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It was the explicit aim of my paper 'Indexical Relativism versus Genuine Relativism' to 'characterize and compare' (p. 297) two different forms of relativism. One form, exemplified by Harman's and Dreier's moral relativism (Harman, 1975 and Dreier, 1990), involves the claim that certain sentences express different propositions in different contexts of utterance, much like indexical sentences – hence the name 'indexical relativism'. The other form involves the claim that the truth-value of certain contents or propositions depends on certain non-standard parameters, i.e. depends not just on a possible world. The explicit conclusion of the paper was that the two forms differ significantly.[1]

Dan López de Sa (2007) seems quite happy to grant my main conclusion, namely that there is a significant difference between these two forms of relativism. However, López de Sa raises two worthwhile issues. First, he proposes a taxonomy of relativist views, one on which my 'genuine relativism' turns out to be the disjunction of two distinct views. Secondly, he offers an answer to a difficulty I raised for some forms of indexical relativism. I shall comment on each point.

1   Content, Context and Index

According to the standard framework derived from Kaplan (1977) and Lewis (1980),[2] one should think of the semantics of indexical languages along the following lines. Sentences express contents (= propositions) in contexts of use. Contents have a truth-value in a 'circumstance of evaluation' (Kaplan) or at an 'index' (Lewis):

Sentence + context of use → content (= proposition)

$$\text{Content} + \text{circumstance (= index)} \rightarrow \text{truth–value}$$

For example, the sentence 'Today it's sunny in Birmingham' expresses different contents depending on the context in which it is used: if it's used

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on 12 January 2007 then it expresses the content that that day it was sunny in Birmingham, whereas if it's used on 10 January 2007 then it expresses the content that on that different day it was sunny in Birmingham. The first content is true, while the second is false – at least as things are actually. But things might have been different from the way they actually are. In a possible situation where 10 January 2007 was sunny too, the second content is also true. Thus the truth-values of contents are relative to possible situations. In the formal framework: contents are functions from circumstances of evaluation (or indices) to truth-values. Which content an indexical sentence expresses itself depends on the context in which it is used.

According to this framework, then, one can describe the semantic properties of the sentences of a language by defining a three-place truth-predicate $T(s, c, i)$, where s is a sentence, c is a context of use and i is a circumstance (or index).[3]

The idea that contents (propositions) vary in truth-value with a circumstance of evaluation *understood as a possible world* is extremely familiar among philosophers of language and semanticists, and it is one that plays a role in standard treatments of modality. Given that contents vary their truth-value with possible worlds, one can define for each content p another content p^* which is true at a world w just if the original content p is true at every (some) world meeting some condition. The standard treatment of modal expressions, such as 'necessarily', exploits this and treats them as 'operators'. Operators are expressions that, when applied to a formula φ, result in a new formula φ^* which is true at a context c and possible world w just if the original formula φ is true is true at at c and at some or all worlds w^* meeting a certain condition. For example, the formula '*Necessarily* it is sunny in Birmingham today' is true at a context c and world w just if for all worlds w^*,[4] 'It is sunny in Birmingham today' is true at c and w^*. Usually, this treatment of modality is the only purpose of the circumstance (index) parameter, so that standardly semanticists think of circumstances of evaluation (indices) just as possible worlds.

However, at its original conception, the circumstances (index) parameter was designed to allow one to do more with it. Thus, for example, Kaplan thought of the circumstance parameter as comprising a time parameter in addition to the possible world parameter. This in turn allowed him to treat tenses as operators, along exactly the same lines as modal operators. He thought of the sentence 'It is sunny in Birmingham' as expressing a *tensed* proposition, i.e. a proposition the truth-value of which varies with time: it is true at some times and not true at other times. Consequently, he thought of sentences like 'It is always sunny in Birmingham' as expressing an untensed proposition that results from the application of an operator '*always*' to the tensed sentence 'It is sunny in Birmingham.' The proposition that it is always sunny in Birmingham is true at a time just if the proposition that it is sunny in Birmingham is true at all times. More interestingly, the proposition

that it *was* sunny in Birmingham can be seen as the proposition that is true at a time *t* just if the proposition that it *is* sunny in Birmingham is true at all times prior to *t*.

This way of thinking about tenses does perhaps seem strange now. Nowadays a quantifier treatment of tenses is standard (see King, 2003). But philosophers like Prior, Kaplan and others defend the operator view of tenses. This is not the only use to which circumstances of evaluation can be put. Lewis, for example, has suggested other non-standard additions to the circumstances parameter, such as a standard of precision (Lewis, 1975). Thus, we can think of a proposition's truth-value as varying with a standard of precision. The proposition that my lawn is flat is true on the standards of precision one should adopt when playing croquet, but it's not true on the standards of precision one should adopt when playing marbles. Such an extra circumstantial parameter (parameter of index) opens up the possibility of introducing further propositional operators, such as the operator 'by all standards' or 'by all standards stricter than those of croquet' etc. There are many other potential areas of application (see my 2007 for a more detailed exposition).

Now, how does the 'genuine relativist' I described in the paper fit into this picture? López de Sa rightly points out that I refrained in that paper from going into the kind of detail that would locate a precise position in the Lewis–Kaplan framework. What I made clear was that the indexical relativist thinks that a sentence such as 'Abortion is wrong' expresses different contents (= propositions) in different contexts of use, but that these contents themselves have their truth-values absolutely, while the genuine relativist thinks that such a sentence expresses the same content (proposition) in all contexts of use, but that this content varies in its truth-value with a parameter I generically called 'perspective'.

Let me briefly review López de Sa's taxonomy. Faced with the sentence 'Abortion is wrong' (= S) and the view that its truth-value varies with some parameter (such as a moral code), the Kaplan–Lewis framework offers several diagnoses:

(i) Indexical contextualism (= indexical relativism): the sentence expresses different propositions on different occasions of use, e.g. it expresses the proposition that abortion is wrong according to moral code A in one context c_1, and it expresses the proposition that abortion is wrong according to moral code B in another context c_2. The sentence is therefore *context*-sensitive in that there are contexts c_1, c_2 and circumstance *i*, so that: $T(S, c_1, i)$, but not-$T(S, c_2, i)$.

(ii) Non-indexical contextualism: S expresses the same proposition in different contexts of use, but that same proposition is evaluated differently in different circumstances of evaluation. The sentence is *circumstance*-sensitive in that there are context *c* and circumstances i_1 and i_2, so that: $T(S, c, i_1)$ but not-$T(S, c, i_2)$.

(iii) Radical relativism: the sentence is sensitive to a new parameter in addition to the context and circumstance parameters, and therefore semantics needs to define a four-place truth-predicate T(s, c, i, p) (where p is a perspective, moral code or whatever), rather than the familiar three-place predicate T(s, c, i). The sentence is *perspective*-sensitive in that there are context c, circumstances i and perspectives p_1 and p_2, so that: T(S, c, i, p_1), but not-T(S, c, i, p_2).

López de Sa rightly points out that my characterization of genuine relativism was indeterminate between (ii) and (iii). He also registers doubts as to the coherence of (iii). The distinction between (ii) and (iii) has been introduced by John MacFarlane, who pleads in favour of introducing 'contexts of assessment' in addition to contexts of use and circumstances of evaluation (see, for example, his 2005 and 2007).

In my view, even though (iii) is as coherent as (ii) is, it is unnecessary to introduce a 'third dimension' (López de Sa's words). It is not necessary to add perspectives to contexts of use and circumstances and thus increase the adicity of the semantic truth-predicate from 3 to 4. Thus option (iii), in the case of moral relativism and similar cases, departs *unnecessarily* from familiar semantics, even though, in my view, that departure is innocuous.[5] However, there may be presentational advantages to opting for (iii) (MacFarlane has claimed such presentational advantages in personal communication).

Thus, in order to remove the indeterminacy López de Sa has detected, I would say that the best way to fit genuine relativism into the Kaplan–Lewis framework is by adopting the position called non-indexical contextualism in his taxonomy.

There are some further important facts worth mentioning. As I pointed out in §5 of my paper, if we want to make sense of contents that vary their truth-values with some parameter, we have to get clear on the normative role of truth for beliefs or speech-acts or utterances that have these contents. For example, those who think that the truth-value of contents varies with possible worlds will say something along these lines: a belief with a content is correct only if that content is true in the possible world where the belief occurs. Or: an utterance of a (declarative) sentence is correct only if the proposition expressed by the sentence in the context of the utterance is true at the possible world determined by the context. Those who introduce additional relativizations of propositional truth will have to give analogous explanations of the normative role of truth. I gave a brief sketch of how this can be done by a genuine relativist: a belief with a content is correct only if that content is true at the possible world at which the belief occurs and in the perspective the believer has at the time at which she has the belief (where perspective possession is a theoretical relation that needs further spelling out). I cannot go into more detail here (but more details are available in my 2003, §IV and in my 2007).

2 How to Defend Indexical Relativism

In the second part of his paper, Dan López de Sa suggests that what he calls a 'presuppositional account' can escape one of the difficulties that I had raised for indexical relativism. What López de Sa says here does not conflict with what I said in the paper. For in the paper I admitted that it may be possible to overcome the difficulties raised for indexical relativism (p. 310). My case for a significant difference between indexical relativism and genuine relativism rested only on the fact that these difficulties arise for indexical relativism and not for genuine relativism, while other difficulties uniquely arise for genuine relativism.

Unfortunately, Dan López de Sa does not spell out in any detail how his favoured view meets the exact difficulty I raised for the two forms of indexical relativism I was discussing, SIR and HIR. I agree with López de Sa that indexical relativism can be defended against them. Let me flesh out in some more detail what an indexical relativist has to do to overcome the difficulty I raised. For simplicity and brevity, I shall discuss only the simpler form of indexical relativism, SIR.

I defined SIR thus:

> SIR is the claim that any sentence of the form '*A* ought to do *x*' is propositionally equivalent to the corresponding sentence of the form 'My moral code requires *A* to do *x*.'

(p. 301)

Saying that two (declarative) sentences are propositionally equivalent amounts to saying that in using the one, one expresses the same proposition one would express were one to use the other.

I raised essentially the same difficulty in two different ways. First, I considered a case where Aznar utters two sentences that are, by SIR's lights, propositionally equivalent: first 'Blair ought to go to war' and then 'My moral code requires Blair to go to war.' I said that Fischer will reject what Aznar's first utterance expressed but accept what the second utterance expressed, and he will do so rationally, given that he believes that Aznar's moral code requires Blair to go to war, but himself believes that Blair ought not to go to war. However, SIR predicts that both utterances express the same proposition, and it is not rational to reject and accept the same proposition.

Here is my second way of raising the difficulty:

> Intuitively, when you sincerely utter ['Blair ought to go to war'] and I sincerely utter the negation, neither of us could rationally accept what the other has asserted without changing our mind. According to SIR,

however, we can just accept what the other has asserted because the propositions asserted are not incompatible.

(p. 305)[6]

The point is that SIR predicts that we are asserting, respectively, the proposition that *your* moral code requires Blair to go to war and the proposition that *my* moral code does not require Blair to go to war. These propositions are not incompatible; thus the intuition that one cannot on pain of irrationality accept both propositions remains unexplained.

Now, the way for the indexical relativist to respond is to point out that the perceived impossibility of accepting what the other has expressed may not be due to the fact that the propositions semantically expressed are by themselves incompatible. It may be that we hold other beliefs which prevent us from accepting what the other has expressed on pain of irrationality: for example a belief that our moral codes impose the same requirements on Blair.

This observation by itself, however, is not yet enough, for two reasons. First, as López de Sa observes,[7] when one person says 'Blair ought to go to war' and another says 'Blair ought not to go to war', we know *without any further knowledge about their background beliefs* that one can't accept what the other asserts. Thus, the incompatibility is likely to be a result of the conventional meaning of these two sentences. Secondly, the intuition of incompatibility disappears when we use the fully explicit sentences 'My moral code requires Blair to go to war' and 'My moral code does not require Blair to go to war.' Thus there must be a difference in conventional meaning between the explicitly indexical and the implicitly indexical form. Given that the two forms are propositionally equivalent, this difference in meaning is not a difference in the content expressed (or truth-conditions) but must concern another aspect of the meaning.[8]

If it is not a difference in terms of the proposition expressed, then it may be a difference in conventional implicatures – or, as López de Sa suggests, a difference in the presuppositions triggered. Sentences of the form 'A ought to do *x*' presuppose/conventionally implicate that speaker and audience have converging moral codes, while sentences of the form 'My moral code requires A to do *x*' do not have such a presupposition/implicature.

Thus, both difficulties are solved. When I utter 'Blair ought to go to war' and you utter the negation, then the *propositions* we express respectively are not by themselves incompatible. However, *given* the presupposition, conventionally triggered, that our moral codes converge, these propositions are incompatible. This explains the intuition that one cannot accept what the other has expressed without changing one's mind.

The reason Fischer can rationally reject Aznar's utterance of 'Blair ought to go to war' while accepting his utterance of 'My moral code requires Blair

to go to war' is that the first sentence uttered triggers a presupposition that the second does not. Given that presupposition, Fischer's own beliefs are incompatible with the proposition expressed. Without the presupposition they are not.

This, I believe, is the most elegant way for an indexical relativist to get around the difficulty I raised. Whether indexical relativism or genuine relativism is the better position overall is not something I can assess at this point.[9] But I believe that we can still agree that they differ.

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Notes

1 There were at least three reasons why I thought it worthwhile writing a paper that merely spells out a distinction: first, chapter 3 of my 2002 had not dealt in sufficient depth with indexical relativism (then called 'revisionism'), secondly, some readers had expressed doubt as to whether there was a significant difference between indexical and genuine relativism, and thirdly I thought it worthwhile spelling out in detail some specific difficulties of Harman's position – difficulties I explicitly claimed were not conclusive.

2 There are some differences between Lewis and Kaplan that I shall be ignoring here. These are not directly relevant to the current issue.

3 One might think, as many did, that, because each context of use determines one particular circumstance of evaluation (index), the circumstance (index) parameter is superfluous. However, as Kaplan has shown, that would rule out distinguishing between mere truth at every context of use (e.g. 'I am here now') and necessary truth, i.e. truth at every circumstance/index.

4 Or perhaps: all worlds w^* *accessible* from w. Introducing various accessibility relations allows one to model different kinds of modality.

5 The situation might be different in other cases, such as that of future contingents – I cannot go into this here, but see MacFarlane, 2007 and my 2007.

6 Another formulation: 'According to SIR when I sincerely utter ["Blair ought to go to war"] and you sincerely utter "It's not the case that Blair ought to go to war", then what I said is not incompatible (in the right way) with what you said. I can just come to believe what you said without needing to change my mind' (p. 307).

7 López de Sa, 2007, p. 275 (GENUINE DISAGREEMENT).

8 This chimes well with Dreier's insistence that indexical relativists do not claim that sentences like 'Blair ought to go to war' and 'My moral code requires Blair to go to war' are *merely* propositionally equivalent, *without* having the same meaning (1999: p. 567).

9 Such an assessment will turn on many issues, such as a general view on the role of notions like 'the proposition expressed by an utterance', or the comparative merits of the genuine relativist's account of the difference between 'A ought to *x*' and 'According to my moral code, A ought to *x*.'

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