

H. Cappelen + E. Lepore 2005. Insensitive Semantics. Blackwell

## CHAPTER 1

Chs 1 + 2

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### Overview

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Try this on some pure, uncontaminated, students: List a few incontrovertibly context sensitive expressions like 'I,' 'you,' 'now,' and 'that.' Then ask them to pick other expressions just *like these*. They are very good at it. They consistently choose expressions like 'yesterday,' 'those,' 'we,' and they never choose expressions like 'penguin,' 'red,' 'know,' or 'dance.' And if you ask them directly whether they think that 'penguin' is like the first person personal pronoun 'I,' they think you must be joking; when they understand that you're serious, they invariably answer 'no.' Of course, they might be wrong. It might be that the more refined intuitions of seasoned linguists and semanticists reveal that our natural inclinations in these respects are mistaken. But we don't think so. We think these strong and clear initial classifications are correct and that semanticists who ignore them are led astray.

On the first page of Kaplan's classic 'Demonstratives,' there is a list of expressions he calls indexicals. Slightly elaborated, his list goes like this: The personal pronouns 'I,' 'you,' 'he,' 'she,' 'it' in their various cases and number (e.g., singular, plural, nominative, accusative, genitive forms), the demonstrative pronouns 'that' and 'this' in their various cases and number, the adverbs 'here,' 'there,' 'now,' 'today,' 'yesterday,' 'tomorrow,' 'ago' (as in 'He left two days ago'), 'hence(forth)' (as in 'There will be no talking henceforth'), and the adjectives 'actual' and 'present' (Kaplan 1989a, p. 489). Words and aspects of words that indicate tense also have their reference so determined. And there are also the contextuials, which include common nouns like 'enemy,' 'outsider,' 'foreigner,' 'alien,' 'immigrant,' 'friend,' and 'native' as well as common adjectives like 'foreign,' 'local,' 'domestic,' 'national,' 'imported,' and 'exported' (cf., Vallée 2003; Nunberg 1992; Condoravdi and Gawron 1995; Partee 1989).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> To be honest, we have our doubts about so-called contextuials; and it's probably no accident that they did not occur on Kaplan's (1989) original list. We will let you decide for yourself after you have read our book.

In what follows, we shall refer to this set of expressions both as the *Basic Set of Context Sensitive Expressions* (the Basic Set, for short) and as the set of *genuinely context sensitive expressions*.

Why choose those expressions? Why didn't he put, say, 'red,' 'know,' 'duck,' 'every,' 'good,' or 'happy' in this set? Here's an interesting fact about Kaplan's classic paper: He doesn't give a reason. He never sees the need to elaborate on, or defend, his choice of examples. In the end, he develops a sophisticated theory of the semantics of demonstratives and other context sensitive expressions. But his account presupposes that the domain he is theorizing about is obvious and already identified.

One central goal in this book is to defend the uncontaminated intuitions that underlie Kaplan's methodology from a wide range of popular objections. In so doing, we also defend a certain view of the role of context sensitivity in the semantics for natural language. It's simultaneously a defense of a certain conception of semantics and of a conception of semantic content.

This first chapter is intended just as an overview of what's to come. We don't really engage in any serious argumentation here; we just quickly present the views we advertised in our subtitle, i.e., Semantic Minimalism and Speech Act Pluralism; we describe our central opponents (Radical and Moderate Contextualists), the kind of arguments used by our adversaries; and at the end of the chapter we outline the book's argumentative strategy.

## Introduction to Semantic Minimalism

At this introductory stage, we'll just list three particularly important features of Semantic Minimalism, all of which will be elaborated on, and defended, later in the book (see in particular Chapter 10):

- 1 The most salient feature of Semantic Minimalism is that it recognizes few context sensitive expressions, and, hence, acknowledges a very limited effect of the context of utterance on the semantic content of an utterance. The only context sensitive expressions are the very obvious ones listed above plus or minus a bit. These are not only obvious, but they pass certain tests for context sensitivity that we spell out in Chapter 7.
- 2 It follows that all semantic context sensitivity is grammatically (i.e., syntactically or morphemically) triggered.
- 3 Beyond fixing the semantic value of these obviously context sensitive expressions, the context of utterance has no effect on the proposition semantically expressed. In this sense, the semantic

content of a sentence *S* is the proposition that all utterances of *S* express (when we adjust for or keep stable the semantic values of the obvious context sensitive expressions in *S*).

Some illustrations: If we keep tense fixed,<sup>2</sup> any utterance of (1)

- (1) Rudolf is a reindeer

is true just in case Rudolf is a reindeer, and expresses the proposition *that Rudolf is a reindeer*.<sup>3</sup>

Any utterance of (2)

- (2) Rudolf has a red nose

is true just in case Rudolf has a red nose, and expresses the proposition *that Rudolf has a red nose*.

Any utterance of (3)

- (3) Rudolf is happy

is true just in case Rudolf is happy, and expresses the proposition *that Rudolf is happy*.

Any utterance of (4)

- (4) Rudolf has had breakfast

is true just in case Rudolf has had breakfast, and expresses the proposition *that Rudolf has had breakfast*.

Any utterance of (5)

- (5) Rudolf doesn't know that penguins eat fish

is true just in case Rudolf doesn't know that penguins eat fish, and expresses the proposition *that Rudolf doesn't know that penguins eat fish*.

If you find it surprising that someone would write a book defending conclusions so obvious, we have a great deal of sympathy. The problem is that a wide range of our contemporary colleagues rejects these views (see below). (It's probably no exaggeration to say that our views about (1)–(5) are

<sup>2</sup> As we will do throughout this book.

<sup>3</sup> Semantic Minimalism, as understood in this book, need not take a stand on whether semantic content is a proposition, or truth conditions, or what have you. Throughout the book we try to remain neutral by couching the issues both in terms of truth conditions and in terms of propositions.

currently held only by a small minority of philosophers and linguists, at least among those who have thought about the surrounding issues.) This book is our attempt to rebut these influential objections. A great deal of that defense focuses on the relationship between speech act content and semantic content, and in that respect Speech Act Pluralism plays a central role.

## Introduction to Speech Act Pluralism

Here's one way to summarize Speech Act Pluralism (for fuller presentation see Chapter 13):

No one thing is said (or asserted, or claimed, or . . .) by any utterance: rather, indefinitely many propositions are said, asserted, claimed, stated. What is said (asserted, claimed, etc.) depends on a wide range of facts other than the proposition semantically expressed. It depends on a potentially indefinite number of features of the context of utterance and of the context of those who report on (or think about) what was said by the utterance.

It follows from Speech Act Pluralism that an utterance can assert propositions that are not even logical implications of the proposition semantically expressed. Nothing even prevents an utterance from asserting (saying, claiming, etc.) propositions incompatible with the proposition semantically expressed by that utterance. From this, it further follows that if you want to exploit intuitions about speech act content to fix semantic content, then you have to be extremely careful in so doing. It can be done, and we'll show you how, but it's a subtle and easily corrupted process.

These points are connected to our defense of Semantic Minimalism because one underlying assumption in many anti-minimalist arguments (in particular, what we shall call the Context Shifting Arguments) is the idea that semantic content has to be closely connected to speech act content. If Speech Act Pluralism is correct, then there is no such tight connection, and so, this requirement is revealed to be a philosophical prejudice. Another way to see the connection is this: If there really were (or had to be) a close connection between speech act content and semantic content, then all the data we think support Speech Act Pluralism would also serve to undermine Semantic Minimalism. That's how some of the most clearheaded contextualists argue. Our strategy is to endorse the data they invoke, but undermine their assumption that this data has semantic implications.

At this initial stage it's worth highlighting one more aspect of Speech Act Pluralism that both has wide ranging implications and sets our view apart from (all?) other contemporary accounts of context sensitivity. We

don't think that everything a speaker says by uttering a sentence in a context C is determined by *features of C*. The speaker's intentions, facts about the audience, the place and time of utterance, background knowledge that's salient in C, the previous conversations salient in C, etc., are insufficient to fix what the speaker said. According to Speech Act Pluralism, a theory of speech act content has to take into account the context of those who say or think about what the speaker said, i.e., the context of those who report what's said by the utterance can, in part, determine what was said by that utterance. (As far as we can tell, we are on our own in defending this view; we published a paper defending it in 1997 and don't know of anyone else who has endorsed it yet.)

## Opponents of Semantic Minimalism

As we have already mentioned, a wide range of semantic theorists can advocate Semantic Minimalism. Indeed, those who practice semantics accepting these kinds of constraints tend to fight fierce internal battles. This book is not a contribution to such rivalries. It's about a range of arguments (below we call them Context Shifting Arguments and Incompleteness Arguments) which, if sound, would undermine the possibility of semantic theorizing. Not all of those who employ these arguments realize the logical implications of doing so. Indeed, one of the points we'll emphasize below is that most proponents of these arguments operate under the illusion they can be a part of 'business as usual' semantics. They don't recognize the dangers lurking right around the corner as soon as they start down this path.

The two central opponents of Semantic Minimalism we'll be concerned with we will call Radical and Moderate Contextualists. What they have in common is that their positions are based on similar kinds of arguments. We now outline these positions, and then, the kinds of arguments used by their proponents.

### Central Opponent 1: Radical Contextualism (RC)

We want to engage two traditions according to which Semantic Minimalism is fundamentally mistaken. One of these goes back to the Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Investigations*, on through Austin, and is today represented by a wide range of philosophers, some of whom call themselves *Relevance Theorists*,<sup>4</sup> some neo-Wittgensteinians, some Sellarsians. We call them all *Radical Contextualists*. These theorists all hold some version or other of the

4 Cf., e.g., Sperber and Wilson (1986); Carston (1988, 2002); Recanati (1989, 1993, 2004).

view that *every* single expression is context sensitive,<sup>5</sup> and that the peculiarities of members of the Basic Set are of no deep theoretical significance. Slightly more precisely, they adhere to some version of (RC1)–(RC3):

- (RC1) No English sentence *S* ever semantically expresses a proposition. Any semantic value that Semantic Minimalists assign to *S* can be no more than a *propositional fragment* (or *radical*), where the hallmark of a propositional fragment (or radical) is that it does not determine a set of truth conditions, and hence, cannot take a truth value.
- (RC2) Context sensitivity is ubiquitous in this sense: No expansion of what we are calling the Basic Set of context sensitive expressions can salvage Semantic Minimalism, i.e., however the Basic Set is expanded, the output will never be more than a propositional fragment; something, therefore, not even truth evaluable.
- (RC3) Only an utterance can semantically express a complete proposition, have a truth condition, and so, take a truth value.

Though they are not alone, John Searle and Charles Travis – without acknowledging each other often (if at all) – are and have been for over thirty years the chief spokespersons for RC.

... the notion of literal meaning of a sentence only has application relative to a set of background assumptions, and furthermore, these background assumptions are not and could not all be realized in the semantic structure of the sentence in the way that presuppositions and indexically dependent elements of the sentence's truth conditions are realized in the semantic structure of the sentence. (Searle 1978, p. 210)

What words mean plays a role in fixing when they would be true; but not an exhaustive one. Meaning leaves room for variation in truth conditions from one speaking to another. (Travis 1996, p. 451)

... in general the meaning of a sentence only has application (it only, for example, determines a set of truth conditions) against a background of assumptions and practices that are not representable as a part of meaning. (Searle 1980, p. 221)

Both of these philosophers allude to Wittgenstein and Austin as their chief influences (Travis 1985, p. 187; 1996, p. 451; Searle 1980, p. 229).

<sup>5</sup> There are different ways of characterizing their views: For example, Every sentence is context sensitive. Or, if the only context sensitivity you take into account is that due to the expressions in the Basic Set, you won't get a proposition or anything truth evaluable.

There is a sense in which we have a great deal of respect for RC. RC, we'll argue, is the logical consequence of denying Semantic Minimalism. As far as we can tell, philosophers and linguists who try to modify Semantic Minimalism only along the edges, by adding a bit of context sensitivity here and there, fail to see that by so doing they lead themselves directly into the clutches of RC.

## Central Opponent 2: Moderate Contextualism (MC)

The other opponents of Semantic Minimalism we are calling Moderate Contextualists. Moderate Contextualists try to steer a middle course between Semantic Minimalism and Radical Contextualism by minimally expanding the Basic Set of context sensitive expressions. Slightly more precisely, Moderate Contextualists endorse some version of (MC1)–(MC3):

- (MC1) The expressions in the Basic Set do not exhaust all the sources of semantic context sensitivity.
- (MC2) Many sentences that Semantic Minimalism assigns truth conditions to, and treats as semantically expressing a proposition, fail to have truth conditions or to semantically express a proposition; they express only fragmentary propositions. Such linguistic expressions are described as providing 'incomplete logical forms,' 'semantic skeletons,' 'semantic scaffolding,' 'semantic templates,' 'propositional schemas' (see, e.g., Carston 2002; Sperber and Wilson 1986; Recanati 1993, 2004; Bach 1994a; Taylor 2001). All of these locutions entail that the expression is not fully propositional; it is incomplete *qua* semantic entity; it is not truth evaluable.
- (MC3) For the cases in question, only their utterances semantically express a proposition, and have (interpretive) truth conditions, and so, take a truth value.

Moderate Contextualists don't typically see themselves as belonging to a tradition or a group and they wouldn't classify themselves as Moderate Contextualists. There are two kinds of Moderate Contextualists: *Misguided Semanticists* and *Semantic Opportunists*.

The Misguided Semanticists come to MC by noticing some data or evidence they think has to be accounted for by a semantic theory (we will describe data of this kind below). They don't see how to account for it except by expanding the Basic Set.

The Semantic Opportunists are sneakier. They are philosophers who come to semantics *with* a nonsemantic agenda. They might be concerned with defending a view in epistemology, ethics, philosophical logic, philos-

ophy of mind, metaphysics, etc. They have no interest in, or understanding of, the overall semantic project. They postulate that various expressions are context sensitive because doing so lends support to a view, usually radical, they endorse in their respective area.

Paradigm examples are ethicists who claim that ethical terms are context sensitive; epistemologists who claim that certain epistemic terms are context sensitive; metaphysicians who claim that vague terms are context sensitive; philosophical logicians who claim that quantifiers or certain semantic terms are context sensitive, and so on.

For our purposes, what motivates Moderate Contextualists doesn't really matter. What does matter is *how* MC is implemented. Here's what we have in mind: Let's assume, for the sake of argument, that Moderate Contextualists hold that some expression *e*, not in the Basic Set, is context sensitive. Remember, they do not think, as Radical Contextualists do, that semantics is impossible. They therefore face a range of additional questions about how a semantic theory should accommodate this additional context sensitivity.

If you have evidence that *e* is context sensitive and you want that incorporated into a semantic theory, primarily three basic strategies are available to you: the Surprise Indexical Strategy, the Hidden Indexical Strategy, and the Unarticulated Constituent Strategy. Here, in very brief outline, is each option.

#### *The Surprise Indexical Strategy*

The Surprise Indexical Strategy is the most straightforward of the three. If you opine that an expression *e* is context sensitive, then add *e* to the Basic Set, thereby treating it as an indexical, in the exact same way that 'I' and 'that' are indexicals. So, some epistemologists, e.g., Lewis, DeRose, or Cohen, think that knowledge attributions exhibit context sensitivity. This leads them to treat the verb 'to know' as context sensitive. One way to incorporate this contextualist view into semantics is to treat 'know' as an indexical expression in a straightforward manner: The semantic value of 'know' changes from one context of utterance to another. As a result, what's required for satisfying, say, 'Lewis knows that penguins eat fish' varies from one context of utterance to another, contingent, say, on rising or falling epistemic standards. Commitment to epistemological contextualism in this manner thereby commits one to extending the Basic Set to include 'know' in addition to 'I,' 'here,' etc.

#### *The Hidden Indexical Strategy*

The Hidden Indexical Strategy postulates a phonetically-unrealized component (a covert indexical) at some level of linguistic representation, say, in

Logical Form. Rather than treating a surface (overt) expression *e* itself as an indexical (as the Surprise Indexical Strategy does), the Hidden Indexical Strategy accounts for alleged context sensitivity by finding (or postulating) a 'hidden' (i.e., unpronounced or covert) indexical associated with the expression(s) we hear pronounced. For example, most philosophers and linguists think that sentences with comparative adjectives are context sensitive. They hold that when someone utters, for example, 'Bill is short,' there's an unpronounced indexical associated with 'short' that makes reference to a comparison class. For any utterance of this sentence, you don't hear 'for an F' or anything like it; rather, what you hear is just 'short.' But in the underlying logical-syntactic form of the sentence, there's alleged to be a (covert) lexical item that refers in context to a comparison class. Again, there are many ways to achieve this end formally, but the basic idea is to take the logical form of 'Bill is short' to be something along the lines of 'Bill is short for an F,' where 'F' can vary from one context of utterance to another.

#### *The Unarticulated Constituent Strategy*

The Unarticulated Constituent Strategy finds context sensitivity in certain sentences, but does not recommend treating any pronounced *or* unpronounced component of that sentence as the source of this context sensitivity. According to this view, a propositional component gets added without being triggered by a syntactic component (pronounced or unpronounced) in the uttered sentence.<sup>6</sup> For example, consider the sentence 'It's raining.' Perry (1986) claims that unless the proposition semantically expressed by an utterance of this sentence included a location, it would not be 'complete,' and so, would not be truth evaluable. However, there's no expression in the logical-syntactic form of this sentence that makes reference to a location. Instead, the location is somehow or other added to the proposition semantically expressed by an utterance of the sentence without its being required by any lexical item in the sentence.

*Methodological observation: MC and RC are supported by only two kinds of arguments*

Here's a methodological observation that underlies the entire rest of this book:

<sup>6</sup> 'An indexical is like a free variable needing to be assigned a value. . . . the conceptual gaps in utterances of semantically underdeterminate sentences do not correspond to anything in the sentences themselves . . . . Not being sentence constituents, they enter in not at the linguistic level but at the conceptual level . . . .' (Bach 1994a, p. 133).

*Methodological observation.* There are two basic kinds of argument adduced in favor of all versions of RC and MC: Context Shifting Arguments and Incompleteness Arguments.

These two kinds of argument are the central motivation behind all departures from Semantic Minimalism.

This observation about the literature on (semantic) context sensitivity is meant to be substantial and controversial. If we are right, then a wide range of apparently diverse philosophical positions rely solely upon two kinds of argument. Chapter 2 is devoted to presenting textual evidence in support of this claim. Here we give a rather brief introduction to what we mean by *Context Shifting Arguments* (CSA) and *Incompleteness Arguments*.

#### *Context Shifting Arguments (and a preview of how they are misused)*

Someone in the business of investigating context sensitivity *contemplates* and *imagines* language as used in contexts *other* than the one she happens to find herself in. She is, after all, interested in the way in which content is influenced by variation in the context of utterance; in particular, she tries to elicit intuitions about whether *what is said*, or *expressed by*, or *the truth conditions of*, an utterance varies in some systematic way with contexts of utterance. To do so, she imagines a range of utterances,  $u_1$ – $u_n$ , of a sentence  $S$ . The resulting data consists of her reports of, and the audience's own, intuitions about the content of  $u_1$ – $u_n$ . Arguments that appeal to this kind of evidence we call *Context Shifting Arguments*.

Here's a preview of what we'll argue later: The literature on context sensitivity is plagued by a blatant misuse of this kind of argument. The mistake is not simply of the kind Grice pointed out, i.e., that theorists have to distinguish between intuitions about what utterances *say* and what they *implicate*. The way we see it, that mistake is superficial and relatively easy to avoid. Rather, the fundamental mistake in the entire contextualist literature is this: To properly engage in this sort of thought experiment a theorist has to locate herself *in a particular context*. To not make the context of the thought experiment an essential variable of the experiment is like trying to measure the speed of objects around you while ignoring your own speed. You can't do it. This mistake, we argue, is exactly the one that both Radical and Moderate Contextualists are guilty of.

If our metaphorical presentation of the problem seems obscure, bear with us until Chapters 7–9, where full details and clarification will be provided.

#### *Incompleteness Arguments (and a preview of how they are misused)*

The second kind of argument in the literature on context sensitivity we call *Incompleteness Arguments*. These also require an appeal to intuition, but an appeal to a kind of metaphysical intuition rather than to a linguistic one. The goal of an *Incompleteness Argument* is to establish that the proposition Semantic Minimalists claim is semantically expressed by some sentence  $S$  is no more than a *propositional fragment*.

*Incompleteness Arguments* are always simple (so simple that they might not deserve the moniker 'argument'). Typically, all they amount to is a claim like the following:

Consider the alleged proposition that  $P$  that some sentence  $S$  semantically expresses. Intuitively, the world can't just be  $P$  *simpliciter*. The world is neither  $P$  nor not  $P$ . There's no such thing as  $P$ 's being the case *simpliciter*. And so, there is no such proposition.

So, for example, consider 'Al is ready.' Some authors contend that it is *just plain obvious* that there isn't any such thing as Al's being ready *simpliciter*. Likewise, Perry (1986) and Crimmins (1992) argue, for example, that with a range of weather or temporal reports (containing pleonastic 'it's'), as in 'It's raining' and 'It is 3 p.m.,' there's no such thing as raining *simpliciter* or as being 3 p.m. *simpliciter*.

Again, a preview of our central contentions about *Incompleteness Arguments*: First, Moderate and Radical Contextualists who use such arguments are typically deeply confused about the relationship between semantics and metaphysics. These arguments are *not* about language; they are about various nonlinguistic aspects of the world. Even if they were good arguments, nothing would follow about the sentences in question, more generally, no semantic conclusions follow from these arguments even if they were sound. Second, considered, as they ought to be, as metaphysical arguments, they are unsound.

### Comparison with Other Ways of Structuring the Debate

The way we have presented the debates about context sensitivity (as a debate between Semantic Minimalism, MC, and RC) is controversial. It is, for example, not how all of the participants of these debates think of them. More specifically:

- Moderate and Radical Contextualists do not see themselves as aligned with each other, differing only with respect to where they are located on a continuum (the former wanting more of something that the latter wants not as much of). The Radical Contextualists see the Moderate Contextualists as fierce opponents, and vice versa.
- The three different versions of MC (Surprise Indexicalists, Hidden Indexicalists, and proponents of Unarticulated Constituents) do not think of each other as holding different versions of the same view. Advocates of each of these views spend a great deal of time arguing against the other two.
- Within each version of MC, there is disagreement about which expressions should be added to the Basic Set.
- Even those proponents of MC that agree on some version of MC and about which expressions should be added to the Basic Set disagree about how the versions should be implemented. For example, Moderate Contextualists who are Hidden Indexicalists about quantified noun phrases disagree about each of the following:
  - The nature of the semantic value of the hidden indexical (a class or a property or something else).
  - The larger semantic frameworks that this view should be embedded in.
  - Various issues concerning how semantic values of the hidden indexicals are fixed ('wide' or 'narrow' context).
  - Where to place the hidden indexical: attach it to the quantifier, to the noun phrase, as separate lexical entry or as 'co-habiting' with some other expression.
- There's a lively debate among Radical Contextualists, and many of those we so classify do not think of themselves as holding versions of the same view. They spend huge chunks of time arguing with each other about the differences between 'enrichment,' 'saturation,' 'free enrichment,' 'concept construction,' and a wide range of other issues.

Not only does our structuring of the debate lump together philosophers and linguists who would rather not be lumped together, but it might also (in part, as a result of this (apparently) crude classification) seem to miss what some think of as the *deep* and *underlying* issues. In particular, we have heard the following suggestions for what these debates are *really* about:

- 1 *Deep down* it is all about *compositionality*. Roughly, the central issue in all these debates is whether it is possible to develop a compositional semantics for natural language. The interesting question is not about context sensitivity as such, but about how it affects compositionality.

- 2 *Deep down* it is all about whether we need to take *speaker's intentions* into account to fix semantic values. In a terminology often used, it is all about whether semantics needs to take into account 'wide' context in addition to 'narrow' context (of the kind Kaplan seemed to focus on in his paper 'Demonstratives').

In sum, we have encountered various charges to the effect that we have failed to see what these debates are *really all about deep down* and that our structure leaves out important distinctions.

That, unsurprisingly, is not how we see things. We do, of course, agree that there are many interesting, deep, and subtle issues about context sensitivity not addressed in this book. In no way do we mean our discussion to be exhaustive. But to leave it at that would be to understate our case. We organize the various positions as we do because we think so doing elicits (renders explicit) the fundamental assumptions shared by positions that conceive of themselves as fundamentally opposed. Four substantive and controversial views underlie our organization of the debate:

- 1 All opponents of Semantic Minimalism (be they some version of MC or some version of RC) share certain important assumptions.
- 2 These assumptions seem so obvious to opponents of Semantic Minimalism that they are almost never made explicit and when they are made explicit they are never convincingly defended.
- 3 We argue that all of these underlying, shared assumptions should be rejected.
- 4 If these shared assumptions are rejected, then:
  - (a) Most (maybe all) of the arguments against Semantic Minimalism collapse.
  - (b) The distinction between various versions of MC and RC will seem unimportant (since these questions don't even arise unless one makes certain false assumptions).
  - (c) The label 'the Deep/Fundamental Issues' should be awarded to a range of issues independent of any debates internal to MC or RC.

One underlying assumption (the simplest version of which we call the Mistaken Assumption - MA, for short) is spelled out in Chapter 4. In brief, it is the view that the semantic content of a sentence *S* is constrained in certain ways (spelled out in Chapter 4) by what speakers can use *S* to say (assert, claim, state, etc.) and that intuitions about what speakers say (assert, claim, state, etc.) with a sentence *S* provide evidence for the semantic content of *S*. This can also be described as the mistake of conflating *semantic content* and *speech act content*. (This, we further argue in Chapter 4,

is what underlies the constant misuse of Context Shifting Arguments in the philosophy of language, and elsewhere.)

### Outline of Argumentative Strategy

In Chapter 2 we document that in a wide range of cases, indeed, in all of the cases we are aware of, arguments to the effect that an expression *e* exhibits semantic context sensitivity are based either on some version of a Context Shifting Argument or on some version of an Incompleteness Argument. (Other arguments occasionally presented as arguments for context sensitivity are shown to be parasitic on these two kinds of argument.)

In Chapters 3-6 we show that any attempt to exploit these two kinds of argument to expand the Basic Set of context sensitive expressions to one any larger is susceptible to an instability charge. The charge takes this form: We consider a range of data, *D*, presented in favor of expanding the Basic Set of context sensitive expressions, and show that if this evidence supports an expansion of the Basic Set, then *all* expressions are context sensitive, i.e., RC is true. In other words, we will establish that any argument for MC inevitably slips into an argument for RC.

In Chapters 7-9 we show that RC is, first, empirically flawed, and worse, ultimately incoherent. Since MC collapses into RC, it follows that MC also is both empirically flawed and ultimately incoherent.

In Chapters 10-12 we present and defend Semantic Minimalism.

In Chapter 13 we present and defend Speech Act Pluralism.

## PART I

### *From Moderate to Radical Contextualism*

## CHAPTER 2

### *Exegesis: The Methodology of Contextualism*

Much of this book consists of discussions, criticisms, and refinements of what we call *Context Shifting* and *Incompleteness Arguments*. We focus on these because they are at the center of all arguments that attempt to establish that expressions or sentences exhibit semantically relevant context sensitivity.

While presenting this material in seminars and at conferences we sometimes encounter the following reply: *Your objections to these arguments might be good, but so what? Those aren't the kinds of arguments contextualists invoke. What's really going on is . . .* This chapter is meant in part as a response to this sort of reply and in part as an introduction to the topic for those not already immersed in the literature.

#### Context Shifting Arguments

Our view is that sentences are context sensitive just in case they contain an expression from what we call the Basic Set of Context Sensitive Expressions. Suppose someone suspects that an expression *e*, not in that set, is context sensitive. How could he go about establishing this? One way that philosophers of language do so is to think about (or imagine) various utterances of sentences containing *e*. If they have intuitions that a *semantically relevant feature* of those utterances varies from context to context, then that, it is assumed, is evidence *e* is context sensitive.

For this strategy to work it is of course important that the features one has intuitions about are semantically relevant. The kinds of features that contextualists claim to have intuitions about include:

- What is *said* or *asserted* or *claimed* or *stated* by utterances of sentences containing *e*.
- The truth conditions of utterances of sentences containing *e*.
- The proposition expressed by utterances of sentences containing *e*.

In Chapters 7-9 we argue that intuitions about variability in these features do not, even *prima facie*, provide evidence of semantic context sensitivity. In this chapter we simply document extensive appeal to such intuitions in the philosophical and linguistics literature. We'll begin by discussing a few of the specific cases and then turn to the more general case.

## Quantifiers

We start with quantifier sentences; these are sentences which include quantifier expressions like 'every bottle,' 'no man,' 'the table,' etc. Stanley and Williamson, for example, appeal to intuitions about context shifting in defending their claim that quantifier sentences are context sensitive when they write:

Since there are clearly true utterances of

(1) Every bottle has been put on the shelf.

in ordinary contexts, it follows that utterances of sentences containing quantified expressions are evaluated with respect to contextually restricted domains. (Stanley and Williamson 1995, p. 291)

Their intuition is that the truth values of utterances of (1) can shift from one context to another even though the locations of all extant bottles change not at all. This is so, they claim, because the domain of the quantifier 'every bottle' itself shifts from context to context of utterance. So, in this case, it is intuitions about shifting truth values that underlie an inference to context sensitivity.

Recanati concurs. In discussing an utterance of the quantifier sentence 'They took everything,' he writes that he has '*a feeling* that "everything" ranges over the domain of valuable objects in the house - not everything in the world' (Recanati 1996, p. 445). Recanati's feelings (or intuitions) are about *what* quantifiers range over; in effect, what their application conditions are, and so, what the truth conditions are for utterances of sentences in which these expressions occur. If Recanati's intuitions are correct, it follows that quantifier sentences admit of context sensitivity.

Lewis, on the other hand, has intuitions about what utterances of quantifier sentences *say*; he writes: 'If I say that every glass is empty, so it's time for another round, doubtless I and my audience are ignoring most of all the glasses there are in the whole wide world throughout all of time. They are outside the domain. They are irrelevant to the truth of what was said' (Lewis 1996, p. 225). In these cases, Lewis's intuitions are that utterances of quantifier sentences can change in what their utterances *say*, and so, in their truth conditions - contingent upon what the restricted domain of the quantifier is.

Schiffer focuses neither on domains of discourse nor on truth values shifting from context to context, but rather on what is *stated* by distinct utterances of quantifier sentences, in particular, by utterances of sentences with definite descriptions in them: 'it is clear that in uttering "The dog is chewing your hat" the literal speaker is not stating something that entails that there is exactly one dog in the universe' (Schiffer 1998, p. 375-6). Neale likewise draws contextualist conclusions based on his intuitions about changes in what speakers are *asserting* with utterances of the same sentence as context shifts from occasion to occasion.

Suppose I had a dinner party last night. In response to a question as to how it went, I say to you:

(2) Everyone was sick.

Clearly I do not mean to be asserting that everyone in existence was sick, just that everyone at the dinner party I had last night was. (Neale 1990, p. 95)

Stanley and Szabó have the intuition that which *propositions* are semantically expressed can shift from context to context, so that distinct utterances of the same unambiguous quantifier sentence can convey different propositions:

Consider the sentence:

(1) Every bottle is empty.

Suppose someone utters (1) in a conversation. It is unlikely that what she intends to convey is that every bottle in the universe is empty; she most likely intends to convey that every one of a restricted class of bottles (say, the bottles in the room where she is, the bottles purchased recently, etc.) is empty. And if the context is right, she can succeed in communicating such a proposition. Permanent linguistic features of (1) - its phonological and morphological constituents, its syntactic structure, the meanings of the lexical items it contains - do not determine the proposition thereby communicated. They cannot

do so, for these features are the same on every occasion when the sentence is used, but on most of those occasions the speaker would communicate a different proposition by the sentence. (Stanley and Szabó 2000a, pp. 219–20)

Though Stanley and Szabó's claim is also one about context shifting, their intuitions are about context shifts in the proposition semantically expressed by distinct utterances of (2). (This of course may elicit a change in truth value as well.)

We find a similar idea in Gaulker:

Imagine a goatherd in the Peruvian Andes whose community has long been isolated from the rest of the world. One evening all the people of the village are gathered for a traditional celebration and there appears in the sky a remarkable bright falling star. Everyone looks up into the sky and sees it. As a result our goatherd forms a belief that he attempts to convey in the words that translate thus: 'Everyone saw the falling star'. Call this the goatherd's first utterance.

Sometime later, our goatherd is out in the hills accompanying a philosophical friend. Bored with tending goats, the philosopher asks the goatherd, 'Do you think there might be people like us on the other side of these distant mountain tops?' For the first time our goatherd contemplates the question and forms the opinion that, yes, very probably, there are other people over there . . . To convey this thought, he chooses the words that translate thus: 'Not everyone in the universe is a member of our community'. Call this the goatherd's second utterance.

A charitable interpretation would say that by means of his first utterance the goatherd intended to convey the proposition that everyone in the goatherd's community saw the falling star, and that by means of his second utterance the goatherd intended to convey the proposition that not everyone in the universe is a member of the goatherd's community. (Gaulker 1997, pp. 17–19)

In sum, each author invokes an intuition or feeling about quantifier sentences in use; each employs intuitions or feelings about distinct utterances of quantifier sentences; namely, that there is a shift in evaluations of these utterances across distinct contexts. What shifts is either

- the application condition of the quantifiers and so the truth conditions of the utterances of sentences in which they occur, and so, possibly the truth values of these utterances, or

- which propositions speakers semantically expressed with their utterances, or
- what they are asserting (stating, affirming, conveying) with these utterances.

It may turn out that these different sets of intuitions all co-vary and have a common cause – namely, the context sensitivity of quantifier expressions. But that would need to be argued for. Still, each is some version of a Context Shifting Argument.

### Comparative Adjectives

Although commitment to contextualism about quantifier expressions is relatively commonplace, with appeals to intuitions about context shifting being the chief defense, commitment to contextualism about comparative adjectives is virtually universal. Once again appeal to intuitions about context shifting is the chief contextualist defense. Some authors assume it is truth conditions that vary:

Consider the class of gradable adjectives, those which take the comparative and superlative; 'rich', 'urgent', 'dangerous', 'tall', and 'square' are examples. Almost everyone agrees that these are contextually sensitive, in the sense that context provides the adjective a parameter necessary for it to determine (even) a (vague) extension. . . . It is, I think, beyond serious dispute that the truth conditions of 'Mary is rich' vary across contexts, as vary the interests, focus, and so on of participants in a conversation. (Richard 2004, pp. 218–19; cf., also, Higginbotham 1985, pp. 563–5; Parsons 1990, pp. 42–4)

Other authors hold that it is what's said that varies:

Consider predicative uses of a comparative adjective, such as:

- (26) That building is small.
- (27) That basketball player is short.
- (28) That flea is small.

On one natural reading of (26), the building in question is not being said to be small for an object in general (whatever that may mean). Rather, the building is being said to be small for a building. Similarly, on a natural reading of (27), the basketball player in question is not being said to be short for a person, but only for a basketball player. (Stanley 2002b, p. 377)

According to Richard, what shifts from context to context is truth conditions; according to Stanley, what shifts from context to context is what speakers say when they use sentences with comparative adjectives, even though the heights and sizes of the individual in question remain constant.

Clapp's intuitions about context shifting for comparative adjectives concern their truth values:

An utterance of (4) ('Bradley is tall') that occurred in a discussion concerning the physical characteristics of presidential candidates would be true iff Bradley is tall for a presidential candidate, while an utterance of (4) that occurred in a discourse concerning great centers in the NBA would be true iff Bradley is tall for a great center in the NBA. Thus, the truth conditions of (4) depend upon what contrast class is invoked by the sentence. (Clapp 2002, p. 237)

### Propositional Attitude Ascriptions

Another fragment for which context shifting intuitions are presented in defense of contextualism concerns propositional attitude ascriptions. For example, Crimmins and Perry present an influential theory about belief reports according to which such reports are context sensitive. Belief reports have 'notions' as unarticulated constituents and these unarticulated constituents vary based on what is contextually salient. Three claims are at the center of their theory:

- 1 That the notions vary across conversational contexts.
- 2 That this variation corresponds to differences in communicated content because notions are unarticulated constituents of belief reports.
- 3 That these variations in communicated content can help solve classical puzzles involving belief reports.

Here's a summary of their view:

We take a belief report to be an utterance *u* of a belief sentence, of the form:

A believes that *S*  
 where *A* is a singular term and *S* is a sentence. . . . The claim made by the belief report is that the agent *a* has a belief with the content *p*, involving notions *n*<sub>1</sub> . . . *n*<sub>k</sub> (in a certain way). . . . We shall say in such

cases that the notions that the belief report is about are *provided* by the utterance and its context. (Crimmins and Perry 1989, pp. 263-4)

According to Crimmins and Perry there is no expression in the logical form of the sentence corresponding to these contextually provided notions:

On our account, the complex relation invoked in belief reports is a four-place relation: an agent believes a proposition at a time relative to a sequence of notions. But there is no argument place in the 'believes' predicate for the sequence of notions. The notions are unarticulated constituents of the content of the report. (Crimmins and Perry 1989, pp. 264-5)

Belief reports, according to this view, '*call for a propositional constituent that meets, say, certain conditions of relevance and salience*' (Crimmins and Perry 1989, p. 266; emphasis our own).

Our interest is in the role of CSAs in their argument. Here's a way to think about the way they defend their view: They take a range of puzzles involving belief reports and show that those puzzles can be solved *on the assumption that the relevant notions vary from one context of utterance to another*.

Here's an illustration involving Kripke's puzzling Pierre case:

In the Pierre case, the sentence (3) ['Pierre believes that London is pretty'] gets used in two reports, first in a discussion of Pierre's initial acquaintance with London through stories, then in a discussion about Pierre's thoughts about his adopted home. Call these reports *U*<sub>3</sub> and *U*'<sub>3</sub>. Pierre actually has two notions of London, one relevant to each discussion; call the first *n* and the second *n*'. The notion *n* meets the condition *C* of being a notion germane to the discussion of Pierre's reaction to these stories; the notion *n*' meets the condition *C*' of being a notion germane to the discussion of Pierre's new home. (Crimmins and Perry 1989, p. 273)

Here is one way in which this variation in contextually relevant notions can contribute to the analysis of the problematic belief reports:<sup>1</sup>

The speaker of the former report is *claiming* that Pierre has a belief involving some notion germane to the current conversation about the stories, with the content that London is pretty. The speaker of the latter report requires that the belief involve some notion *relevant to the conversation about Pierre's new home*. (Crimmins and Perry 1989, p. 273)

1 For elaboration of this point, see Crimmins and Perry (1989, pp. 272-3).

At the center of this argument one finds an appeal to the intuition that the *claim* made by a belief report is determined by the contextually salient or 'germane' notion, and hence, varies depending on which notions are *salient* or *germane*. The rest of Crimmins and Perry (1989) and Crimmins (1992) provides a plethora of further illustrations of appeals to context shifting intuitions.

Here's another variation on this kind of argument, this one from Clapp:

We are observing Jerry who is tasting the cookies from a plate with a tag that reads 'Ms. O'Connor' ... suppose that we know that Jerry does not realize that the baker of the cookies, Ms O'Connor, just is his acquaintance Marie ... I thus say, 'Ha! Poor Jerry does not know that "O'Connor" is Marie's last name, so he doesn't know that those are Marie's cookies!' If you were to utter (5) [Jerry believes that Marie baked the cookies] immediately following my statement, your utterance would be false ... But ... suppose that we are at a cookie baking contest, and suppose that Jerry, whom we know to have no prior acquaintance with Ms. Marie O'Connor, observes her at a distance placing her cookies on a plate. Seeing Jerry observe Marie putting her cookies on a plate, I utter (5) to you. In this context my utterance of (5) is (probably) true. ... So (5) is clearly context sensitive ... (Clapp 2002, p. 238)

Clapp's intuition or feeling is that distinct utterances of the same attitude ascription can disagree in truth value. The natural way for him to explain his intuitions is to infer that psychological attitude ascriptions are context sensitive.

### Counterfactual Conditionals

The general view about counterfactual conditionals is that they

are not categorically true or false but only relative to a set of implicit background assumptions. Utterances of both of the following could be true if different background assumptions are held fixed.

(15) If Lincoln hadn't gone to the theatre, he wouldn't have been assassinated.

(16) If Lincoln hadn't gone to the theatre, he would have been assassinated anyway.

This suggests that these conditionals do not express complete propositions as they stand. (Bach 1994a, pp. 128-9)

An influential version of this view is developed by Lewis. According to Lewis, the truth conditions for counterfactuals vary from one context of utterance to another and they do so because they appeal to the similarity relation between worlds. Whether two worlds are relevantly similar depends on the context of utterance. As a result counterfactuals are context sensitive. Here's a passage in which Lewis describes the alleged variability of the similarity relation (and, by implication, the variability of truth conditions for counterfactuals):

All this is not special to the comparative similarity of worlds that appears in my analysis of counterfactuals. It is the same sort of vagueness that arises if I say that Seattle resembles San Francisco more closely than it resembles Los Angeles. Does it? That depends on whether we attach more importance to the surrounding landscape, the architecture, the dominant industries, the political temper, the state of the arts, the climate, the public transportation system, the form of the city government, or what. Possible worlds are bigger than cities (sometimes) and are capable of differing in a greater variety of respects. ... Still, any problems posed by my use of comparative similarity differ only in degree, not in kind, from problems about similarity that we would be stuck with no matter what we did about counterfactuals. (Lewis 1973, p. 92)

The respects of similarity we attach importance to vary between contexts, but counterfactuals don't allow just any kind of variability:

There is a rough consensus about the importance of respects of comparison, and hence about comparative similarity. Our standards of importance and similarity *do vary*; but mostly within a certain range, narrow by comparison with the range of variation permitted by the formal constraints in my definition of a system of spheres. (Lewis 1973, pp. 93-4)

Here is how this applies to a specific example. Lewis writes about Quine's pair of counterfactual conditionals

If Caesar had been in command [in Korea] he would have used the atom bomb

If Caesar had been in command he would have used catapults

as follows:

In dealing with Quine's opposed counterfactuals about Caesar, context must of course be consulted somehow ... I could ... call on

context . . . to resolve part of the vagueness of comparative similarity in a way favourable to the truth of one counterfactual or the other. In one context, we may attach great importance to similarities and differences in respect of Caesar's character and in respect of regularities concerning the knowledge of weapons common to commanders in Korea. In another context we may attach less importance to these similarities and differences, and more importance to similarities and differences in respect of Caesar's own knowledge of weapons. The first context resolves the vagueness of comparative similarity in such a way that some worlds with a modernized Caesar in command come out closer to our world than any with an unmodernized Caesar. It thereby makes the first counterfactual true. The second context resolves the vagueness in the opposite direction, making the second counterfactual true. (Lewis 1973, p. 67)

Two kinds of context shifting intuitions are at the center of Lewis's argument:

- 1 The intuition that the truth conditions for counterfactuals depend on the topic of conversation, the assumed background knowledge, and more generally, salient features of the context of utterance.
- 2 The intuition that this variability can be captured by, and is reflected in, the variability in similarity judgments. That variability is, again, justified by appeals to intuitions about how the truth conditions of a sentence of the form 'A is similar to B' vary between contexts.<sup>2</sup>

### Knowledge Attributions

An area of philosophy where contextualism has really taken hold is in epistemology. Epistemic contextualism is often invoked to solve traditional epistemic puzzles/paradoxes, e.g., the Lottery Paradox, and Gettier and Skeptical problems. These contextualists all appeal to intuitions that speakers have about context shifts about knowledge attributions. Here's an example from DeRose:

<sup>2</sup> A related kind of argument is used to show that conditionals are context sensitive. The basic idea goes back to Ramsey and is expressed in the following passage: 'In general we can say with Mill that "If P then Q" means that Q is inferable from P, that is of course, from P together with certain facts and laws not stated but *in some way indicated by the context*' (Ramsey 1978, p. 247; emphasis our own).

Bank Case A: My wife and I are driving home on a Friday afternoon. We plan to stop at the bank on the way home to deposit our paychecks. But as we drive past the bank, we notice that the lines are very long, as they often are on Friday afternoons. Although we generally like to deposit our paychecks as soon as possible, it is not especially important in this case that they be deposited right away, so I suggest that we drive straight home and deposit our paychecks on Saturday morning. My wife says, 'Maybe the bank won't be open tomorrow. Lots of banks are closed on Saturdays.' I reply, 'No, I know it'll be open. I was just there two weeks ago on Saturday. It's open until noon.'

Bank Case B: My wife and I drive past the bank on a Friday afternoon, as in Case A, and notice the long lines. I again suggest that we deposit our paychecks on Saturday morning, explaining that I was at the bank on Saturday morning only two weeks ago and discovered that it was open until noon. But in this case, we have just written a very large and important check. If our paychecks are not deposited into our checking account before Monday morning, the important check we wrote will bounce, leaving us in a *very* bad situation. And, of course, the bank is not open on Sunday. My wife reminds me of these facts. She then says, 'Banks do change their hours. Do you know the bank will be open tomorrow?' Remaining as confident as I was before that the bank will be open then, still, I reply, 'Well, no. I'd better go in and make sure.' (DeRose 1992, pp. 920-1)

DeRose comments that the 'contexts of my utterance in the two cases make it easier for a knowledge attribution to be true in Case A than in Case B' (DeRose 1992, p. 920). He writes about contextualism in general that:

Once the standards have been so raised, we *correctly sense that we only could falsely claim* to know such things as that we have hands . . . [and] *as soon as we find ourselves in more ordinary conversational contexts, it will not only be true for us to claim* to know the very things that the skeptic now denies we know, but it will also be wrong for us to deny that we know these things (DeRose 1995, p. 185; emphasis our own).

In these cases DeRose is appealing to intuitions about the truth values of *claims* we are making with distinct utterances of the same unambiguous knowledge attribution in distinct contexts of utterances, *even though all of the nonepistemological facts remain constant*. Along the same lines, he concludes, 'the truth conditions of sentences of the form "S knows that p" or "S does not know that p" vary in certain ways according to the context

in which they are uttered' (DeRose 1992, p. 914; cf., also, 1995, sect. 8; Casteneda 1980).<sup>3</sup>

Other authors, e.g., Cohen, argue that what shifts is the threshold required for justification, where for any given subject his belief that *p* is assigned some absolute degree *d* of justification for *p* and what shifts is whether *d* suffices for justification. Cohen writes, in consequence, that:

Contextualism is the view that . . . the truth-values of sentences containing 'know', and its cognates depend on contextually determined standards. Because of this, sentences of the form 'S knows P' can, at one time, have different truth-values in different contexts. Now when I say 'contexts', I mean 'contexts of ascription'. So the truth-value of a sentence containing the knowledge predicate can vary depending on things like purposes, intentions, expectations, presuppositions, etc., of the speakers who utter these sentences. (Cohen 1999, p. 57)

Suppose one speaker says about a subject *S* and a proposition *P*, 'S knows that *P*.' At the very same time, another speaker says of the very same subject and proposition, 'S does not know *P*.' Must one of the two be speaking falsely? According to the view I will call 'contextualism', both speakers can be speaking the truth. (Cohen 1999, p. 57)

Mary and John are at the L.A. airport contemplating taking a certain flight to New York. They want to know whether the flight has a layover in Chicago. They overhear someone ask a passenger Smith if he knows whether the flight stops in Chicago. Smith looks at the flight itinerary he got from the travel agent and responds, 'Yes I know - it does stop in Chicago.' It turns out that Mary and John have a very important business contact to make at the Chicago airport. Mary says, 'How reliable is that itinerary? It could contain a misprint. They could have changed the schedule at the last minute.' Mary and John agree that Smith doesn't really know that the plane will stop in Chicago. They decide to check with the airline agent. . . . neither standard is simply correct or simply incorrect. Rather, context determines which stan-

<sup>3</sup> Not all the contributors to the epistemic contextualism debate agree about what they are claiming when they say that knowledge attributions are context sensitive. Some suggest that 'know' is a kind of indexical (Cohen 1988); others that the expression is vague and that context effects different precisifications (Heller 1999); others are even less committal and rest with claims about what counts as true knowledge attributions depends on context (DeRose 1995), or on what possibilities get ignored (Lewis 1996). We intend our objections to epistemic contextualism in this book to apply to all such views, and so, will not focus on the details of any particular account.

dard is correct. Since the standards for knowledge ascriptions can vary across context, each claim, Smith's as well as Mary and John's, can be correct in the context in which it was made. When Smith says 'I know . . .', what he says is true given the weaker standard operating in that context. When Mary and John say 'Smith does not know . . .', what they say is true given the stricter standard operating in their context. *And there is no context independent correct standard.* (Cohen 1999, pp. 58-9)

Again we see that it's the truth values (or truth conditions; Cohen 1991, p. 23) of utterances of knowledge ascriptions that are alleged to shift from one context of use to another; or what's said by these utterances (Cohen 1999, p. 57).

### Moral Attributions

Context shifting also is invoked in ethics, for example, in talking about 'good.' Unger speaks about contextual variability in *judgments* about whether something is permissible:

In many cases, the truth value (or the acceptability) of a judgment about whether a person's behavior is morally permissible depends on the context in which the judgment is made. (Unger 1995, p. 2)

According to Unger's intuitions, the truth values of moral judgments can shift from context to context.

Dreier agrees with him when he writes:

For one thing, the content of a moral claim or belief is, on my view, relative to a context. For another (and this is really just a consequence of the first) two people in different contexts may utter 'x is good' and 'x is not good' and both speak truly. (Dreier 1990, p. 7)

And more of the same, he writes:

speaker relativism is the theory that the content of (what is expressed by) a sentence containing a moral term varies with (is a function of) the context in which it is used. (Dreier 1990, p. 6)

In this latter quotation, Dreier is talking about what's *expressed* varying from context to context.

## Weather Reports

According to numerous authors, distinct utterances of weather reports vary, e.g., in what they say, as in:

Fred hears Mary say ['It's raining']; he doesn't know whether she is talking about the location where they are; or some other location – perhaps the location of the person to whom she is talking on the phone. So, in a sense, he doesn't know what she has said. (Perry 1998, p. 7)

['It's raining'] is used to *say different things on different occasions* of utterance. A speaker S who utters ['It's raining'] says that it is raining where S is (or at some other contextually salient location) at the time of utterance (or at some other contextually salient time). (Pagin forthcoming, p. 3; emphasis our own)

## Other Sorts of Expressions

In addition to his contextualist commitment about quantifier expressions and counterfactual conditionals, Lewis advocates contextualism for a rather wide range of expressions. For example, for words about geometrical shape, he writes:

An adequate grammar must tell us that truth-in-English depends not only on what words are said and on the facts, but also on features of the situation in which the words are said. . . . If the words are 'France is hexagonal' of course the shape of France matters but so do the aspects of previous discourse that raise or lower the standards of precision. Truth in English has been achieved if the last thing said before was 'Italy is sort of boot shaped' but not if the last thing said before was 'Shapes in geometry are ever so much simpler than shapes in geography.' (Lewis 1998, p. 24; see also Austin 1962, p. 143)

Here Lewis is appealing to intuitions about context shifting with regard to shifts in the truth values of distinct utterances of 'France is hexagonal.' It's his intuition that an utterance of this sentence can shift in truth value from true to false (with no physical facts changing) simply because of what other sentences were uttered before it.

Along the same lines, Bezuidenhout writes:

Suppose that George has a paper route, which he covers every day on his bicycle. As he rides past a customer's house, he tosses their paper

towards their house, aiming for their porch. Sometimes he is successful but often he is not. *In such a context, when a speaker utters (11) [(11) 'George managed to porch the newspaper yesterday'] she will be understood to have said that George was successful yesterday in tossing the newspaper onto the porch.* On the other hand, suppose that it is George's job to bundle up each week's newspapers and put the bundle out on the porch, where someone from the recycling company will pick it up. George isn't very reliable, and some weeks he forgets to do his job. *In this context when a speaker utters (11) she will be understood to have said that George managed to remember to put the newspaper bundle out on the porch for recycling yesterday.* (Bezuidenhout 2002, p. 115; emphasis our own)

It is Bezuidenhout's intuition that what gets *said* by distinct utterances of (11) can shift from context to context. Based on this intuition she infers the contextualist thesis that (11) is itself context sensitive.

Travis also infers contextualism based on intuitions about what's being *said* varying with distinct utterances of the same unambiguous sentence.

Consider the English 'Ice floats' . . . Now suppose, as may be, that ice sinks in certain substances – glycerine, perhaps, or mineral oil or ethanol. . . . Many typical speakings of 'Ice floats' *rightly understood, are not shown false by such things, since so understood, they do not say things to be any way things are not if ice so behaves.* For some speakings, though, some or all of the above does matter. Sam and Pia, e.g., may be wondering what will happen if they drop an ice cube in the bowl of glycerine before them. 'Oh, it will just bob around' Sam assures Pia, 'After all, ice floats'. If the cube sinks, then *what Sam said* in 'Ice floats' is false. . . . So there is more than one thing *to be said in saying 'Ice floats' where those words mean what they do mean in English;* more than one thing, that is, each of which is what sometimes would be said in so speaking . . . (Travis 1994, p. 172; emphasis our own)

## Radical Contextualism

So far we have been assuming that contextualism in its various forms is limited to a small class of words that provoke contextualist intuitions of various sorts, e.g., about the uses of quantifiers, counterfactual conditionals, comparative adjectives, psychological, epistemic, and moral attributions. Some authors, however, set no such limits on intuitions about context shifting. These authors believe that *every* single expression in *every* single sentence in the language is subject to context shifting (all read unre-

strictedly!). And they invoke the exact same range of intuitions to defend their widespread contextualism. This generalization of the argument was central to much ordinary language philosophy in the twentieth century. It is succinctly summarized by Austin as follows:

If you just take a bunch of sentences . . . impeccably formulated in some language or other, there can be no question of sorting them out into those that are true and those that are false; for . . . the question of truth and falsehood does not turn only on what a sentence *is*, nor yet on what it *means*, but on, speaking very broadly, the circumstances in which it is uttered. Sentences are not *as such* either true or false. (Austin 1962, pp. 110-11)

Versions of the same view are found in Travis and Searle (repeated here from Chapter 1):

What words mean plays a role in fixing when they would be true; but not an exhaustive one. Meaning leaves room for variation in truth conditions from one speaking to another. (Travis 1996, p. 451)

The literal meaning of a sentence only determines a set of truth conditions given a set of background practices and assumptions. Relative to one set of practices and assumptions, a sentence may determine one set of truth conditions; relative to another set of practices and assumptions, another set; and if some sets of assumptions and practices are given, the literal meaning of a sentence may not determine a definite set of truth conditions at all. (Searle 1980, p. 227)

. . . in general the meaning of a sentence only has application (it only, for example, determines a set of truth conditions) against a background of assumptions and practices that are not representable as a part of meaning. (Searle 1980, p. 221)

Other prominent supporters of this view include Relevance theorists (such as Dan Sperber, Deirdre Wilson, and Robyn Carston) and François Recanati. Recanati, for example, says:

Contrary to what formal semanticists tend to assume, the (intuitive) truth-conditions of our utterances are not compositionally determined by the meanings of words and their syntactic arrangement, in a strict bottom-up manner. They are shaped by contextual expectations and world-knowledge to a very large extent. That is true of all

utterances, however 'literal' they are (in the ordinary sense). (Recanati 2004, p. 92)

It is not surprising, of course, that these kinds of appeals to intuitions about contextual variability should be at the center of discussion of context sensitivity. *Context sensitivity* is, after all, variability between contexts. In order to establish such variability one has to think about and compare what happens to the same sentence in different contexts of utterance. What is not equally obvious is:

- (a) What the relevant variability is (what is said, claimed, expressed, or what have you).
- (b) What kinds of comparisons constitute solid semantic evidence.

(a) and (b) are discussed further in Chapters 7-9.

We now turn to the second, closely related form of argument for contextualism - Incompleteness.

### Incompleteness Arguments

Context Shifting Arguments and what we are calling Incompleteness Arguments are not unrelated. If a sentence really is context sensitive, not only may it shift in what is said or expressed by an utterance of it, it also makes no sense to ask what it says, or expresses, independent of context. For example, it makes no sense to ask of the bona fide context sensitive sentence 'I am American' whether it is true or false, nor does it make any sense to ask of it whether it says or expresses anything independent of a (felicitous) use.

In the case of incompleteness (unlike that of context shifting) the intuitions invoked are ones in which a speaker is called upon to ask whether she thinks a sentence says or semantically expresses anything, or has conditions of truth, and so, a truth value, independent of any context. For example, Taylor writes about sentence (3)

- (3) It's raining

that it

is missing no syntactically mandatory sentential constituent, nonetheless, it is *semantically incomplete*. The semantic incompleteness is manifest to us as a *felt inability to evaluate the truth value of an*

utterance of (3) in the absence of a contextually provided location (or range of locations). This felt need for a contextually provided location has its source, I claim, in our tacit cognition of the syntactically unexpressed argument place of the verb 'to rain'. (Taylor 2001, p. 53)

So in this case, (3) is claimed to be context sensitive because *unless context provides a location* the sentence is felt to lack a truth value. Perry concurs when he writes that:

in order to assign a truth value to my son's statement [3] ... I needed a place. (Perry 1993, p. 206)

These claims about incompleteness, or as it is sometimes called 'semantic underdetermination,' have been advocated for a range of sentences. Bach writes about sentence (1):

(1) Steel isn't strong enough

that

(1), though syntactically well formed, [is] semantically or conceptually incomplete, in the sense that something must be added to the sentence for it to *express a complete and determinate proposition*. With (1) we need to know strong enough for what (it does not express the weak proposition that steel is strong enough for something or other) ... (Bach 1994b, p. 269)

The idea is that (1) is (semantically) incomplete - as Bach says, it does not express a complete and determinate proposition. His 'argument' for the conclusion is that only after it is specified 'strong enough for what' can a determinate proposition be expressed. A sentence like (1),

even after disambiguation and reference fixing, does not by virtue of linguistic meaning express a complete proposition. When a sentence is in this way *semantically underdeterminate*, understanding its utterance requires a process of *completion* to produce a full proposition. (Bach 1994a, p. 125)

Context is supposed to supply this information. The speaker 'intends the hearer to read something into the utterance, to regard it as if it contained certain conceptual materials that are not in fact there' (Bach 1994a, p. 126).

Sperber and Wilson, much like Bach, proclaim about sentence (20),

(20) Peter's bat is gray,

that

'Peter's bat' might refer to the bat owned by Peter, the bat chosen by Peter, the bat killed by Peter ... and so on indefinitely. ... It *seems* ... that the semantic interpretation of a sentence with a genitive from which ambiguities and referential indeterminacies have been eliminated is still something less than fully propositional. Contextual information is needed to resolve what should be seen as the semantic incompleteness, rather than the ambiguity, of the genitive. (Sperber and Wilson 1986, p. 188)

According to Sperber and Wilson, it 'seems' that sentences with genitive (possessive) constructions fail to express any proposition whatsoever unless context provides the required information.

Bezuidenhout concurs:

Let us take an example of a sentence that most would agree does involve some incompleteness. Suppose for instance I utter the sentence 'There is no beer left.' The quantifier phrase 'no beer' is incomplete and in context it must be completed, either by restricting the domain or by adding ellipsed material (depending on your favorite view of the matter). Suppose that in context I am talking about what beer is left in my refrigerator. Even so my utterance *is open to multiple possible understandings* depending on what else is assumed in the context. For instance, if I am having a party at my house, I might utter the sentence in question trying to convey that there is no beer left in the refrigerator for my guests to drink ... But the context could be rather different. Several bottles of beer have exploded in my refrigerator, spraying the inside of the refrigerator with beer. I have been mopping up puddles of beer. When my husband asks me how things are going I reply 'There is no beer left.' *He understands me to say* that there are no more puddles of beer inside the refrigerator. (Bezuidenhout 2002, pp. 112-13)

Her argument is that 'most would agree' that the sentence 'There is no beer left' does not express a proposition, or has truth conditions, out of context. We're supposed to see that, note, because we recognize that in different contexts we recognize different propositions being expressed by the same sentence. In this regard we see how context shifting and incompleteness go hand in hand.

Bach extends the incompleteness charge to propositional attitude ascriptions. He writes:

sentences used to make the belief reports, though semantically equivalent, are also *semantically incomplete*. That is, they do not express complete propositions, and to that extent they are like such sentences as

(5) Fred is ready.

and

(6) Jerry has finished.

Though syntactically well-formed (compare (6) with the virtually synonymous but ungrammatical 'Jerry has completed'), these sentences are semantically incomplete because of a missing argument . . . Like words such as 'big' and 'short,' a belief-predicate does not have a context-independent condition of satisfaction, so that a sentence containing it does not have a context-independent truth condition. A belief-predicate does not express, independently of context, a unique belief-property. So, for example, there is no unique property of believing that Batman is a wimp. (Bach 1997, p. 228)

Why, for example, are sentences (5) and (6) supposed to be (semantically) incomplete? According to Bach, 'these sentences are semantically incomplete because of a missing argument.' What's the argument that they lack an argument?

Bach clearly thinks that the Incompleteness Argument can be extended indefinitely for belief reports. He writes:

Consider the following variation on the original version of the Paderewski case. Suppose that Peter hears a recording of Paderewski playing Rachmaninov in Carnegie Hall. Peter likes what he hears. Then Peter hears a recording of Paderewski playing with a jazz combo at the Apollo Theatre. This time he hates what he hears. It is clear to us that Peter does not realize he has heard the same pianist twice. But here it won't do any good to say that Peter disbelieves that Paderewski the pianist had musical talent, because we could also have truly said that he believes that Paderewski the pianist had musical talent. We could say that Peter disbelieves that Paderewski the *jazz* pianist had musical talent and say too that he believes that Paderewski the *classical* pianist had musical talent. But this ploy won't ultimately work either. Suppose Peter hears a recording of an atrocious performance of Paderewski playing Mozart. It is clear to us that Peter does not realize that he has heard the same pianist a second time. We could say that Peter disbelieves that Paderewski the classical pianist had musical talent, but this would not distinguish what he disbelieves from what

he believes. We would need to say that Peter disbelieves that Paderewski the classical pianist *playing Mozart* had musical talent, and that Peter believes that Paderewski the classical pianist *playing Rachmaninov* had musical talent. Well, you get the idea. (Bach 1997, pp. 230-1)

What Bach is intending to establish here is that the context sensitivity of belief reports cannot be eliminated by inserting additional material into the 'that'-clause. The problem is not one of insufficient detail.<sup>4</sup> Bach is claiming that you can add all the detail you want but the problem doesn't go away. No matter how much material is inserted into it, a 'that'-clause does not determine belief content but merely narrows it down. So, it seems that no belief report is inherently capable of specifying a belief fully.

Here's an example of an author who runs CSA and Incompleteness together in the same example:

Typically, the proposition that a sentence expresses depends not only on the meaning of the constituent words and their grammatical composition but also on the context in which the sentence is uttered. . . .

Domain of discourse: 'Everyone is present.' If the domain of discourse is students still enrolled in the course, then the proposition expressed will be the proposition that every student still enrolled in the course is present. If the domain of discourse is students who have been attending recently, then the proposition expressed will be the proposition that every student who has been attending recently is present . . . Suppose that a teacher enters a classroom, looks around and declares, 'Everyone is present.' Taken out of context, this sentence does not express any particular proposition, because, taken out of context, there is no particular domain of discourse relative to which we may interpret 'everyone' . . . Nonetheless, the sentence, as a sentence of English, carries a certain potential for expressing propositions and this potential is, in one sense, its meaning. . . . So sentences may fail to express a proposition all by themselves, but may nonetheless express a proposition in a context. When a speaker utters a sentence in some context, we may describe the proposition that the sentence expresses in that context as what is said, or what the speaker says. (Gaulker 2002, pp. 11-13)

<sup>4</sup> Bach (and other Moderate Contextualists) doesn't feel this way about all cases of incompleteness. About the sentence 'Steel isn't strong enough' he writes: 'the speaker could have made the additional conceptual material explicit by including the corresponding lexical material in his utterance' (Bach 1994a, p. 127). This will be important to us when we turn to criticism of Incompleteness Arguments.

Carston (2002) is in large part a defense of the most general version of this kind of incompleteness claim. She summarizes her views on this issue as follows:

Underdeterminacy is an essential feature of the relation between linguistic expression and the propositions (thoughts) they are used to express; generally, for any given proposition/thought, there is no sentence which fully encodes it . . . Underdeterminacy is universal and no sentence ever fully encodes the thought or proposition it is used to express. (Carston 2002, p. 29)

Only limitations of space and time prevent us from pursuing and elaborating further examples. We hope, though, that the above is more than sufficient to justify our claim that Context Shifting Arguments and Incompleteness Arguments are at the center of the contemporary debate about contextualism in philosophy and linguistics.

## CHAPTER 3

### *The Instability of Context Shifting Arguments*

Moderate Contextualism (MC) is not a stable position. A consistent (and sufficiently imaginative) Moderate Contextualist must endorse Radical Contextualism (RC). The kind of evidence that supports MC leads directly to RC. The kinds of arguments used to support MC lead directly to RC. Someone who starts down the path of contextualism, but wants to stop short of RC, can do so only arbitrarily. This arbitrariness, we will argue, is a form of inconsistency. We aim to establish this in the next three chapters. Here's the central claim of this chapter:

If Context Shifting Arguments of the kind described in Chapter 2<sup>1</sup> suffice to show that MC is true (i.e., if they suffice to show that there is a context sensitive expression or locution *e* not in the Basic Set of context sensitive expressions), then RC follows.

We cannot emphasize enough the *conditional* nature of this claim. Don't forget, we do *not* think the arguments for MC are any good. Indeed, we're going to argue MC is false. However, for the sake of argument, we will for the time being place our convictions to one side and run an entirely *internal* argument against MC. We will show that, given the standards of evidence implicit in the arguments adduced by Moderate Contextualists, RC follows. This is significant, since most Moderate Contextualists do not endorse RC.

We pointed out in the last two chapters that a CSA involves a *complex imaginative activity*. It requires conjuring up interesting scenarios, making these scenarios vivid (to yourself and to your audience), and then in some way empathizing in the most literal fashion with the participants in these

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 7 for a very special kind of CSA we like.