



## No longer true (ECAP)

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**No longer true**

**Luca Barlassina** (University of Sheffield)  
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# The plan

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# The plan

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- ▶ Three unremarkable points



# The plan

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- ▶ Three unremarkable points
- ▶ A crazy conclusion: **the past has changed**



# First unremarkable point

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We say true (false) things about the past ...



# First unremarkable point

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We say true (false) things about the past ...

... and the truth (falsity) of what we say depends on how the past is.





# Some terminology

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- II. Sentences express *propositions* at contexts.
- III. A sentence  $S$  is *temporally specific* if and only if, for any context  $c$ , the proposition expressed by  $S$  at  $c$  is about a specific time.



# Some terminology

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- I. People utter sentences at *contexts*, which we represent as pairs  $\langle w, t \rangle$ .
- II. Sentences express *propositions* at contexts.
- III. A sentence  $S$  is *temporally specific* if and only if, for any context  $c$ , the proposition expressed by  $S$  at  $c$  is about a specific time.
- IV. A sentence  $S$  is *about the past* in a context  $c$  if and only if the proposition expressed by  $S$  at  $c$  is about a time that precedes  $c$ .



# More precisely

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## More precisely

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- ▶ A temporally specific sentence  $S$  that is about the past in a context  $c$  is **true in  $c$**  if and only if the time the proposition  $p$  expressed by  $S$  in  $c$  is about has, relative to the past of  $c$ , the property that  $p$  ascribes to it.



## More precisely

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- ▶ A temporally specific sentence  $S$  that is about the past in a context  $c$  is **true in  $c$**  if and only if the time the proposition  $p$  expressed by  $S$  in  $c$  is about has, relative to the past of  $c$ , the property that  $p$  ascribes to it.
- ▶ ‘Obama was born in 1961’ is **true in  $\langle @, 1^{\text{st}} \text{ Sept } 2014 \rangle$**  if and only if, relative to the past of  $\langle @, 1^{\text{st}} \text{ Sept } 2014 \rangle$ , the year 1961 has the property of being a time in which Obama was born.





# A true story

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# July 2000: The champion

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# July 2000: The champion

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Context A: <@,  
Christmas 2002>



# July 2000: The champion

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Context A: <@,  
Christmas 2002>

(1) Lance Armstrong  
won the Tour de  
France in 2000



# October 2012: No longer the champion

---



# October 2012: No longer the champion

---



Context B: <@,  
Christmas 2013>

# October 2012: No longer the champion

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Context B: <@,  
Christmas 2013>

(1) Lance Armstrong  
won the Tour de  
France in 2000



## Another definition

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- v. A context  $c'$  is a *successive same-world context* to context  $c$  if and only if:
- (i) the world of  $c'$  is the same as the world of  $c$ ,
  - (ii) the time of  $c'$  follows the time of  $c$ .





# Second unremarkable point

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- ▶ Sentence (1) is a **temporally specific** sentence: for any context  $c$ , the proposition expressed by (1) at  $c$  is about the year 2000.



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- ▶ Sentence (1) is a **temporally specific** sentence: for any context  $c$ , the proposition expressed by (1) at  $c$  is about the year 2000.
- ▶ Context B is a **successive same-world context** to Context A.



## Second unremarkable point

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- ▶ Sentence (1) is a **temporally specific** sentence: for any context  $c$ , the proposition expressed by (1) at  $c$  is about the year 2000.
- ▶ Context B is a **successive same-world context** to Context A.
- ▶ Sentence (1) is **about the past** in both Context A and Context B.



## Second unremarkable point

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- ▶ Sentence (1) is a **temporally specific** sentence: for any context  $c$ , the proposition expressed by (1) at  $c$  is about the year 2000.
- ▶ Context B is a **successive same-world context** to Context A.
- ▶ Sentence (1) is **about the past** in both Context A and Context B.
- ▶ Sentence (1) takes **different truth-values** in Context A and Context B.



# Third unremarkable point

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- VI. A sentence is *context-insensitive* if and only if it expresses the same proposition at all contexts.



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(1) Lance Armstrong won the Tour de France in 2000

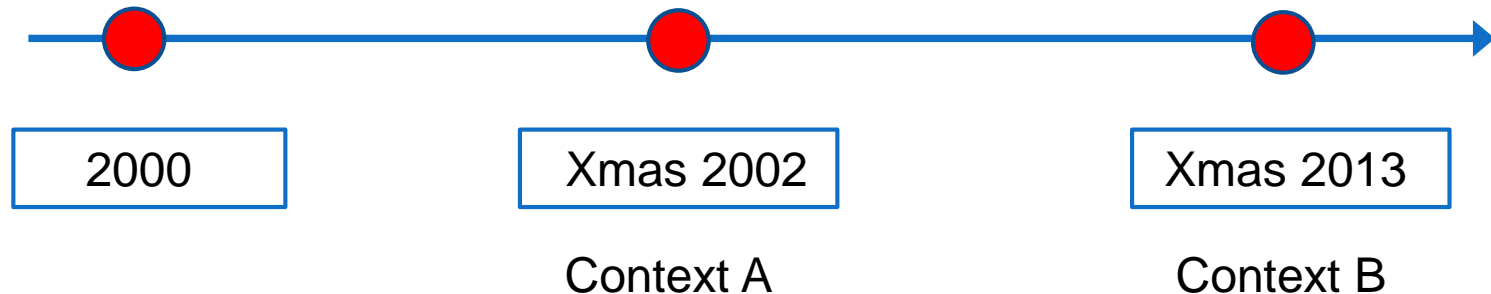
(2) *that Lance Armstrong won the Tour de France in 2000.*



# Putting things together

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(1) Lance Armstrong won the Tour de France in 2000



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**The past has changed!**





Two objections:





Two objections:

1. No truth value change



Two objections:

1. No truth value change
2. Different propositions

# Objection 1: No truth value change

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# First variant of Objection 1

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- ▶ Sentence (1) was **already false** in Context A because Armstrong got the lowest time only by doping himself, thus by *cheating*.



# First variant of Objection 1

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- ▶ Sentence (1) was **already false** in Context A because Armstrong got the lowest time only by doping himself, thus by *cheating*.
- ▶ One cannot be the winner if one cheats!



## Our reply

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- ▶ This objection conflates the property *being the winner* with the property *being the person who deserves to win*.



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- ▶ This objection conflates the property *being the winner* with the property *being the person who deserves to win*.
- ▶ The property *being the winner* only depends on a **deliberation by a competent authority**:

if an authority declares  $x$  to be the winner,  $x$  is the winner—regardless of whether  $x$  cheated or not.



# La mano de dios

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## Second variant of Objection 1

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- ▶ Sentence (1) was **still true** in Context B.



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- ▶ Sentence (1) was **still true** in Context B.
- ▶ Sincere and informed speakers seem to assert (1), or sentences implying (1), after the revocation of Armstrong's titles.



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- ▶ Sentence (1) was **still true** in Context B.
  - ▶ Sincere and informed speakers seem to assert (1), or sentences implying (1), after the revocation of Armstrong's titles.
- (3) Armstrong won the Tour de France seven times from 1999 to 2005. He was later stripped of those titles for doping.

*(USA Today, June 28<sup>th</sup> 2013)*





## Our reply: step 1

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- ▶ Sincere and informed speakers assert sentences that imply that (1) would be **false** if uttered after the revocation of Armstrong's titles:



# Our reply: step 1

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- ▶ Sincere and informed speakers assert sentences that imply that (1) would be **false** if uttered after the revocation of Armstrong's titles:

(4) Who won the Tour de France 1999-2005? No one.

(*Law, Economics & Cycling*, October 22<sup>nd</sup> 2012).

(5) Lance Armstrong is no longer the winner of the Tour de France from 1999-2005.

(Christian Prudhomme, Director of the Tour de France, from *CBSNews*, October 22<sup>nd</sup> 2012).



## Our reply: step 2

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- ▶ If (3) implied (1), adding to (3) the sentence '*Armstrong never won any Tour de France in the end*' should result in a contradiction, given that the latter sentence and (1) are incompatible.



## Our reply: step 2

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- ▶ If (3) implied (1), adding to (3) the sentence ‘*Armstrong never won any Tour de France in the end*’ should result in a contradiction, given that the latter sentence and (1) are incompatible.
  - ▶ However, (6) is perfectly consistent!
- (6) Armstrong won the Tour de France seven times from 1999 to 2005. He was later stripped of those titles for doping. So, *Armstrong never won any Tour de France in the end.*



# Objection 2: Context-sensitivity

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- ▶ (1) expresses **different propositions** at Context A and Context B:



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- ▶ The verb phrase ‘win the Tour de France in 2000’ is **context-sensitive**.
- ▶ (1) expresses **different propositions** at Context A and Context B:
  - (7) *that Lance Armstrong won the Tour de France in 2000 according to the declaration of Context A* (Declaration  $\alpha$ )





## Objection 2: Context-sensitivity

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- ▶ The verb phrase ‘win the Tour de France in 2000’ is **context-sensitive**.
  - ▶ (1) expresses **different propositions** at Context A and Context B:
    - (7) *that Lance Armstrong won the Tour de France in 2000 according to the declaration of Context A* (Declaration  $\alpha$ )
    - (8) *that Lance Armstrong won the Tour de France in 2000 according to the declaration of Context B* (Declaration  $\beta$ )
- 



## Our reply

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- ▶ Having come to know that Armstrong's titles have been revoked by declaration  $\beta$ , you assert (9) at Context B:  
  
(9) It is no longer the case that Lance Armstrong won the Tour de France in 2000.



## Our reply

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- ▶ Having come to know that Armstrong's titles have been revoked by declaration  $\beta$ , you assert (9) at Context B:

(9) It is no longer the case that Lance Armstrong won the Tour de France in 2000.

- ▶ **(9) is true in Context B.**



## Our reply

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On the contextualist analysis, (9) expresses proposition (10) at Context B:

- (10) *that it is no longer the case that Lance Armstrong won the Tour de France in 2000 according to declaration  $\beta$ .*



## Our reply

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On the contextualist analysis, (9) expresses proposition (10) at Context B:

(10) *that it is no longer the case that Lance Armstrong won the Tour de France in 2000 according to declaration  $\beta$ .*

- ▶ However, (10) has a **presupposition that is false** in the circumstance of Context B, namely:  
*that it was once the case that Armstrong won the Tour de France in 2000 according to declaration  $\beta$ .*
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# Conclusion

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- ▶ The attempts to block our conclusion do not work. So, maybe, the past can really change.



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- ▶ One should stop asking *whether* the past can change and start to think *how* this could be.





# Conclusion

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- ▶ The attempts to block our conclusion do not work. So, maybe, the past can really change.
- ▶ One should stop asking *whether* the past can change and start to think *how* this could be.
- ▶ How to make sense of this idea? Suggestions are welcome!



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# THANKS!

