Semantic Content

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abstract

The goal of this paper is to propose an account of the notion of semantic content. I will try to show that my account has some advantages over the existing accounts, and that, at the same time, it captures the most valuable insights behind both parties involved in the contextualism-minimalism debate. The proposed account of semantic content differs from the more traditional ones in that it puts more burden on the parameters of the point of evaluation, leaving very little in the content itself. In particular, even in the case of indexical and demonstrative pronouns, the semantic content is, I suggest, stable across contexts, and does not include the reference of the pronoun. In a nutshell, the semantic content associated with (an utterance of) a sentence that contains one or more pronouns is a function that asks not only for a world and a time of evaluation, but also one or more individuals, before it can return a truth value.

1. Introduction

My goal in this paper is to argue that all there is to semantic content is the lexically encoded content. In particular, I want to argue that the things referred to with the help of demonstrative and indexical pronouns are neither part of semantic content, nor otherwise involved in determining semantic content. This does not mean, though, that they are not relevant to determining truth value. Thinking of it more formally, semantic content corresponds, then, to a function from a sequence of parameters that, along with possible world and time parameters, include parameters of *individuals*, into truth values.

To illustrate the idea, suppose that I say, pointing at Bruce:

(1) He is smart.

My proposal, on a first approximation, is that the semantic content of (1) is a function from triples (world, time, individual) to truth values, a function that returns value True if and only if i is smart in w at t. So, with a sentence like (1), the semantic content will yield a truth value only once it has been given a world, a time, and *an individual* to be evaluated at. And normally, our judgments of truth concerning (1) will rely on evaluating the semantic content associated with (1) at Bruce, since he is the person about whom I am talking in (1), as well as at the time at which (1) is uttered and at the world that we are in. The crucial point is that Bruce is no more part of the semantic content of (1) than are the world and the time of evaluation.

The notion of semantic content is at the heart of the contextualism/literalism debate. Even though my proposal is not directly motivated by the debate, it sheds new light on it, since it embodies the most important insights behind both camps. My proposal may be classified among *contextualist* proposals because of its emphasis on semantic underdetermination. The idea is that often, contextual elements not only fail to be *determined,* but are not even *constrained* by meaning, and yet participate in determining truth value. On the other hand, my proposal is *minimalist* to the extent that there is nothing more to semantic content than what is already encoded in the lexical meaning.[1]

The plan for the paper is as follows. In sections 2 and 3, I will lay down my proposal about semantic content. Since one of its tenets is the idea that (indexical and demonstrative) reference does not reach into semantic content, I will try to explain how I see the interplay between reference and content, and their relationship to truth value. In sections 4 and 5, I turn to the issue of finding the right criteria for *semantic* content. I will try to show that the notion that I am proposing, unlike the more traditional ones, meets the proposed criteria, and captures the insights from both contextualism and minimalism, without inheriting the drawbacks of either. In the remainder of the present section, in order to forestall possible misunderstandings, let me distance my proposal from some related ideas.

I argue that all there is to semantic content is the lexically encoded content – but I am not arguing for the converse, which I believe does not hold. That is to say, I believe that there are aspects of lexical meaning that do not reach into semantic content. To take a fairly uncontroversial example, consider the Spanish pronouns 'tu' vs. 'Usted'. It is part of the lexical meaning of the latter that ones uses it to formally address one's interlocutor. But this lexical difference does not get reflected in semantics: from the point of view of semantics, 'tu' and 'Usted' are interchangeable. More controversially, albeit more importantly for our purposes, I am attracted to the idea that even the constraint that 'you' should be used in addressing one's interlocutor, or the condition that 'I' should be used in referring to oneself, or 'she', to some female individual, are constraints that do not reach into semantic content, despite of being a central component of the lexical meaning of these pronouns.[2]

1 As we will see, semantic content, on my account, is even more “minimal” than on the standard minimalist accounts, namely Borg's, on the one hand, and Cappelen and Lepore's, on the other, both of which follow the Kaplanian tradition of taking the reference of indexicals and demonstratives to be part of semantic content.

2 The idea that those constraints are not part of semantic content is, in itself, relatively uncontroversial, and endorsed by Kaplan's followers, as it falls out rather directly from his character/content distinction. However, when we pair it with the idea that reference, too, is not part of semantic content, we arrive at the result that indexical pronouns are entirely idle from a semantic point of view; and this idea is likely to encounter some resistance.

Although it is central to my proposal that (indexical and demonstrative) reference isn't part of semantic content, I have no qualms with the idea *per se* that reference can be part of content – or, alluding to the famous exchange between Frege and Russell, that Mont Blanc, with all its snowfields, may be a constituent of a proposition. My goal is certainly not to argue for a neo-Fregean view on which demonstratives and indexicals contribute to semantic content something like an individual concept, or a mode of presentation, or some similar sense-like entity. I will not argue against such neo-Fregean views either – I will simply set them aside as orthogonal to the present discussion.

Finally, the claim that semantic content does not include more than the lexically encoded content is not exactly an empirical claim, to the extent that the notion of semantic content is primarily a theoretical notion. Some might fear that the debate about semantic content would, then, boil down to a *terminological* dispute as to which among several available levels of content deserves the label "semantic". While this worry is legitimate, I believe there is something substantial to the debate. Even if there are no semantic contents out there in the world to be discovered, studied and described, theories of semantic content are open to empirical testing. The empirical data that are central to the issue are those obtained by canvassing for ordinary speakers' intuitive judgments of truth value (of a given sentence in a given context).[3] So, for instance, a theory that systematically predicts that a certain kind of sentence, in a certain kind of context, has a truth value different from the one assigned to it by ordinary speakers, is seriously disadvantaged with respect to theories whose truth predictions match speakers' intuitions on truth value.[4] This gives us if not a plausible

3 There are other sorts of empirical data that may be relevant, such as the comparative length of time that it takes a speaker to process a given sentence in a given context. However, data of the latter sort will be left out of consideration in the present paper.

4 So for instance, the minimalist account of quantifiers, on which a sentence like "Everyone came to the party" is almost trivially false, is seriously disadvantaged – which is not to say that it must be outright eliminated. As we know, accounts of this sort typically have a story to tell that explains the mismatch between intuitive vs. theoretically correct assignments of truth value (see e.g. Bach (2002)). The point is that the motivations for such a view would have to be so strong as to outbalance its failure to provide intuitively correct truth predictions.

criterion, then at least a desideratum: the notion of semantic content should play a role in a theory that operates over sentences (in context) and assigns them truth values in accordance with empirically gathered data. But this need not be the only criterion. When several theories do equally well on the task of truth value predictions, there may still be reasons to judge some superior to others, depending on a number of other criteria.

2. The Interplay between Reference and Meaning

As emphasized at the outset, removing reference from semantic content does not mean removing it altogether from the entire picture. To the contrary, reference still plays an important role in the account that I am proposing. The goal of this section is to go back to some motivations behind the theories of direct reference, and to show how they fit into the present picture.

I take it to be something of a platitude that communication presupposes that we should be able to convey information *about* people and things around us, and that this, in turn, strongly suggests that we should be able to *refer* to those things *directly*. Here is an example of what I take to be a paradigmatic case of direct reference. Suppose that we are staring at a certain painting – let's say, at Rembrandt's masterpiece *The Night Watch*, and I simply say:

(2) Impressive!

I will be referring to that very painting of Rembrandt, and I will be saying *of it* that it is impressive. Similarly, suppose that, having just tasted a certain cake, I simply say “Delicious.” Then I will be saying *of that very cake* that it is delicious and will be referring to it directly.

By way of yet another example, suppose that I tell you:

(3) We'll be late.

To determine the truth value of my utterance of (3) – i.e. whether we'll be late – it is crucial to know not only who counts as 'we', but also what it is that I am saying that we will be late for. If what I am talking about is some concert to which we are going, and we are late for it, (3) will be true, but if what I am talking about is the submission of a project, and we manage to meet the deadline, (3) is false. This implicit reference to the event for which we are said to be late is, I suggest, to be included among the paradigmatic cases of direct reference.

What these examples illustrate is a form of reference that makes it possible to talk about a particular thing or event without having to use any expression for it, reference that relies entirely on the non-linguistic contextual setting in which communication takes place. It is this form of reference that I take to be direct reference *par excellence*. Reference supported by words, be they pronouns, names, or descriptions, is merely parasitic on this other, more basic form of reference.

It is easy to confuse direct reference with the use of indexicals. A possible explanation of why indexicals are so often thought to be devices of direct reference is that in theorizing about them, philosophers often focus on those uses on which indexicals do no interesting semantic or pragmatic work – rather, they merely "articulate" the reference. Suppose that the following are uttered in the same situations in which (2) and (3) were uttered:

(4) This is impressive!

(5) We'll be late for it.

These appear to be equivalent ways of expressing the same thing as in (2) and (3). Note, however, that (5) sounds rather odd in situations in which the bare "We'll be late" is fine; that is, situations in which there is no linguistic antecedent for the pronoun 'it' and no event contrasted with the one for which I say that we'll be late.[5] On the other hand, the use of 'this' in (4) comes more naturally, since it is justified from the standpoint of syntax alone.

It is cases like (4) or (5) that seem to support the idea that we use indexicals in order to refer to things, and that indexicals merely stand for their reference. And that idea I believe to be wrong. Of course, if one focuses on those cases in which the

5 Compare with: "The reception is at 6, so we'll be late for it, but not for the concert."

speaker has used an indexical when she could have used no word at all, it is somewhat difficult to say what else the indexical is there for, other than to articulate the reference. In such cases, the speaker could have referred *directly*, making it clear to her audience what she was referring to, without having recourse to *any* linguistic expression. But the role of indexicals – at least, when they are not idle the way they are in (4) and (5) – is precisely to assist the speaker in making reference to something, and to help the audience figure out what it is to which the speaker is referring.

To summarize my proposal, direct reference is, first and foremost, *referring directly*, which is an action performed by the speaker, and is, therefore, a primarily pragmatic phenomenon. Direct reference does not require the use of any expression that would stand for the thing referred to, and when it is accompanied by the use of an indexical, the speaker will typically use the indexical in order to help her audience figure out what it is to which *she*, *qua* speaker, is referring. The idea is that the way in which indexicals help figuring out what is being referred to, is by constraining the range of potential referents by means of constraints lexically encoded in their meaning. The remainder of the section explores this idea.

It is desirable to construe the notion of lexical meaning (of a given expression) in such a way that it captures the sort of information that any speaker competent with the expression possesses merely in virtue of her knowledge of the language. The meaning of 'this', for example, encodes the information that the thing talked about is salient and, perhaps, proximal. Although it is convenient to talk of the meaning of 'this' as something like “the most salient thing proximal to the speaker”, or of the meaning of 'I' as “the speaker”, we should not expect to be able to pin down the lexical meaning of an indexical by means of some definite description. We may want to use such descriptions simply as *approximations* to the lexical meaning of the word, just as we may use the description “hand-held instrument containing an interior strip of solid material that produces marks used to write or draw” to explain what the common noun 'pencil' means. But of course, no one believes that this description *is* the lexical meaning of the word 'pencil', and there is similarly no reason to think that the condition of e.g. speakerhood should capture the lexical meaning of the indexical 'I', or that salience should be an essential component to the lexical meaning of the demonstrative 'this'.

Here is a picture of how indexicals work, and of the role that their lexical meanings play. Suppose that we are at a party, and that there is a loud and noticeable couple, Bruce and Ann. I want to warn you that Ann is obnoxious, so I say:

(6) She is obnoxious.

The 3rd person pronoun 'she' has only a very poor lexical meaning. All that is lexically encoded is that the person referred to should be *female*. But even this information, rather uninteresting in itself, is doing something very useful in communication. It helps you, *qua* hearer, figure out that it is Ann that I am referring to, since she is the one who, among the things or people to whom I *might* be referring, satisfies most obviously the condition associated with the pronoun 'she'.

Contrast the previous case with a similar case in which Ann is extremely loud and noticeable, and our attention is already focused on her, and I utter the same sentence as before, namely:

(7) She is obnoxious.

In both (6) and (7), I, *qua* speaker, am directly referring to Ann, with the intention of telling to you something about her. But in (7), unlike (6), I do not need to worry much about helping you figure out to whom I am referring. Ann is already so salient that she will be picked up by default as the most likely referent. In this kind of case, the lexical meaning of the pronoun is, as I like to say, *idle*. The conditions lexically encoded in the pronoun are not put at work for communicational purposes; the pronoun is there primarily for syntactic reasons. In a language in which the grammatical subject is not mandatory, I could have simply said:

(8) Obnoxious.

Note that (8) would not have worked in the context of (6), in which Bruce and Ann are equally salient and equally likely to be referred to by default.

Finally, consider a situation similar to that of (6), except that instead of Bruce and Ann we have *Carla* and Ann, both of whom are equally salient and noticeable. I again want to inform you that Ann is obnoxious, but now it will not work to simply say "She is obnoxious." For, I have given you no hints that will let you decide whether I am talking about Ann or, rather, about Carla. In such situations, there are typically two ways to go. One is to enhance the salience of the person referred to, for example, by pointing at her with a finger. Once I make sure that Ann has been raised in salience over Carla, I can go back and just use the pronoun 'she', as in (6) or (7). But in many contexts, that is not the best strategy. For instance, it is not polite to point at people, and even if I did, it may still be difficult for you to decide whether I am pointing at Ann or at Carla (e.g. if they are standing next to each other and my hand is shaking). A better strategy is to use more language. For instance, I might say:

(9) That woman wearing a white blouse is obnoxious.

The lexical meaning of the complex demonstrative in (9) contributes a new constraint ('wearing a white blouse') that will help you decide that I must be referring to Ann.

3. Rethinking Semantic Content

Now that I have described the interplay between reference and the use of indexicals, let me turn back to the notion of semantic content to see where and how it fits into the picture. Recall the case in which, in reference to Rembrandt's *Night Watch,* I simply say "Impressive." The suggestion is that the semantic content in this case is simply a property; namely, impressiveness. The object to which that property is attributed, *The Night Watch*, is not part of semantic content. Rather, it is that with respect to which semantic content will be normally evaluated for a truth value, just as it will be evaluated for a truth value at a certain time and with respect to a certain state of affairs (or a possible world).[6] Speaking more technically, the semantic content in this case is

6 Let us, for the sake of simplicity, pretend at this stage that impressiveness is indeed a property, i.e. a one-place predicate that applies to the object said to be impressive and does not require any other argument. Beware, though, that this simplification obliterates the fact that what is impressive to me

a function that takes an object, a time, and a possible world (and, if needed, a number of other parameters), and returns a truth value: it will return True if the object at stake is impressive at that time and in that world, and False otherwise.

On a first approximation, the same story goes for the case in which, in reference to Ann, I say:

(10) She is obnoxious.

The semantic content associated with (10) corresponds to a function that takes an individual, a time and a world, and returns True if that individual is obnoxious at that time and in that world, and False otherwise.

There is an issue, however: what is the difference (if any) between the semantic content associated with (10) and that associated with its pronoun-free variant (8), i.e. with the mere "obnoxious"? Similarly, how does the semantic content associated with "impressive" differ (if at all) from that associated with "this is impressive"?

In other words, given that indexicals do not contribute any reference to content, do they contribute anything else, and what? To these questions I see two equally plausible (sets of) answers. I will distinguish the two views by calling the one "inclusive" and the other "exclusive".

On the *inclusive* view, the constraints lexically encoded in indexicals are part of semantic content. At first, one could suggest that the semantic content associated with (10) is a function that takes an individual, time and world, and returns True if that individual is obnoxious *and female* at that time and in that world, and False otherwise. But this will not work for several reasons. For one, imagine that Ann is about to change sex, and that I say, in reference to her:

(11) Soon she will be a man.

Then we want (11) to come out true, but on the suggestion outlined, (11) is

need not be impressive to you. In other words, it would be more accurate to consider impressiveness as a *relational* property: something can be impressive with respect to some agents and unimpressive with respect to others. I discussed the semantics of such predicates and their relationship to semantic content in Stojanovic 2007.

presumably true at individual i, time t and world w iff there is a time t' soon after t such that i is a man *and female* at t' in w.

The problem can be solved by using the mechanism of *double indexing*, which is needed for independent reasons anyway (see e.g. Crossley and Humberstone (1977), Kaplan (1977), Lewis (1980)).[7] The idea is that we evaluate contents not just at one time and one world, but rather, at a pair of times and a pair of worlds, the first of which are the "designated" time and world (the now and the actuality), the second of which are the time and the world deployed in the recursive truth clauses of non-indexical temporal and modal operators. This amounts to saying that (11) is true at an individual i, a pair of times (t^*, t) and a pair of worlds (w^*, w) iff i is female at t^* and w^* and there is a time t' soon after t such that i is female at t' in w.

Unfortunately, the outlined suggestion has other problems. While it accounts for the interaction between indexicals and modal or temporal operators, it has no impact on their interaction with usual truth-functional operators, such as negation. Thus, even with double indexing granted, if we evaluate the semantic content associated with (10) at Bruce, it will return False (since Bruce isn't a *she*). But then, assuming the usual truth clause for negation, the following will be true when evaluated at Bruce:

(12) It's not the case that she is obnoxious.

Yet if a speaker says (12) in reference to Bruce, whom let us furthermore suppose to be obnoxious, we would not take her to be speaking truth. So, unless we consider indexicals as scope-taking devices that can take wide scope over negation, the inclusive view has to replace or modify the proposed truth clause.

While there may be several solutions, the most plausible, I think, is to take the semantic content associated with (10) to be a *partial* function, namely, a function that takes an individual i, a pair of times (t^*, t) and a pair of worlds (w^*, w), and returns True if i is female at t^* and w^* and i is obnoxious at t and w, returns False if i is female at t^* and w^* and i is not obnoxious at t and w, and simply does not return

7 Kaplan thinks, though, that double indexing is not enough, and tends to interpret all the motivations for double indexing as motivations for his character/content distinction. For discussion, see Stojanovic (2008): §1.5.

anything (i.e. is undefined) if i fails to be female at t^* and w^*.[8]

Turning to the *exclusive* view, its answer to the question of the difference between the semantic contents respectively associated with (10) and its pronoun-free variant (8), and similarly between (2) and (4), is very simple: there is no difference. The semantic content of (10) just is the property of being obnoxious, i.e. a total function that takes an individual, a time and a world (or sequences thereof), and returns True if the individual at stake is obnoxious at the time and in the world of evaluation, and False otherwise. In other words, on the exclusive view, indexical and demonstrative pronouns do not contribute anything to semantic content. The semantic content of (10), if evaluated at Bruce, would indeed return True in case Bruce is obnoxious. The lexical meaning of 'she' in (10) would, then, intervene at a *post*-semantic stage, at which semantic content gets evaluated for a truth value. Its role would be to indicate that only individuals who satisfy the lexically encoded constraint (i.e. who are female) may be plausibly taken as values for the parameters at which the content of (10) is to receive its truth value.

On either view, the semantic content associated with the sentence "She is obnoxious" is stable across contexts, and remains the same regardless of whether the speaker is talking of Ann, Carla, or anyone else. On the exclusive – but not on the inclusive view – that same content is also associated with the sentences "He is obnoxious" or "You are obnoxious", given that indexicals operate only at a post-semantic level, contributing nothing at all to semantic content.

I believe that the disagreement between the two views is more terminological than substantial.[9] Whether or not we think of semantic content as including the constraints lexically encoded in indexicals, the resulting notions of content will be equally plausible (in particular, they will meet equally well the criteria discussed in the next section). This does not mean, though, that there are no interesting differences between

8 This move will be familiar from formal theories of presupposition. Indeed, I believe that the most attractive variant of the inclusive view is that which construes the constraints lexically encoded in the meaning of pronouns as presuppositions (albeit of a special sort).

9 On a personal note, I used to defend the inclusive view (e.g. in Stojanovic 2008), but have been lately more in favor of the exclusive view.

the two views. The inclusive view has the disadvantage of positing some sort of truth-value gaps, but the advantage of preserving more of the lexically encoded meaning within semantic content. It can also account for the intuition that from a true utterance of e.g. "She is obnoxious" it follows *semantically* (perhaps even *logically*) that there is someone who is both female and obnoxious. On the other hand, the exclusive view can account for the intuition that a speaker who mistakenly uses 'she' for Bruce can still express something *true* about Bruce (in case Bruce satisfies what is predicated of him). Regardless of which view's motivations ultimately prevail, for the purposes of the present paper, either view will do. I will take them to be on a par, and will, for simplicity, assume the exclusive view in what follows.

4. The Semantics/Pragmatics Distinction

The problem of where to draw the line between semantics and pragmatics has received considerable attention in the past decade.[10] While I think that there is indeed such a problem for the Kaplanian views, which are eventually forced to make some arbitrary decisions and give up some plausible criteria for what may count as 'semantics', I will argue that there are no such problems for my view. By insisting that even in the case of indexical and demonstrative pronouns, reference does not reach into semantic content, we will be able to draw the semantics/pragmatics distinction in a way that preserves all the desirable criteria. I will start by saying what those criteria are, then explain why they cannot be preserved within the Kaplanian tradition, and show that indexical pronouns are quite essential to the problem.

Before indexicality and other cases of systematic context-dependence came to bear on the discussion of the semantics/pragmatics distinction, we may speculate that there was some sort of consensus, and that the following criteria were believed to converge unproblematically towards a single distinction. The criteria may be roughly put as follows:

10 A number of collections of articles specifically on this issue may be mentioned: Turner (ed.) 1999, Bianchi (ed.) 2004, Szabo (ed.) 2006, Stojanovic (ed.) 2008, to mention only a few.

(i) semantic elements are **lexically encoded** in the meaning of the words; pragmatic elements are not lexically encoded;

(ii) pragmatic elements are those that deploy various contextual factors; semantic elements are **context-insensitive**;

(iii) semantic elements determine **truth conditions**; pragmatic elements are truth-conditionally inert;

(iv) semantic elements obey **compositionality**; pragmatic elements are not necessarily compositional.

To get a better understanding of the motivations behind the four criteria, let us go back to our working example. In reference to Ann, I tell you:

(13) She is obnoxious.

Suppose, though, that Ann's behavior already makes it obvious that she is obnoxious. In that case, by telling you that she is obnoxious, I am telling you something that you already know, and that I know that you know, hence something completely uninformative. Still, my reasons for saying (1) need not be to *inform* you that Ann is obnoxious, but rather, to *convey* something along the lines of

(14) I suggest we avoid Ann for the rest of the evening.

What I would thus convey with (13) – which is what I would have *expressed* had I uttered the sentence in (14) – is uncontroversially only a *pragmatic* element with respect to (13). And indeed, it falls out as *pragmatic* according to all four criteria:

(i) my suggestion that we avoid Ann for the rest of the evening is **not** lexically encoded in the meaning of sentence uttered in (13);

(ii) in order to convey that suggestion, I must rely on various **contextual factors**; my interlocutor must reason about what my intentions were in uttering (13), etc.;

(iii) the suggestion conveyed has no bearing on the **truth** conditions of (13); (13) is true if Ann is obnoxious and false if she isn't, and that is so regardless of how we feel about avoiding her for the rest of the evening;

(iv) what I convey does not enter the possible **compositional derivations** that one can perform on the sentence uttered in (13); for instance, “She is **not** obnoxious” does not necessarily convey that I **do not** suggest we avoid her for the rest of the evening.

So far so good. But things start getting complicated as we start encountering elements that according to some criteria appear to fall out as *semantic*, while according to other criteria, they come out *pragmatic*. The case at point is precisely indexicality. Ann herself, about whom I am talking, is she a semantic or a pragmatic element? According to criterion (i), taken at face value, she is a *pragmatic* element. For, the lexical meaning of 'she' does not *encode* that the word should stand precisely for Ann. If it did, then every time I used the pronoun 'she' I would be talking of Ann, which is absurd. Now, one could tamper with the idea of lexical encoding. For instance, for someone like Recanati, the mere fact that there is a *word*, 'she', that appears to stand for Ann, and that the lexical meaning of this word invites you to search for a salient female, would be sufficient to render Ann lexically encoded in the sentence in (13). Be this as it may, what remains uncontroversial is that Ann herself is not *part of* the lexical meaning of 'she'. Moreover, Ann doesn't turn out to be a semantic element according to criterion (ii) either. Obviously one needs context in order to pick out Ann and associate her with the sentence in (13). So, on criterion (ii), Ann is only a pragmatic element in (13); although we will shortly see that one may tamper with the notion of contextuality as well. But now, when you take criterion (iii), at least at face value, Ann would seem to fall out as a *semantic* element in (13). For, the truth of (13) depends on how things are with Ann herself, and on whether or not *she* is obnoxious. Criterion (iv) is similarly respected. On a suitable construal, Ann is preserved in the compositional derivations of (13); e.g. the negation of (13) ascribes lack of obnoxiousness to the same person to which (13) ascribes obnoxiousness, namely Ann.

The standard, Kaplanian response to the case of indexicals is to hold onto criteria (iii) (truth-conditionality) and (iv) (compositionality), and to give up criteria (i) and (ii), taken at face value. But since there is still something plausible about these, rather than just give them up, one may try to amend them. I have already pointed out how one can reinterpret the idea of lexical encoding in such a way that Ann ends up being "lexically encoded" in (13). And, as for criterion (ii), one might want to allow for "semantic contextuality" – that is, for the idea that certain semantic elements depend upon the context. Precisely, indexicals are believed to contribute *contextual* elements to *semantic* content. But let us see more closely where this assumption leads.

Indexicality has opened the gates of semantics to contextuality, but the general feeling seems to be that one needs to place a guard at those gates. If we let too much context in, it will mess up our semantics. So the guard should only let in those contextual elements that are "invited" – invited into semantic content by some syntactic element and its lexical meaning jointly. The idea is that in the syntax of (13), there is an element – the pronoun 'she' – whose lexical meaning appears to "invite" an element from the context. The lexical meaning tells you to look into the context of utterance and search for the most salient female. Ann is, then, an element that, sure, comes from the context, but is called for by the pronoun 'she' and its lexical meaning, which makes her a "good" element, and therefore admissible into semantics.

The guard at the semantics' gates is, then, supposed to let in those contextual elements that have been invited by some syntactic element (and its meaning), and deny entrance to anything else. But can we be sure that even then, he won't let too much context in? If our guard has been taught that Ann is a good element and that he should let her into the semantic content of (13), then he will find it quite difficult to turn away certain other contextual elements. And if he lets those in, he will soon be holding the gates of semantics wide open to context and pragmatics.[11] For reasons of space, instead of developing the argument in detail, let me make the point on an example. Suppose that Bruce says:[12]

11 It has been argued, e.g. in Cappelen and Lepore (2005), that once we start letting context into semantics, we get onto a slippery slope: there is no way to prevent letting more and more context in. However, their argument assumes that the slippery slope only begins after indexicals: maybe with quantifier domains, maybe with gradable adjectives, maybe with the location argument involved in predicates such as 'rain'. What interests me, on the other hand, is the idea (not theirs, to be sure) that as soon as one lets *any* context in, as one would if one allowed the values of indexicals to be part of semantic content, one will have already stepped onto a slippery slope.

12 The example is inspired by one form François Recanati, although he uses it for a different purpose.

(15) Today I didn't stop that car at a pedestrian crossing.

Even if we fix the day on which Bruce says it, the world we are in, and the car about which Bruce is talking, we are still unable to determine the truth value. In one context, (15) will be true, and in another, false. For, suppose that Bruce is a policeman, and that, while he was on duty, he didn't stop the car under consideration at a pedestrian crossing; that is, he didn't stop it the way a policeman stops a car, as by signaling 'stop' to the driver. On the other hand, suppose that Bruce himself was driving that same car, and that he didn't stop it at a pedestrian crossing; that is, he didn't stop it the way a driver stops a car, as by pressing the breaks. In other words, in a context in which what is relevant is policeman's way of stopping a car, (15) is true, while in a context in which what is relevant is driver's way of stopping a car, (15) is false.

Now, the case of (15) is relevant to the semantics/pragmatics distinction, as drawn by the mainstream view, for the following reason. Even when the indexical elements of (15), viz. 'today', 'I', and 'that car', have been resolved, the truth value of (15) still depends on the context, in a way that cannot be assimilated to the dependence of truth value on the world and the time of evaluation.[13] This leads to the following trilemma:

(a) maintain a boundary between “good” and “bad” context, in such a way that (15) is true iff on the day of (15), Bruce didn't stop the car *simpliciter*.

(b) maintain a boundary between “good” and “bad” context, in such a way that a manner of stopping is, after all, a "good" element, so that (15) is true iff on the day of (15), Bruce didn't stop the car in the manner picked out in the context of (15).

(c) give up the distinction between “good” and “bad” context, and consequently, give up criterion (ii) as a criterion for the semantics/pragmatics distinction.

Option (c) is endorsed by radical contextualists, who hold that pragmatics freely intrudes into semantics, while option (b) seems to be rejected in unison.[14] What I

13 At least, it cannot be *easily* assimilated to this form of dependence, although that is precisely the move taken by Predelli (2005) in order to rebutt the challenges to truth-conditional semantics coming from radical contextualists such as John Searle and Charles Travis.

14 For the sake of exhaustivity, let me mention that something like option (b) is defended in Rothschild and Segal (2009), although with respect to a different sort of case. More importantly, to take verbs like

would like to argue now is that one who goes for option (a) can only do so at the cost of imposing an arbitrary divide between "good" and "bad" context. The standard manoeuvre is to distinguish the way in which 'she' is context-dependent from the way in which 'stop' is (or, if you prefer, *isn't*) context-dependent. But let us try to put ourselves in the shoes of that guard at the semantics' gates: we need to decide whether to admit *the manner of stopping a car* (viz. policeman's manner or driver's manner) into semantic content. So we first ask ourselves: is there a syntactic element that invites the manner of stopping into semantic content? Well, yes, presumably the word 'stop' itself. We then ask: is the manner in which someone stops something an aspect of the lexical meaning of 'stop'? Well, nothing prevents us from taking the lexical meaning of 'stop' to be such. After all, in the same way in which the lexical meaning of 'she' only constrains the referent to being a female, the lexical meaning of 'stop' could similarly *constrain* its referent, which is a two-place relation, to being a certain way – e.g. such that the agent brings the patient to a halt, regardless of *how* he does it. So for example, both policeman-stopping and driver-stopping satisfy the constraint of being relations of stopping, even if they are different relations. In other words, there does not seem to be any principled reason that one could invoke in order to prevent the manner of stopping from reaching into semantic content.

5. Bridging the Gap between Contextualism and Minimalism

Let me turn back to the criteria presented at the beginning of the previous section, to show how they may be rehabilitated through my account of semantic content. On my account, there is no more to semantic content than the lexical meaning, for indexical and non-indexical expressions alike. That immediately takes care of criterion (i), on which semantics deals at most with what is lexically encoded. It also takes care of criterion (ii), given that lexical meaning does not vary with the context. In other

'stop' to be indexical predicates, and the way in which a car is stopped to be, after all, a "good" element of context, is tantamount to sliding down to pretty much to the bottom of the slippery slope. For, there is a fair amount of concensus among philosophers and semanticists to the effect that such verbs cannot, and should not, be classified among indexicals of any kind.

words, all contextuality is *pragmatic* contextuality. So the only potentially problematic criterion is criterion (iii):

(iii) semantic elements determine **truth conditions**;
pragmatic elements are truth-conditionally inert.

Reconsider our working example:

(16) She is obnoxious.

While we want the truth value of (16) to depend directly on the person to whom I am referring in (16), we do not want that person to be part of the semantic content associated with (16). Does this commit us to giving up criterion (iii)? No, and this is where the received view is guilty of confusion, in that it thinks that all truth conditions must be amenable to *worldly* conditions; that is, that a condition associated with some sentence S may count as a "truth condition" only if it specifies *what the world must be like* for the sentence to be true. I submit that there are no good theoretical or even practical reasons to insist that truth conditions must be *worldly* conditions. Truth conditions may be conditions pretty much on anything. For example, take the condition of being bigger than. That is a condition on *pairs* of objects – a condition that obtains when the first one is bigger than the second. We can think of this condition as being a *truth condition* associated with the open sentence "x is bigger than y". Now, recall that a sentence that contains an indexical is precisely such an "open" sentence, to the extent that its content is a function from an individual, a time and a world (or sequences thereof), to truth values. In other words, its semantic content *is* a truth condition, although not only on what the world needs to be like, but also on what the other parameters of evaluation need to be like, for the sentence to be true. The individual referred to, at which content is evaluated, will thus have an impact on truth *value*, although not necessarily on truth *conditions* – so long as these are allowed to be conditions on more than just the world. And what criterion (iii) says is that pragmatic elements do not affect truth conditions, which does not prevent them from possibly affecting truth value. In sum, once we lift the confusion over the question of whether an element affects truth *value* or truth *conditions*, we see that there are no compelling reasons to think that the person talked about in a case such as (16) should be part of semantic content.

As for criterion (iv) (compositionality), the fact that the Kaplanian notion of content is compositional does not mean that this must be *semantic* content. As Kaplan himself observed, his notion of *character* is also compositional. And if we think of semantic content as a function from a sequence of parameters to truth values, again, such functions meet criterion (iv) (cf. Lewis (1980)). Compositionality is, then, only a necessary criterion that does not cut in favor of the Kaplanian view over my own view – nor, for that matter, the other way round.

I would like to end the paper with a brief discussion of the place that my account would occupy in the debate between contextualism and minimalism. The upshot of the discussion will be that the debate turns on certain issues that are ill-conceived, and that if we think of semantic content along the lines of my proposal, we can satisfy both parties in the debate.

My proposal incorporates contextualist as well as minimalist insights, while avoiding the problems of either camp. To make the point clear, recall one of our earlier examples:

(17) We'll be late.

One of the driving motivations behind contextualism is to offer an account that predicts a truth value for (17) in accordance with speakers' intuitions. This, in turn, implies that the truth value of (17) must be multiply context-sensitive: the context needs to tell us not only which group of people are "we", but also what it is that we will be late for. In a context in which I am talking about tonight's concert, and we are late for it, (17) is true, while in a context in which I am talking about the submission of our project, and we are not late for it, (17) is false.[15] One of the driving motivations behind minimalism, on the other hand, is to maintain a boundary between semantics

15 For the sake of simplicity, I am ignoring the fact that (17) involves future contingency, and that we might want to say that at the time when I utter it, (17) does not have any truth value yet, but only obtains one from the moment when it becomes settled whether we are late for the event at stake; cf. MacFarlane (2002).

and pragmatics and to make room for a notion of semantic content that mirrors the syntactic structure of the sentence and does not depend on any pragmatic processes involving reasoning about one's interlocutor's beliefs or intentions. The problem with the existing minimalist accounts, such as Borg (2004) and Cappelen and Lepore (2005), is twofold.[16] First, given that they allow for *some* contextuality in semantics, they ought to come up with non-arbitrary criteria for determining *how much* contextuality, and *of which kind*, can go into semantics. But, as we saw in the previous section, the prospects of distinguishing "good" contextual elements from "bad" ones are quite hopeless. Secondly, minimalism takes it for granted that semantic content should be propositional, in the sense of providing a condition on what the world must be like for the sentence, as used in a context, to be true. This means that once we fix the group referred to with "we" in (17), we should only ask what the world will be like in order to determine whether (17) is true. But the idea that there is such a thing as being late *simpliciter* is, to say the least, very bizarre. To be late is to be late *for* something. With this observation in mind, minimalism could say that (17) is true iff there is some event or another such that the group referred to with "we" is late for that event. But this will render (17) almost trivially true. In turn, such a systematic mismatch between the truth values predicted by minimalist semantics vs. by speakers' intuitions makes minimalism seriously disadvantaged in comparison with other accounts that provide empirically adequate predictions of truth value (see end of section 1 and footnote 4 for discussion).

I take it to be an advantage of my account that, in the contextualism/minimalism debate, it gives reason to both parties in the debate. It gives reason to contextualism to the extent that contextual elements that are not encoded in the lexical meaning, and perhaps not even constrained by it, are involved in determining truth value. And it

16 One might object that I am treating Borg's minimalism and Cappelen and Lepore's minimalism as being the same, while there are some significant differences, such as Borg's emphasis that contextual features can only reach into semantic content if they can be "formally modeled." A discussion of the differences between these two versions of minimalism would take us astray. More importantly, adding the constraint of formal tractability does not solve the demarcation problem: the manner of stopping a car (to take up the example from (15)) is just as fit for formal modeling as is the reference of pronouns.

gives reason to minimalism to the extent that such contextual elements are not part of semantic content.[17] For, the semantic content associated with (17) is, on my account, a function that takes a group of individuals *G*, an event *e*, a time *t* and a world *w*, and returns True iff there is a time *t′* later than *t* such that *Gs* are late for *e* at *t′* in *w*. Thus if I say (17) while talking about the concert to which we are going, the concert itself isn't part of the semantic content associated with (17) (and, for that matter, *we* aren't part of it either). However, the truth value of (17) will depend on whether we are late *for that very concert*; and that is because in evaluating the semantic content of (17) for a truth value, the values assigned to the relevant parameters of evaluations are typically taken to be the things, people or events about which the speaker is talking.

By way of a final remark, it is worth pointing out that contextualism and relativism are reconcilable in this way only if semantic content isn't necessarily propositional. In other words, semantic content need not specify what the world itself should be like regardless of anything else in order for the sentence to be true. As noted previously, the assumption of propositionality is often merely *implicit* in contextualist and literalist approaches. Once we become aware of the possibility of contents whose truth value varies not only with worlds, and with times, but also with individuals at which content is evaluated, we might wonder whether there is anything that would prevent such contents from playing the role of *semantic* content. I believe that there isn't, but even if there were, the burden of proof would be on those who hold that semantic content has to be propositional.[18]

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17 In MacFarlane (2007), we find an outline of a position that similarly gives reason to both contextualism and minimalism. However, the issue of indexicals' contribution to semantic content is not discussed by MacFarlane.

18 In a famous passage, Frege wrote: "But are there not thoughts which are true today but false in six months' time? The thought, for example, that the tree there is covered with green leaves, will surely be false in six months' time. No, for it is not the same thought at all. The words 'This tree is covered with green leaves' are not sufficient by themselves to constitute the expression of a thought, for the time of utterance is involved as well. (...) Only a sentence with the time-specification filled out, a sentence complete in every respect, expresses a thought." (Frege 1918: 27). Someone moved by Frege's remarks who wanted semantic content to be the content of thought would thus have a motivation for insisting on propositionality. Note, however, that what Frege does here is state a position, rather than provide an

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