconstruction of (what they think is) the best case for relativism, and so neither is it always clear who (if anyone) holds this view. These two circumstances sometimes render their discussion less transparent than it could have been, in particular the discussion of *assessor sensitivity* and of *non-indexical contextualism*.

First, the main contrast to relativism, concerning statements about taste, humor, morals, epistemic modals, etc. is *contextualism*, (unobjectionably) described as the view that seemingly contrary claims about whether something is funny, for example, express *fully compatible propositions* (of the simple kind), i.e. that it is funny according to A, and that it is not funny according to B, and so disagreement is only apparent.

In order to salvage disagreement, relativists posit assessor sensitivity. Now there are two kinds of assessor sensitivity: with respect to semantic *values* (propositions) and with respect to *assertions* or *utterances*. C&H start with the former: the same proposition may be true for one assessor and false for another. But then they claim that sensitivity of assertions *follows* from this, once one accepts "the eminently natural principle that an assertion is true iff the semantic value of that assertion is true" (p. 18). So then the same assertion/utterance can be true for one onlooker and false for another.

But it is not clear that relativists of any kind should believe in this transfer principle, however natural. Rather, their version of it is: an assertion/utterance is true iff its semantic value is true *relative to the operative assessor*. Moreover, they differ as to where this assessor comes from. According to non-indexical contextualists, the operative assessor is determined by the utterance context, along with the operative time, world, etc. This is precisely what characterizes that position: it treats parameters like assessors or standards just as Kaplan treats *time*. Other relativists on the other hand, notably Lasersohn and MacFarlane (e.g. [5] and [7]), think of assessment as a separate act, independent of the utterance. This is why an utterance can differ in truth value between assessors. Both kinds of relativist accept (their respective version of) the *revised* transfer principle, but that principle cannot be used to get from assessor sensitivity of content to assessor sensitivity of assertions.

An analogous unclarity pertains to C&H's presentation of non-indexical contextualism (pp. 20–24). They follow the account in MacFarlane [9], arguing at the same time that the position is patently absurd and therefore can be left aside. As they and MacFarlane point out, a non-indexical contextualist, call her B, in a situation where A utters S in context c (thereby expressing proposition P) may have to accept both of the following:

(1) a. A's utterance of S at c is true.

b. What A says in uttering S at c (i.e. P) is false.

This is why C&H think non-indexical contextualism is absurd. But again, if we bear in mind that while utterance truth is absolute for B, truth of propositions is relative to standards (so (1-b) implicitly uses B's standard), the air of absurdity disappears. In other words, absurdity only follows under the above-mentioned transfer principle.[3]

The remainder of Chapter 1 is mainly a warm-up for Chapter 2.

2.2 Chapter 2

Chapter 1 identified the recent relativist challenge as one of the two main attacks on Simplicity. The relativist arguments are based on certain data about expressions that seem context-insensitive with respect to content, yet prompt truth ascriptions that vary with context. Chapter 2 examines two types of tests for identity (non-relativity) of semantic value across contexts: speech reports involving *says*, *believes*, and cognates, and reports of agreement or disagreement.

C&H first consider a simple test, called *Says-That* (ST), which roughly amounts to the following: If A utters sentence S in a context c, and if it is easy to claim of that utterance, though in another context c', that *A said that S* is true, this is evidence that there is a level of content in S not sensitive to the difference between c and c'. To cast doubt on the reliability of ST, C&H present obviously context-sensitive expressions that yet pass the test, such as location-sensitive expressions like *left*, *nearby*, and *local*. For example, if A says *Naomi went to a nearby beach* referring to a location close to A, B can report that utterance from any location by: *A said that Naomi went to a nearby beach*. It would be absurd to conclude that *nearby* makes no context-bound contribution

[3]For similar reasons, it is not clear if non-indexical contextualism is a version of relativism or not, according to C&W. They are content to say that it is "less relativist-sounding" and that it posits Proliferation and Disquotation (p. 20). No reason is given why it should not also embrace Non-relativity of semantic value and belief reports. Although the terminological issue is unimportant, it bears emphasizing that non-indexical contextualism is a position taken by several theorists, some of whom think of themselves as relativists (e.g. Kölbel [4]), whereas others (e.g. Brogaard [1]) reserve that label for the position of Lasersohn and MacFarlane.

to sentences containing it, hence ST seems flawed.

Having proved ST ineffective, C&H suggest a diagnosis: due to flexible mechanisms of saturation, an utterance can be *parasitic* on contexts other than the utterance context. Consequently, a test based on collective reports, *Collective-Says-That* (CST), blocking the possibility for a reporter to parasite upon one single context, might be more promising. However, they argue that CST fails too, in the following kind of situation. C reports: *A and B said that Naomi went to a nearby beach.* Even assuming that A and B where significantly differently located when uttering *Naomi went to a nearby beach*, we may find C's report felicitous and reasonable. This is so, it seems, since we are able to understand that Naomi went to a beach nearby A and B, *respectively.* C&H note that it is easy to explain why CST fails to produce the expected result in these cases, if the logical form is understood in terms of lambda abstraction:

A and B λx(x said that Naomi went to a beach nearby (to x))

That is, both A and B are individuals x such that x said that Naomi went to a beach nearby to x (p. 47). Similar lambda abstraction is used anyway to account for other linguistic phenomena, such as so-called sloppy reading of elliptic statements like *John likes his mother and so does Bill.*

In Part 2 of the chapter, C&H examine data about constructions containing the verbs *agree* and *disagree*, by designing a test, called *Agree*, for agreement reports. The test comes in three versions, but essentially it goes as follows: If it is easy to find pairs of contexts c and c' such that utterances of S in c and c', respectively, cannot be reported as agreement, this is an indication that S has context-sensitive content. Conversely, if it is hard to find such context pairs for a sentence type, content identity is indicated. Corresponding principles hold for disagreement reports. The reliability of Agree can be checked in the same way as for ST and CST, i.e. whether there are sentences containing obviously context-sensitive expressions which pass the test.

First, C&H observe that although apparently context-sensitive expressions

like *smart*, *ready*, *enough* can be used in constructions that pass *say* tests, this no longer holds for *agree*. A and B can use *Nicola is ready* to mean very different things (e.g. that she is ready to go out in the rain, and that she is ready for an exam, respectively), but even though there may be a sense in which A and B both *said* that Nicola was ready, they hardly *agreed* about it. This of course undermines the extensive use of *say* tests in Cappelen and Lepore [2] to argue for a semantic minimalism assigning a context-independent content to *Nicola is ready*, and indeed C&H do not hold such a view.

Similarly, whereas ST and CST failed for *nearby*, agreement tests give intuitively correct results. This is because the verb *agree* doesn't distribute over the individuals or opinions disquoted, in contrast with *say*. Thus, in the situation just discussed when A and B both utter *Naomi went to a nearby beach*, it is *not* appropriate to report this by saying that A and B agree that Naomi went to a nearby beach. The lambda-abstracted interpretation is no longer available.

C&H find additional evidence for the superiority of Agree with mixed quotation reports. Briefly, *say* lends itself to mixed quote readings in ways which *agree* doesn't. (2-a) is possible as a mixed quote report — indicating that both used the word *gay*, though perhaps A meant 'happy' and B meant 'homosexual' — but (2-b) is just infelicitous.

(2) a. A and B both said that they are gay, but they meant very different things by that.

b. A and B agree that they are gay, but they mean very different things by that.

In sum, C&H find (dis)agreement tests quite reliable for tracking sameness and difference of content. The chapter ends with an application to an example used by MacFarlane [8] to show that besides the proposition under discussion, the possible world concerned by an attitude is needed to decide whether it is in (dis)agreement with another attitude. Jane asserts correctly that Mars has two moons (P), whereas her counterpart June in a merely possible world where

Mars has three moons asserts that Mars doesn't have two moons (not-P). Still they do not disagree, MacFarlane says, since the circumstances concerned are different. This would go against both Agree and Simplicity.

C&H respond by first emphasizing that talk about disagreement between actual individuals and their counterparts may lead intuitions in the wrong direction. Instead, we should consider what existing persons *would have said* by uttering S or not-S, *had* things been different from what they are. As they note, MacFarlane essentially agrees that this way of putting it is preferable. But then they find it "entirely obvious" to say that if June under the different circumstances would have asserted not-P, what she would have said is in disagreement with what Jane actually asserted.

For what it's worth, we don't find this so obvious. But it must be admitted that intuitions in cases like this are rather weak, and it is hard not to let those intuitions be biased by whether you already accept Simplicity or not. Perhaps intuitions can be sharpened, for example by making more fine-graded distinctions as to exactly how possible circumstances are allowed to differ. Lacking this, the application of Agree in purely modal cases still seems problematic.

2.3 Chapter 3

Chapter 3 is perhaps the most radical one in the book, taking on the whole tradition from Lewis and Kaplan. The most detailed discussion centers around what C&H call *Operator arguments*, to the effect that certain linguistic phenomena show that operators on worlds, times, locations, or standards of precision are present in language, and that these parameters belong to what Kaplan calls the *circumstances of evaluation*, not the *context of utterance*. The latter fixes the reference of indexicals and determines which proposition is expressed, the former are needed to determine whether that proposition is true or false.

C&H regiment operator arguments into several subclaims, such as *Sententiality* (that, linguistically, the operators take sentences as arguments), *Parameter Dependence* (the just mentioned dependence of Kaplanian propositions on

circumstantial parameters), and *Uniformity* (the idea that a sentence makes the same semantic contribution when it stands alone as when it is a subexpression of some larger expression). They argue that each operator argument, for each kind of circumstantial parameter, has serious flaws, but not that there is one single fault common to all of them.

For example, as to Sententiality, it is fairly clear that expressions like *in Boston* or *on Tuesday* are not sentential operators in English. Although *In Boston it is raining* and *On Tuesday he mowed the lawn* are well-formed sentences, at no reasonable syntactic level do these expressions appear as sentence operators.[4] In so far as an operator argument relies on such sentences, it appears to be weak. Things get more interesting for expressions like *possibly*, *somewhere*, or *sometimes*, which at least seem to operate on sentences. As to *somewhere*, there is a well-known argument in Lewis [6], cited by C&H, to the effect that propositions cannot be functions from just worlds to truth values: If they were, the proposition expressed by an utterance of

(3) It is raining.

in a context c would be something like *that it is raining-at-*l_c, where l_c is the location of c (disregarding tense here), but this proposition is useless for calculating the proposition expressed by uttering

(4) Somewhere it is raining.

in c, since the location is *shifted*. In other words, says Lewis, taking these propositions as semantic values would make the semantics non-compositional. But if we take location too to be an argument, compositionality is restored.

However, C&H observe, this reasoning presupposes Sententiality. Clearly, an adequate semantic analysis of (4) has to quantify over locations at some point, but if we, for example, take the logical form of (3) to contain a *variable* for location, normal existential quantification of that variable can occur directly

[4]Rather, they are modifiers, placed at the front by a rule of fronting.

in the sentence, and there is no need for location-dependent propositions. But then, at the level of logical form, (4) doesn't have (3) as a subsentence, instead it has the corresponding sub*formula* with a free variable. Similarly, Uniformity fails: the semantic contribution of the stand-alone (3) (where the variable is fixed to l_c) isn't the same as the contribution of the same phrase in (4).

In the case of *tense*, it is even easier to argue that Sententiality and Uniformity fail. It requires quite significant 'rewriting' to get *The girls danced* contain a tenseless *The girls dance*. Moreover, the use of the past tense in the former sentence is referential, and thus not obtainable with a (standard) tense operator. And for cases when quantification over times does occur, C&H mention influential arguments from King [3] and others that this is done by explicit quantification over times and not by tense operators (see also below).

Now consider the case where the Kaplan style analysis seems to stand at its strongest: modals using *necessarily* and *possibly*. Here, no arguments similar to those around (4) work, for C&H are emphatic that simple non-modal sentences have no hidden world parameter or variable, and no reference to the actual world. Also, this is where the strongest case can be made for Sententiality. But if one accepts all of this, what to say about simple sentences like the following?

(5) Possibly, the girls are dancing.

Here C&H are a bit vague. Sometimes they take refuge in the position that their job is not to propose theories of modality or tense, but to criticize arguments against the simple view. Still, for sentences as central as (5) it would be strange to have *nothing* to say. And in fact they do say two things. On the one hand, they say that the usual possible worlds account, in terms of a relation *true at*, is perfectly fine, but that this is compatible with the view that the monadic *true* is "more fundamental". On the other hand, when pressed to explain how the more fundamental account would go, their story is simply disquotational. To take one of their examples, *It could be the case that there are talking donkeys* is true *simpliciter* iff it could be the case that there are talking

donkeys. And to someone who objects that this is no analysis at all, they reply that to require more would be "to endorse a wildly implausible form of semantic reductionism" (p. 80, fn. 21). For now, we leave to the reader to ponder this, but come back to similar questions in Section 3.

Chapter 3 contains much more. There is a brief but, we think, important discussion of how Contingency and Temporality go together with Simplicity, that we come back to below. There is an even more briefly argued claim that the Agree test gives strong evidence against the Kaplanian approach. The argumentation in Chapter 3 is intentionally swift, and doesn't go into the intricacies of current linguistic debate on these matters, although numerous of the debated topics are mentioned. The authors' contention is that even a quick look at this debate shows that the Lewis/Kaplan approach to at least tense and location is in serious trouble.

2.4 Chapter 4

Predicates of personal taste, epistemic uses of *might*, and probability operators, to mention a few of the relativist's favorite cases, have some features in common. They seem to pass agreement-based tests, and trigger a sense of faultless disagreement, at least with some observers. Moreover, they prompt seemingly appropriate assessments of truth and correctness that vary with context. In Chapter 4, C&H critically re-examine these data, aiming to show that with a proper analysis, contextualism has the resources to account for them. This occupies the main part of the chapter, which is is rounded off with an exposition of some weaknesses pertaining to relativism: it over-generates predictions of contradictory beliefs, it has trouble making sense of factive verbs applied to sentences containing relative predicates, and it loses contact with our common (monadic) notion of truth. We restrict attention here to some central themes developed in the first part of the chapter.

The strategy deployed is to provide contextualist semantics for predicates of personal taste, like *fun*, *tasty*, and *disgusting*, with the understanding that

the analysis could be generalized to other relativism-friendly predicates. They begin by providing a contextualist analysis of the word *filling* that can handle cases of agreement and disagreement. This model is then generalized to other, more relativism-prone, predicates of taste.[5] The upshot is that there is no such phenomenon as faultless disagreement in matters of taste. Taste sentences do not really pass agreement-based tests, impressions notwithstanding. Much of the discussion centers around uncovering sources of these mistaken impressions.

The first misunderstanding concerns the alleged contradiction afflicting utterances of a taste sentence and its negation when both are true. For example, in many cases we are not prone to say that an utterance of *That is fun* in a conversational context *contradicts* an utterance of its negation (with the same target), just as traditional contextualism predicts. C&H recognize, however, that if the response is *No. That is not fun*, we do perceive a contradiction. In their opinion, such use of *No* indicates a corrective intention of the hearer. But this contradiction can be given a contextualist account, if due attention is paid to the fact that interlocutors may use the predicate term *auto-* or *exocentrically* (Lasersohn's terminology). They list three possible interpretations, noting that there are others. First, the speaker might use *fun* autocentrically whereas the hearer exocentrically (referring to speaker standard) points out that the speaker is wrong about his own standard. Second, the speaker might use *fun* referring to a group standard; while the hearer corrects the speaker since not all members of the group find the target fun. And finally, the speaker utters *That is fun* autocentrically, whereas the hearer responds to an exocentric interpretation of that utterance. The first case involves an ordinary disagreement, and the second case exhibits a similar cognitive mistake. The third scenario involves a hearer response based on a misinterpretation.

All this is good news for contextualism, but the relativist would insist that there are disputes in matters of taste that do not fall neatly into any of these

[5]There are also interesting discussions about the importance of distinguishing between dispositional and non-dispositional uses of taste predicates, and between generic and particular applications of them; we forego that here.

categories. Arguments for relativism are supposed to gain support from cases where no interlocutor has made any epistemic or cognitive mistake. But C&H's claim is that such cases of faultless disagreement hardly exist, or at least are too rare to carry any weight. They consider the cases analyzed as more or less prototypical: what looks like relativism-friendly data evaporates on a closer look. They do mention, however, cases where these prototypes do not fit the felt disagreement. In particular, predicates codifying sensations of (physical) disgust seem to provoke persistent disputes, where interlocutors as well as eavesdroppers report a sense of disagreement and intuitions of contradiction. A set of examples involves Vinnie, a speaking vulture who loves rotten flesh, and Jones, his human friend who hates it. Vinnie says (roughly) *Rotten flesh is not disgusting*, Jones says *It is disgusting*. We can imagine both resisting claims that they don't disagree. C&H recognize that quite a few informants report intuitions of contradiction, both in a conversational setting and in a situation where Vinnie and Jones are not participants in the same conversation.

This may seem embarrassing to contextualism, but C&H suggest a way out. First, they predict that a number of sufficiently talented speakers would cease using corrective phrases in situations like Vulture vs. Jones, if properly *taught* that such standards are subjective. This form of linguistic therapy C&H call *Phyrronian reflection*. The fact that linguistic therapy is sometimes required to convert believers in faultless disagreement into enlightened contextualists can be explained by appeal to a "dose of semantic blindness" (p. 118). This is an error-theory, building on the assumption that some sensibilities are connected to physical or emotional responses, for example disgust, such that humans tend to behave as if there are superior standards of sensitivity. It is also assumed that most people would respond positively to Phyrronian therapy.

C&H make several points in Chapter 4 that are well worth considering, and the discussion in this chapter is more detailed than in the others. But taking onboard an error-theory of this type is a rather heavy commitment. Talk of folk perspectives grounded in psycho-biology (sensibilities, and emotive or physical responses) that guide erroneous linguistic behavior is not self-evidently feasible.

What establishes the correct use of terms like *agree*, and why would semantic blindness have survival value?

3 How simple is Simplicity?

In a book whose main thesis is that truth is a monadic property of propositions, one might expect a crucial issue to be what propositions are. Yet C&H take this rather lightly. Their approach is to criticize arguments against Simplicity, not to offer independent reasons for it.

There is no denying that each of T1–T5 has intuitive support. But the book's dialectic leaves open the possibility that there is *no* viable notion of proposition satisfying all of them. It wouldn't be the first time a set of intuitions is incoherent. In any case, remaining neutral on what propositions really are, and refuting arguments against T1–T5, isn't enough to show that the simple view itself is coherent.

Presumably, C&H just take for granted that it is. But it seems to us that this is at least a problem for discussion, and moreover that the authors are sometimes driven, in spite of their professed neutrality, to views about propositions that are neither simple nor unproblematic. We end by discussing some putative problems with the book's account of simple propositions.

3.1 Compositionality

We saw above how C&H want to defuse the argument in Lewis [6] against propositions that depend only on worlds and not on locations: it presupposes Sententiality and Uniformity. In fact, their critique summarizes the more detailed reasoning around Lewis's argument in King [3]. Now recall that Lewis's point was that if merely world-dependent propositions are used as semantic values, the semantics *would not be compositional*. So suppose we accept, with King and C&H, that (again ignoring tense) the logical form of (4) uses an explicit location variable l; we can take this form to be $\exists l\ \mathit{rain}(l)$. Is it then obvious that we

can take the semantic values of sentences in context to be location-independent propositions[6] without running into trouble with compositionality?

First, what is the logical form of (3)? One suggestion is that it is $rain(l)$, and that the function assigning semantic values in context, let us call it *cont* for 'content', is such that $cont(rain(l), c) = \langle rain(l_c) \rangle$, the proposition that it rains at l_c. This seems in fact to be what C&H suggest.[7] But that doesn't work, because then we cannot calculate $cont(\exists l\, rain(l), c)$ from $cont(rain(l), c)$ (and the meaning of $\exists$), so *cont* is not compositional, just as Lewis said. We seem to be forced to say that the logical form of (3) is something like $rain(l_c)$ instead. But this too is a bit hard to swallow, at least if one assumes that logical form pertains to *expressions*, independently of extra-linguistic context.

Second, suppose this could somehow be solved. We still need to associate a content with $rain(l)$, i.e. we need to say what $cont(rain(l), c)$ is, in order to compositionally derive the proposition expressed in (4). In the present set-up, this value must be something like a *set of locations* (the set of locations where it rains). Indeed, one could argue that sentences and formulas are expressions of the same category, and therefore should have the same kind of semantic values. Only, when there are no free variables, as in (4), this will be either the empty set or the set of all locations. In that case we may be able to associate a proposition of the kind C&H or King wants. Still, having the right content for *formulas* is crucial to compositionality. And these contents are very much like location-dependent propositions.

Thus, location-dependent propositions do not really go away, even if they may be avoided, with some effort, as values of closed sentences. This is not surprising, since whether one uses location operators or King's alternative account, *quantification over locations* occurs in sentences like (4). Also, as we saw, the details of a compositional account may be more tricky than they seem.

[6] It doesn't matter here whether these are absolute as in the book or functions from worlds and standards of precision to truth values as in King's paper.

[7] "[O]ne might hypothesize that the deep structure of 'It is raining' is 'It is raining *at* x', and then allow that in some contexts the hidden pronoun refers to some salient location while in others it is bound by a quantifier." (p. 83)

3.2 Contingency

The modern idea of propositions starts with Frege and Russell. Despite the familiar differences between these two about the constituents of propositions (i.e. whether they are real objects and relations, or senses), their propositions are absolutely true or false, and they serve as objects of propositional attitudes. But as far as we know, neither Frege nor Russell entertained the idea that some true propositions *might have been false*, or that they *will be false*. These additional features, i.e. Contingency and Temporality, are important parts of C&H's view of propositions, however.

The idea of Contingency is most naturally explained in terms of some notion of possible world. Indeed, C&H freely avail themselves of possible worlds throughout the book. But they think of the relation of truth *at* a world as a technical one, "less fundamental" than monadic truth. Although this is a repeated claim, it is hardly elaborated or explained. The following quote is characteristic: "[There is] ... no deep threat to Simplicity posed by the hypothesis that the semantic value of some speech is true at some worlds and false at others. For this hypothesis is quite compatible with the hypothesis that this semantic value is true or false *simpliciter* — one needs merely to be careful not to jumble alethic properties." (p. 94)

This is not very enlightening. To be sure, we can always replace 'true at the actual world' by 'true *simpliciter*', but the issue is what to do with 'true at w' when w is *not* the actual world. No hint has been given of how to eliminate this from the semantics, and the reader remains in the dark as to exactly *how* Contingency is supposed to be compatible with Simplicity.

The one argument one finds in the book is, as we already noted, that speakers have a primitive understanding of what it means that P *could be true*, and no further elucidation is necessary or even desirable. But recall that the whole point of introducing propositions in the first place is to do *semantics*. And, it seems to us, theorists usually think of the possible worlds idea as something that *clarifies* the semantics of 'could be true'. But as soon as you accept this (whether

propositions are sets of possible worlds or structured entities with 'holes' that can be filled by worlds), truth becomes true at this world, and 'could be true' becomes 'true at some world'. The relation *true at* cannot be eliminated.[8]

3.3 Temporality

It is even harder to make Temporality fit Simplicity. The plausibility of the claim that truth *simpliciter* is the same as truth in the actual world rests on the idea that there is only one real world. As the authors realize, the corresponding claim for time leads to *Presentism*: there is only one real time, the present. But although Presentism has its champions, it is hardly a majority view. It is not a *simple* view. A reader initially attracted to Simplicity might be surprised to find herself saddled with such a heavy ontological commitment.

But suppose we ignore these worries and accept that some propositions that are true *simpliciter* will be false. Exactly what kinds of things are these propositions? In the modal case we might perhaps be able to find a way (though it seems unlikely) to explain how a true proposition *could be false* without invoking something like worlds. But there is absolutely no way to explain how a true proposition *will be false* without invoking *times*. Thus, these propositions must be things that are true at some times and false at others. But then we don't really see how to tell them apart from temporal propositions: entities that C&H insist we must avoid![9] So Temporality seems to work *against* Simplicity:

[8] In footnote 22, C&H refer to Ch. 5 in Williamson [12] for "more on semantics with a modal metalanguage that proceeds in this vein [i.e. without possible worlds]" (p. 80). Here Williamson analyzes necessity and possibility in terms of counterfactuals, arguing that speakers often know fairly well how to assess counterfactual claims. But he is very clear that he is *not* doing semantics, "which concern[s] the truth conditions of counterfactuals, not how subjects attempt to find out whether those truth conditions obtain" ([12], p. 142). The latter is his main occupation in that chapter, and he maintains that a preliminary investigation into the *epistemology* of counterfactuals can be undertaken even before a precise semantics has been given. There is no claim, as far as we can see, that such a semantics could be done without something like possible worlds.

[9] It doesn't seem to help to add the word *simpliciter* here. What could the difference be between saying that P is true at t, and saying that P is true *simpliciter* at t?

it posits propositions that do require a time argument.[10]

3.4 A technical issue?

Here is a final more general worry, also related to time. In contrast to worlds, most sentences make reference to time in some form, and the best way to deal with temporal phenomena in language is a crucial issue in semantics. Kaplan chose to proceed as in intensional logic, letting time be a parameter or circumstance of evaluation. C&H incline towards the first-order approach recommended in King [3] with explicit quantification over times, which in particular requires practically all properties and relations to have an extra time argument. Indeed, they present several arguments for that position, and note that it is favored by many contemporary linguists. But there are dissenting voices, e.g. Recanati [10]. One argument is precisely that it is just unnatural to treat simple properties like *cold*, *red*, or *sitting* as binary relations with a time argument.

Without going into this debate, we note here the striking similarity with the issue about the property *truth*. If the choice is between adding a time argument to *cold*, indeed to practically all ordinary properties and relations, and adding a time argument to *true*, aren't *both* forms of relativism? Also, the choice bears on technical issues; intuitions about *simplicity* will not be enough.

4 In conclusion

Relativism and Monadic Truth is an eminently readable book. The pace is fast, the style is witty, a wealth of interesting issues are raised in only 148 pages. Some of these issues are cursorily treated, but this is intentional. The idea is to create the impression that there are overwhelmingly many pieces of evidence, some strong, others more speculative, but all pointing in the same direction: Truth is monadic, propositions are true or false *simpliciter*. The evidence is mostly indirect: purported arguments *against* Simplicity are faulty.

[10] Does Presentism make this problem go away? We admit that we do not see how.

One problem with this approach is that critics will not find the discussion detailed enough. Unless impressed with the sheer number of (counter-)arguments, they will hardly be convinced that they are wrong. So in a sense the book is not written for specialists in the philosophy of language, but for a more general audience. Which is fine, of course. Moreover, both specialists and a philosophically interested general audience may be inspired by it, or provoked by it, to undertake a deeper scrutiny of the attractions of Simplicity.

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