

About Concerns

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Abstract: This paper is a sympathetic and critical discussion of the views about mental and linguistic content put forward by François Recanati in his book *Perspectival Thought* (2007a). I begin in the first section by outlining Recanati's account and his arguments for it. In the second section, I articulate some questions and criticisms: I propose some complementary arguments, attempt to relate Recanati's notion of a "lekton" to his earlier notion of "what is said", and put forward some objections against Recanati's account of epistemic modals and predicates of personal taste.

Keywords: What is said, unarticulated constituents, semantic content, epistemic modals, predicates of personal taste.

In his book *Perspectival Thought*, François Recanati defends a position he calls "Moderate Relativism". This is primarily a view on how to deal with context dependence—both in natural language semantics and in a corresponding theory of the contents of thought. It is the purpose of this paper to reflect critically on some aspects of this view. I shall begin by outlining this position and its motivations. In the second part, I will articulate some criticisms.

1. A Crash Course in Moderate Relativism

Easy semantics

Semantics is easy when there is no context dependence. For the semantics of a language without context dependence can just assign a proposition to each sentence of the language. A proposition can be thought of as an entity that somehow represents the world as being a certain way. Each proposition therefore has a truth-value depending on whether the world is as that proposition represents it as being. There are different ways of construing propositions: they can be viewed as structured entities consisting of particulars and universals combined in a certain way. Or they can be seen as sets of possible worlds. How we construe propositions will not matter much for our purposes here. However, one

feature of propositions will be of interest to us: their truth-value depends on how things actually are, i.e. on the world.

An easy semantics for a context-independent language will deliver certain plausible *evaluations* of utterances or mental states in terms of the propositions they have as contents. If a sentence expresses a certain proposition then an utterance of the sentence can be evaluated as true or false depending on the world where the sentence is uttered. Similarly, if a belief has a certain proposition as its content, it can be evaluated as true or false depending on whether that proposition is true at the world in which the belief occurs. We can say, using a terminology that Recanati adopts from Perry (1986), that beliefs and utterances *concern* the world where they occur. Take for example the sentence

(1) François Recanati is a French philosopher.

This sentence expresses the proposition that François Recanati is a French philosopher. An utterance of the sentence in the current situation would be true because the utterance would concern a world in which François Recanati is indeed French and a philosopher.¹ Similarly, a sincere utterance of the sentence in this situation would express a belief in the same proposition, and such a belief would also be true, because it would concern a world where François Récanati is indeed a French philosopher. An utterance of the same sentence in a different, non-actual situation would be false (and express a false belief), if, for example, in that non-actual situation François Récanati is an Italian pastry-maker.

I am here assuming that an utterance, a belief, or any other act or state with a propositional content, always *concerns* the possible world where it occurs. This does not mean that the utterance, belief etc is *about* the possible world where it occurs, for it is simply about François Récanati, and perhaps about frenchness and philosopherhood. In other words, the idea is that an utterance, belief, or any other contentful state is *about* the constituents of its propositional content, while it *concerns* a particular situation or world, namely the situation or world where it occurs. Contentful utterances or mental states are

¹ I am here ignoring tense and also the reading of “French philosopher” on which being French and a philosopher is neither necessary nor sufficient for being a French philosopher (just as being good and being a dancer is not necessary or sufficient for being a good dancer). On this reading, (1) is true concerning the distant past, but not true today (see Belleri & Palmira 2014).

evaluated with respect to the situation or world they concern. In Kaplan's terminology, one would say that utterances or states concern the *circumstances of evaluation* with respect to which they are evaluated.

Part of what I have just expounded has the status of terminological stipulations: the *aboutness* relation, the *concerning* relation and the notion of *the content of an utterance or contentful state* are to be understood in such a way that they satisfy the following two principles:

- (P1) An utterance or contentful mental state is *about* the constituents of its content.
- (P2) An utterance or contentful state *concerns* the situation or world with respect to which it is evaluated as true or false (such that it is true if its content is true in that situation or at that world).

One remaining principle does not have stipulative status for Recanati, but is taken by him to be substantial (for he claims that certain considerations by Evans refute it—more about this below):

- (P3) An utterance or contentful state always concerns (and is evaluated with respect to) the situation or world in which it occurs.

Semantics with tenses

Once we consider the semantics of languages that contain context-dependent expressions, we need to make some decisions as to the way in which the above framework should be applied to them. Let's begin with tensed sentences:

- (2) François Recanati is hungry.

In easy semantics, we were just assigning propositions to sentences, and this gave us a basis for evaluations as true or false of utterances of these sentences. Tensed sentences like (2) require something new, for otherwise we would have to say that every actual utterance of (2) has the same truth value—which we don't want to say, because presumably FR is a normal mortal who is sometimes hungry and sometimes not.

There are several ways of making adjustments for tensed sentences. On the one hand, one can maintain the Fregean idea that contents have absolute truth-values. In that

case the semantics cannot assign the same proposition to every utterance of (2). The proposition expressed by the sentence has to depend on the time of utterance. On this story, an utterance of (2) 11/10/08 at 5pm expresses the proposition that FR is hungry 11/10/08 at 5pm. That is, the utterance is *about* that time, i.e. 11/10/08 at 5pm. Suppose that FR is actually hungry 11/10/08 at 5pm. Then the utterance is true, because it *concerns* the actual world. Utterances of (2) at any other time will be *about* that other time. This is currently the standard picture, defended for example in King 2003.

Another way of adjusting our framework to tensed sentences, would involve saying that an utterance of (2) at some time is not *about* that time, but merely *concerns* that time. On this view, the content of utterances of (2) remains stable over time. Whether I utter it now or utter it later: it will always express the content that FR is hungry—period. Such a content (one may or may not call it a proposition) does not determine a truth-value for each possible world. Rather, it is (or determines) a function from times *and* worlds to truth-values. Arthur Prior is well known for defending this sort of view—he claims that tensed sentences express *tensed propositions* (Prior 1968). Kaplan’s “Demonstratives” also involves this sort of view (Kaplan 1977/1989).²

Recanati joins Prior, Kaplan and others in saying that utterances of tensed sentences are not about their time of utterance but merely concern it. However, Recanati also distances himself from one way of construing temporalism, and this is connected to an objection to temporalism put forward by Evans. Evans believes that it is incoherent to think of tensed propositions as the contents of assertion, for he thinks that assertions must “admit of a stable evaluation” (Evans 1985, p. 349, cited after Recanati 2007a). Without commenting further on the question of the coherence of assertions that do not admit of stable evaluation, Recanati claims that on his way of construing temporalism, assertions do admit of a stable evaluation, for they will always be evaluated with respect to the time at which they are uttered. Thus in his view assertions (as well as other contentful linguistic acts or mental states) have both an “explicit content”, a “lekton”, which can be

² I suspect that Kaplan pursued this approach in large part because Prior’s pioneering work in tense logic was the standard approach at the time Kaplan was writing (Kaplan 1977/89). However, recently some philosophers have read into Kaplan (1977/1989, p. 502–3), an argument (the “operator argument”) which argues from the premiss that there are intensional temporal operators to the conclusion that there must also be time-unspecific intensions or tensed propositions. I suspect that Kaplan was not envisaging having to defend the premiss of this argument. See Cappelen and Hawthorne 2009, Weber 2012 and Zeman 2013.

a tensed proposition of the kind Prior postulates, as well as a “semantically complete content” which is the lekton taken together with the situation in which the utterance was made (or in which the mental state occurs). The complete content thus in one way or another comprehends all the worldly themes of an utterance or mental state: what the utterance or state is *about* and what it *concerns*.

Recanati calls this position “moderate relativism”. It may be useful to contrast this with “radical relativism”, the view that the tensed proposition, the lekton, is a “semantically complete content”, and that assertions do not have a further content which admits of stable evaluation. John MacFarlane’s relativism seems to involve this claim: the very same *assertion* or *utterance* can be evaluated with respect to different times and receive different truth-values (MacFarlane 2003, 2008, 2014). According to MacFarlane, the context, and in particular the time, of an utterance of a sentence may not yet determine what the utterance *concerns*, for we may assess the utterance at different circumstances, and the circumstance against which we assess it may not always coincide with the circumstance that was relevant at the context of utterance. For example, a utterance of a sentence may concern a contingent matter which gets settled only at some particular time (whether or not it is *about* that time, so this particular argument is independent of the temporalism issue). If such a sentence is uttered before that time, then there are several possible courses of history the utterance potentially concerns, so that the utterance does not have a stable truth-value. This does not arise for Recanati, because his position involves the claim that the context in which an utterance or mental state occurs determines what it concerns, and thereby determines a situation with respect to which its content (lekton) is to be evaluated, such that this evaluation counts as the evaluation of the utterance or state.

Recanati’s approach to tense, i.e. adopting tensed, or time-neutral, propositions and to treat temporal modification with the apparatus of intensional operators, competes with the now mainstream extensional approach in which temporal modification is treated as a quantificational phenomenon that involves the binding of implicit variables (see King 2003). Instead of saying that (2) expresses a temporally neutral intension, which can be operated on by temporal modal operators, as in

(2)* Sometimes FR is hungry.

(2)** Often FR is hungry.

it has been argued that we should take (2) to contain an implicit variable (“FR is hungry at x ”), which can be bound by quantifiers (“At some times x ”, “At many times x ”). It is also part of this view to say that when a sentence like (2) occurs on its own, it expresses a proposition *about* a specific time, namely the time that is assigned to the variable by the utterance context. There is analogous competition between an intensional and an extensional treatment of modality: we can take a sentence like (1) to express a modally neutral proposition, which is not *about* any possible world, and that an operator like “Possibly” will operate on that modally neutral intension. Friends of an extensional treatment will take (1) to contain a variable, or an indexical, which makes it express at any utterance context the same proposition that “François Recanati is actually a French philosopher.” would express at that context. The same alternatives arise in the case of sentences like “It is raining”, which according to some is *about* the location of rain, while according to others (among them, famously, Recanati) it merely concerns it.

Recanati argues that his approach preserves what he calls “temporal, modal and locational innocence”: we can understand sentences like (1), (2) and “It’s raining.”, and we can think their content, without needing to be able to represent explicitly (in the *aboutness* way) either possibilities or times.

A canonical difficulty for this type of approach is constituted by examples in which it seems like the variable of which the extensional theorist speaks is being bound (e.g. Stanley 2000). Consider, for example:

(3) Whenever he is hungry, he rubs his belly.

It seems like a variable ranging over times is being bound here, roughly: For all times x : if François is hungry at x , then François rubs his belly at x . But treating (3) as involving such binding seems to require the binding quantifier to be attached to a sentence that already contains the variables to be bound.

Recanati sketches an answer to this sort of difficulty by citing his earlier “variadic operator” treatment of binding cases (Recanati 2002). In a nutshell, the answer is that the

variable to be bound need not be already present when an operator is applied, but the operator may already come with the relevant bound variables. The effectiveness of this answer tends to be underestimated (especially given the overgeneration problems that the binding argument faces), so let me give it a different gloss.

It is no news that we can add all manner of adjuncts to ordinary tensed sentences like (2) or “He rubs his belly.”: “He rubs his belly vigorously.”, “He rubs his belly at noon.”. Some such adjuncts are semantically complex: “at noon” and “on Monday” etc. In these two cases, the adjuncts are formed by combining a preposition (“at”, “on”) with a suitable noun phrase. No-one suspects these simple assumptions to smuggle in any implicit variables. But binding cases of the type that are invoked by the extensional theorists can already be generated and explained by these two innocent seeming assumptions: once we also observe that certain noun phrases give rise to binding, we are already in a position to produce the kinds of examples that have been claimed to require variables for their treatment: “He rubs his belly at every time.” or even: “He rubs his belly at every time at which he is hungry.”. It looks to me like the complex adjunct “— at every time at which he is hungry” exists in ordinary English, and the sentence-forming operator “—at every time at which ...” seems to be a variadic operator in Recanati’s sense, and one that is pretty much equivalent to “Whenever ... , —.”. Perhaps examples like these can persuade those who suspect ad-hoc-ery in the variadic operator response that variadic operators are actually pretty much an everyday phenomenon.

Semantics with indexicals

The question that arose with respect to tensed sentences also arises with other forms of context dependence. When tensed sentences are uttered, Recanati insists that the time of utterance is merely a *concern*, i.e. something that plays a role for the evaluation of the sentence, not something the utterance is *about*. Let’s now consider sentences containing what Recanati labels “indexicals”:

- (4) François Recanati is hungry now.
- (5) I am hungry.

Clearly, an evaluation of utterances of these sentences must depend on the time they are uttered and the person who has uttered them respectively. Thus we again have a choice: either we say that an utterance of (5) is *about* its utterer, and that an utterance of (4) is *about* the time of utterance, or they merely *concern* these factors, because the factors play a role only in the evaluation without occurring in the explicit contents (lekta) of the utterances. In these cases Recanati opts for aboutness. In other words, he claims that explicit contents (lekta) are context dependent: the same sentence can express different explicit contents (lekta) on different occasions of utterance.

Semantics with alleged unarticulated constituents

What does Recanati, the Moderate Relativist, say about sentences like

(6) It is raining.

and about the contents of such sentences as well as the contents of mental states such utterances express. Besides the temporal aspect of (6), the treatment of which is temporalist, the evaluation of utterances of (6) will also depend somehow on a location that is not explicitly referred to in the sentence. Again the question arises whether when uttering (6) one asserts something *about* some location or whether one merely asserts something *concerning* that location. Recanati gives this form of context dependence roughly the same treatment as the time dependence of tensed sentences. Thus utterances of (6) will concern a specific place, and their explicit content will not contain that place as their constituent.

Possibly in contrast with the phenomena of tense, users of a sentence like (6) have more freedom as to which location their utterance will concern. It need not necessarily be the location of the utterance, as is exemplified by a case where a speaker says “It’s raining.” while in Palo Alto, but thereby intending to make an assertion that is true just if it is raining in Murdock—a location that is salient in the conversation because the speaker has just been asked about the weather in Murdock (cf. Perry 1986). Recanati does not say exactly how the location of concern is determined, but he suggests that “the only thing that matters is the hearer’s ‘uptake’, that is his or her recognition of the speaker’s intention to talk about this or that situation” (p. 280). It seems that “free shiftability”, as Recanati calls the phenomenon, occurs primarily in discourse, not in thought.

Now, when (6) is used, the location of rain is “unarticulated” in the sense that this location occurs in the “semantically complete content” or “Austinian proposition” without it being the semantic value of any of the expressions in (6). It is not unarticulated in the sense of being a constituent of the explicit content (lekton) which is not the value of any expression in (6). Recanati argues against Perry that explicit contents of utterances never have unarticulated constituents. Failure of articulation occurs only at the level of complete contents, when an utterance *concerns* something it is not *about*.

Motivations and Justifications

The truth-value of an utterance or of a contentful mental state depends on a number of factors. Thus the truth-value of an utterance of (5) (“I am hungry.”) depends on who utters it at what time and on whether that person is actually hungry at that time. Similarly, the truth-value of someone’s belief that he or she is hungry depends on who that person is and whether that person is actually hungry at the time at which the belief occurs. Recanati’s framework tells us how these various factors are distributed over the explicit content (lekton) of the utterance (or mental state) and the situation of evaluation (p. 33–4). It tells us which factors the utterance or state is *about* and which ones it merely *concerns*, i.e. which ones are merely part of the circumstance with respect to which it gets evaluated. In the case of utterances of (5), and the mental state it expresses, the utterer (or thinker) is part of the explicit content. The time of utterance (or belief), however, and the world with respect to which evaluation takes place, are not part of the lekton. They are merely concerns.

What is the significance of this distribution of factors, and how should it be decided which factors belong to the explicit content/lekton and the semantically complete content respectively? For Recanati, lekta are the contents of speech acts performed by means of uttering sentences, and of the contentful mental states that can be thereby expressed. This provides a motivation for treating some factors as mere concerns. For example, the world with respect to which utterances concerning contingent matters are to be evaluated is arguably not a constituent in the lekta expressed by such utterances because the world of utterance does not play an explicit role in the corresponding belief. When I assert or believe that FR is a french philosopher, the actual world is not something I talk or think

about explicitly. However, the semanticist evaluating my assertion or belief will need to think *about* the actual world explicitly. Similarly, when I assert or believe that it is raining, I do not seem to be talking or thinking *about* a location of rain explicitly, even though evaluating my assertion and thought will clearly require focussing on some location. When I assert or believe that FR is hungry, I do not seem to be talking or thinking about a particular time, even though the truth of my assertion or thought will depend on the time at which the assertion or thought took place. The matter is different when I assert or believe that FR is hungry *now*, for now I *am* explicitly talking and thinking about a particular time.

How do we decide what an assertion or belief is or is not about? Well, at least *beliefs* have a certain causal explanatory role (p. 84). People who believe that it is raining tend to act in characteristic ways (given other beliefs and preferences they have). They tend to take umbrellas or raincoats, to cancel picnics, or to take the washing off the line. These tendencies are independent of the place or time at which the belief occurs. Thus individuating beliefs in terms of their explicit contents in this way makes sense. Or to give another of Recanati's examples: if Holmes believes that the Salt is to the left of the pepper, and Watson believes this also, then both tend to reach to their left when in need of salt—even if they occupy different perspectives, and even if the perspectives their beliefs respectively concern are such that one of them is false. The explicit content explains why they both reach to their left. The complete content, i.e. the explicit content together with the relevant situation of evaluation, explains why one of them will be disappointed when pepper will be sprinkled onto his food rather than salt.

Recanati is not explicit about this, but the justification to adopt the same schema of individuating explicit contents of *utterances* presumably comes from the role assertions and other speech acts have in expressing and communicating mental states. Thus Recanati's lekta are theoretical entities that are defined by the role they play in a certain theory of cognition and communication.

This provides a straightforward justification for *not* including certain truth-value-determining factors in the lekton: we are interested in what all those have in common who believe that it is raining, independently of their time and place, thus we need

contents that are unspecific as to time and place. But what is the positive motivation for *including* other truth-value-determining factors in the lekton? What are the cognitive reasons for including the utterer in the explicit content of utterances of “I am hungry.”? After all, there are certain causal-explanatory similarities between all those who believe that they are hungry! The justification for including the referents of indexicals in the lekton comes in the middle part of Recanati’s book, where he expounds an account of the cognitive phenomena of perception, memory and imagination. Let me very briefly summarise that account.

According to Recanati, when, standing on a cliff, I see a swimmer in the waves beneath me, the swimmer is part of the content of my perception (presumably this is the difference between me hallucinating a swimmer and actually seeing one). Similarly, when I remember seeing the swimmer, the swimmer is part of the content of my memory. That very swimmer has to be part of the content of my perception because when it comes to evaluating the perception, it is that swimmer who matters and no-one else. If I perceived her to be wearing a blue hat, then the correctness of the perception depends on her, and not on whether anyone else was wearing a blue hat, perhaps someone otherwise similar to the one I saw. Similarly my memory of the same scene will depend for its correctness on that very swimmer. In the case of my perception, then, the content, which contains the swimmer, is evaluated against the actual situation of perception, and when it is a situation where that swimmer is wearing a blue hat, then it is correct. When evaluating the memory that is left as a trace of that perception, one has to evaluate the very same content with respect to the situation in which the original perception occurred. It is the *modes* of perception and memory respectively, which determine the situation with respect to which each of them is to be evaluated.³

Now, the case just discussed is that of my remembering seeing a swimmer with a blue hat. This differs from a case where I remember myself seeing a swimmer, or perhaps where I remember that I saw a swimmer. When I remember seeing a swimmer, I myself

³ To be sure, Recanati recognises that it would be “perfectly coherent” (p. 217) to say that the swimmer is not herself included in the content of the perception or memory. In that case, we would have to say that when evaluating the perception, the content has to be evaluated with respect to the actual object of perception. And similarly for the memory. Again, the mode of the cognitive state determines the situation of evaluation.

am not part of the content evaluated—the perceiver is unarticulated. When I remember myself seeing a swimmer, I, the perceiver, am part of the content of the memory. There are, according to Recanati, a number of reasons why it is important to make this distinction. One is that when the perceiver is not an explicit part of the content, she is immune to errors through misidentification: it is impossible that she have a memory of seeing a swimmer but someone else be the subject of the remembered perception. However, when I remember that I was seeing a swimmer, I may do so not because the perception left a trace in me, but because perhaps I remember (falsely) that I remembered seeing the swimmer, while in fact it was someone else who saw the swimmer and told me about it.

This, according to Recanati, motivates including the values of indexicals in the explicit content of utterances generally. Thus we need to distinguish between the context-independent meaning of the sentence uttered, its explicit content (the lekton) and the situation of evaluation. We thus have three levels of content, each with an explanatory role.

2. Some comments and objections

I am generally very sympathetic to Moderate Relativism, and I shall begin with a friendly observation that I hope adds support to the general framework. I also have some remaining doubts, which I would like to raise. Finally, I also have some objections.

Cognitive vs Semantic Content

Recanati's Moderate Relativism is largely motivated by cognitive considerations. That is, his justification for postulating three levels of content: linguistic meaning, lekton, and semantically complete contents, relies largely on considerations of the causal-explanatory role of contentful mental states. That's why the book is aptly titled "Perspectival Thought". However, the framework is also presented as a theory of the contents of utterances, thus at least *prima facie* it is also a contribution to natural language semantics. In order for considerations about the contents of mental states to carry over to the semantic contents of linguistic utterances some assumptions need to be made, assumptions that are not made explicit in the book.

I cannot here attempt to examine the necessary assumptions. However, I would like to adduce one consideration in favour of lekta as semantic contents that Recanati omits. In chapter 13, Recanati discusses Lewis's objection to Kaplan's (and Stalnaker's) view that propositions should figure as the semantic values of sentences in contexts. According to Kaplan, sentences have characters, which are functions from contexts of utterance to contents. Contents then are functions from circumstances of evaluation to truth-values. These contents are analogous to Recanati's lekta in that they are intended to be the contents of assertion and the contents of mental states expressed by assertions. Now Lewis contrasts this view with a view according to which sentences have context-independent semantic values which are functions from contexts and circumstances to truth-values—a view which corresponds in Recanati's framework to the view that lekta do not have the values of indexicals as constituents (or that the constant linguistic meaning of sentences can serve as assertoric- and belief contents).

Lewis (1980) objects that no single entity can serve as the content of propositional attitudes *and* as a semantic value. For either these contents are relativistic, in which case they cannot figure as the contents of propositional attitudes; or they are genuine propositions, in which case they cannot serve as semantic values, for the following reason: The semantic value of the sentence "Somewhere the sun is shining." in a given context is not a function of the proposition expressed by "the sun is shining" in that context.

Recanati's response here is to insist that relativised contents, i.e. contents that do not determine a truth-value for each possible world, can indeed play the role of the object of propositional attitudes. So, the content of "the sun is shining" is unspecific as to place, and "Somewhere" functions like an operator on that content. I believe this response is convincing.

Now, what Recanati does not mention, but which perhaps should be mentioned, is that considerations of compositionality leave room precisely for Recanati's own position. One feature of indexicals, observed by Kaplan and Lewis alike, is that their values cannot be shifted by an operator. For example, we cannot say "Somewhere the sun is shining here." or "In Paris the sun is shining here." hoping that the value of "here" will be any

place other than the place of utterance. This seems to be a feature of all indexicals (except tense, if tense were to be thought of as involving indexicality). Thus, precisely those truth-value-determining factors that Recanati *does* incorporate into the lekton, namely indexicals, are not subject to shifting and therefore not subject to problems with compositionality. If there were monstrous operators, the story would be different. But (arguably) there aren't.⁴ This feature of indexicals provides a semantic (rather than cognitive) reason for treating them differently when it comes to specifying the explicit content of utterances.

“I am hungry.” vs “I am hungry now.”

I have one, perhaps silly, worry about the psychological justification for identifying the constituents of lekta. Compare the following two pairs of sentences:

(7a) I am hungry.

(7b) I am hungry now.

(8a) It's raining.

(8b) It's raining here.

Utterances of (7a) express lekta that do not contain the time of utterance as a constituent, while utterances of (7b) do. Utterances of (7b) are *about* the time of utterance, while utterances of (7a) merely *concern* the time of utterance. Analogously with utterances of (8a) and (8b): the former merely concern some location while the latter are about a location. While utterances of the sentences in each pair have different explicit contents in a given context, the conditions under which they are true are exactly the same.

The worry I have has to do with the purely psychological justification for this difference in content. One might argue that the beliefs expressed by sincere utterances of the sentences in a pair do not differ in their psychological or causal-explanatory role. Now, Recanati might argue that one who sincerely utters (7b) typically has a belief that is explicitly about the time of utterance in the sense that he or she is aware of that time, and that this is not so in the case of utterances of (7a). However, it is not so clear that utterers of (7a) do not also typically have this awareness. As Recanati himself claims, we have to

⁴ There are those who argue against Kaplan that there are “monsters”, i.e. expressions that shift indexicals. For example Schlenker 2003.

distinguish between the belief *expressed* by an utterance, and other beliefs present (p. 226). He will claim that *if* an utterance of (7a) is accompanied by a belief that is explicitly *about* the time of utterance, then this is not the belief expressed by the utterance. Similarly, he will claim that if a time-unspecific belief that the utterer is hungry accompanies an utterance of (7b), that this belief will not be the one expressed by the utterance.

Now, *which* of several beliefs is the one expressed by an utterance? I believe that the relation of *expression* must here clearly be a semantic relation, i.e. a relation that is grounded in the conventional meaning of the sentence used. Thus the justification for distinguishing between the explicit content of utterances of (7a) and (7b) will ultimately need to be semantically justified.

Such justification might again be taken from Lewis's criterion of compositionality. If we want to say that lekta are semantic values of sentences in context, then we are *forced* to say that the lekton expressed by (7a) in a context is unspecific as to time, for otherwise we cannot give a compositional treatment of "Sometimes I am hungry.". In the case of (7b) we can get away with incorporating the time of utterance into the lekton because similar embeddings are not possible with (7b), or if they are possible, they do not manage to shift the value of "now". The same goes for (8a): we are forced to treat this as expressing location-unspecific lekta, for the location parameter can be shifted by an operator, as for example in: Somewhere it is raining. There is no such reason in the case of (8b). (In the case of (8a) and (8b), of course, there is one additional reason to construe them as expressing different lekta in many contexts: (8a) can, and (8b) cannot, be used to say something concerning a location other than the location of utterance—as in the Murdock example)

Lekton and what is said

It is an interesting question how Recanati's book relates to his earlier work, in particular his work on unarticulated constituents and what is said. Recanati is well-known for his view that what is said by an utterance is determined in part by a process of modulation or free enrichment, and that some constituents of what is said are unarticulated, in so far as they are not the result of a process of interpretation mandated by the conventional

meaning of the sentence used. It is also part of this view that no literally expressed proposition plays any cognitive role prior to the application of free enrichment.

Now there is one curious fact that makes it less than straightforward to map Moderate Relativism onto the old Recanati. This is the fact that he hardly ever uses the term “what is said” in *Perspectival Thought*. Another obstacle to such a mapping is the fact that he uses the Greek term “lekton” for the explicit contents of assertion, belief etc that he postulates. Now, “lekton” is just the Greek word for what is said.

It seems clear that Recanati’s lekta cannot be identified with what is said in the earlier work. For Recanati makes quite clear, and argues at length against Perry, that lekta are fully articulated. The *lekta* expressed by a sentence in context do not contain constituents that are not linguistically articulated in the sentence used, while in earlier work, Recanati seems to argue that *what is said* does involve unarticulated constituents.⁵ A better candidate for identification with what is said is what Recanati calls the “semantically complete content” or the “Austinian proposition” expressed by an utterance. Clearly, semantically complete contents contain unarticulated constituents, constituents that are neither articulated linguistically in the sentence used, nor in the lekton corresponding to the sentence in the context. Another possibility is that what is said corresponds to something slightly less finegrained than Austinian propositions, namely the truth conditions of an utterance (which according to Recanati can be seen as an equivalence class of Austinian propositions—p. 83, fn 28).

As far as I can make out, therefore, Recanati’s processes of modulation and free enrichment operate on lekta and yield complete propositions (or truth conditions) as output. Or at least in some cases they will be involved in the determination of a complete content from a lekton. An example of this might be the enrichment that takes us from the location-unspecific lekton expressed by “it’s raining” to a complete proposition involving the place in question.⁶

⁵ For example in Recanati 2001, he argues that while one could define what is said in a minimal sense “as what is said in the full-fledged, pragmatic sense *minus* the unarticulated constituents resulting from free enrichment” (p. 88), what is said in this minimal sense “has no psychological reality” (p. 89).

⁶ The discussion of unarticulated constituents and free enrichment in Recanati 2002 and 2007b suggests this.

Let us suppose that this is so. Then I have an observation and a worry. The observation is that in the framework of Moderate Relativism, we do have cognitively significant propositional contents that are in between, as it were, the conventional meaning of a sentence uttered and what is said, namely lekta. To be sure, these contents are not (or not always) *classical* propositions in that they are not (and do not determine) functions from possible worlds to truth-values. So Recanati is not contradicting his earlier claims. However, they are propositional enough to be the objects of propositional acts and propositional attitudes. Moreover, they seem to have the status of the semantic values of sentences in context, or at least they could easily play this role, as Recanati demonstrates.

The worry is that in Recanati's earlier scheme, what is said primarily plays the role of the input of pragmatic processes, such as the derivation of conversational implicatures. However, in the framework of Moderate Relativism, lekta seem to be a more suitable input to these processes. Lekta are the objects of the beliefs expressed by utterances. Lekta will also often be the better candidate for the content that is taken up by an audience (as Recanati himself seems to imply on p. 280). For if someone next to me says that it is raining, because they can easily look out of the window, and I cannot, then arguably the assertion made, the belief expressed as well as the belief induced in me (the audience) will all have the same lekton as content. If what the speaker thereby wants to convey conversationally is that we should not go out for a walk, then arguably it is the lekton expressed that plays the role of input into the process of implicature derivation, not the "complete content", or anything that articulates a time or place.

Another worry with respect to the earlier debate about unarticulated constituents is this. If lekta are the semantic values that sentences have in context, then strictly speaking semantics has done its job once it has specified for each sentence and each context which lekton the sentence expresses in that context. How assertions (and beliefs etc) that have these lekta as contents are to be evaluated is a matter for the theory of assertion (or the theory of belief) to decide. Now if (*if*) the debate about unarticulated constituents is primarily a debate about semantics, i.e. about whether semantic values have unarticulated constituents, then Recanati's position in that debate suddenly looks like that of a denier of unarticulatedness. (One might say that his position looks similar to that sketched by

MacFarlane in his “Non-indexical Contextualism” (2008a.) All this need not be a bad thing. Perhaps Recanati views the earlier debate with respect to which he favours unarticulated constituents as a debate about what he calls “complete contents”, in which case his newer view that the lekton is never unarticulated is not incompatible with his older position on unarticulated constituents.

Faultless Disagreement

In my final comment, I would like to take up Recanati’s view of predicates of personal taste and epistemic modals as well as the remarks he makes about faultless disagreement. Recanati says:

[L]ooking at a painting, I say: “This is beautiful”. You disagree: “No it’s ugly”. In a sense we are both right, since for me it is beautiful, while for you it is ugly; but we disagree nonetheless. Or consider epistemic modals. I say “The treasure might be under the palm tree”. I am right since, for all I know, the treasure might be there—nothing in my epistemic state rules out the treasure’s being there. Later, however, I learn that the treasure is not on the island (where the palm tree is). This rules out the treasure’s being under the palm tree, and in my new epistemic situation, I assert “The treasure cannot be under the palm tree”. Again, I am right since, in my new epistemic situation, there is something that rules out the treasure’s being under the palm tree. What is strange, however, is that I can now disagree with my former self. I can say: “I was wrong—the treasure cannot be under the palm tree”. How can that be? (p. 88–9)

Let’s take this to be the problem of faultless disagreement. Now, Recanati ultimately thinks that if there really is what he calls “genuine disagreement” (at least in the first case), then we cannot both be right about the picture. For genuine disagreement only occurs, according to him, when two thinkers have beliefs whose complete contents are incompatible, not at the level of incomplete lekta. For example, if I say “it’s raining.” and you say “it’s not”, but you mean to say something concerning a different location from the one I am concerned with, then there is merely misunderstanding, not disagreement.

Thus what he takes to be essential about the described situation is that there is genuine disagreement, not that the two parties are faultless.

If I understand him correctly, Recanati is saying that “The picture is beautiful.” works much like “It’s raining.”. Just as an utterance of “It’s raining” will always concern a certain location (without being *about* it), “The picture is beautiful.” will concern the community to which the speaker and his audience belong, again without being *about* it.⁷ Thus, the situation against which the lekta of the two utterances about the picture are to be evaluated is the same: both concern the actual world and the community of speaker and hearer.

Now, Recanati distinguishes two possibilities: either the speaker “was mistaken when he assumed that the painting was beautiful for both him and his audience” (p. 92) or the “audience deviates, by her bad taste, from the aesthetic standards of the community to which they both belong” (p. 92). He says that in both cases someone was at fault, so that there is no *faultless* disagreement. However, this is a little rash. While Recanati is right about the second case—speaker and audience do share a community, so one of them believes a false complete content and is at fault—he is too quick with the first possibility. Strictly speaking, the first case is one where a certain presupposition for the evaluation of the two assertions is not met: there is no such thing as *the* community to which both speaker and audience belong. What should we say in such a case? Presumably we have to say that the two failed to express complete propositions, for the context of utterance fails to determine a situation of evaluation. It’s like uttering “It’s raining.”, intending to say something concerning Cockaigne (a mythical place where, when it rains, it rains cheese). Maybe this is how Recanati’s account should be reconstructed.

I can see three problems with this account of the above case of apparent faultless disagreement. The first is that it does not straightforwardly transfer to the other disagreement, that involving epistemic modals. When I say the first time round that the

⁷ Some of Recanati’s formulations suggest otherwise: he says, for example, that “‘It is beautiful’ means that it is beautiful ‘for us’, that is for the community to which the speaker and his audience belong”. I take it that by “means that” Recanati here has in mind the complete content expressed by utterances of the sentence, and not the linguistic meaning of the sentence. For otherwise his account would involve the claim that, after all, sentences containing predicates of personal taste are implicitly indexical, which goes against his view that lekta are fully articulated.

treasure might be under the palm tree, what is the intended situation of evaluation? Presumably it involves my epistemic state at that time. For if not, why is my assertion correct? Now, when I assert later that the treasure cannot be under the palm tree, and I disagree with my former self, what is the intended situation of evaluation then? Recanati says that the second assertion is also correct, so presumably the second assertion is to be evaluated with respect to a situation involving my improved epistemic state at the time of the second assertion. But if that is so, I cannot disagree—in the sense of Recanati’s “genuine disagreement”—with my former self, for my former self asserted something concerning a different situation. Perhaps Recanati wants to say that the situation of evaluation the second time round is the epistemic state I share with my former self. But in that case we again have a failure of a presupposition. And in any case, I am not likely to make the mistake of assuming that I share an epistemic state with my former self, for I am well aware that I have learned something new that I didn’t know before, and that what I have learned has a bearing on whether the treasure might be under the palm tree.

Perhaps Recanati can rescue his account by saying that when I disagree with my former self, I pretend that my former self had available the same information. However, the first assertion gets evaluated twice: once with respect to the earlier epistemic state, and once with respect to the later epistemic state. This goes against the principle that according to Recanati differentiates Moderate Relativism from radical forms of relativism, namely the principle that the context of each utterance determines the situation with respect to which the utterance is to be evaluated. In the current case we seem to be evaluating the very same utterance and the very same assertion first with respect to one situation and then with respect to another.

Let me spell out the second problem I see with Recanati’s account of the two cases of apparent faultless disagreement. Suppose the picture is beautiful for me and it is not beautiful for you. Then, according to Recanati’s account, we cannot, when talking to one another, correctly assert that the picture is beautiful. For if we do so we commit a failure of presupposition similar to that of someone who asserts that it’s raining intending to say something concerning Cockaigne. But no such failure seems to be involved. We take it to be quite normal to have diverging views on the beauty of pictures, but do not think that this prevents us from successfully asserting to one another that pictures are or are not

beautiful. On Recanati's view, our assertions will lack a semantically complete content. So at the very least Recanati's account would have to allow that when we are talking about matters of taste, failing to assert something with a semantically complete content is not in any way a linguistic failing. For this type of situation seems to be absolutely standard.

The third problem is that on Recanati's account, the correctness of an assertion that some picture is beautiful depends on who I am talking to. This however, has the odd consequence that I also express different beliefs by such an assertion, depending on who I am talking to, at least beliefs that differ in what they *concern*. However, it seems plausible that I always express the same belief when I assert that the picture is beautiful (given that the assertion is sincere). My assertion and my belief always concern the same things. Why should the audience in question matter for the concerns with respect to which my assertions and views are to be evaluated?

Finally, let me briefly sketch an alternative account of the situation of apparent faultless disagreement that Recanati describes. In my view, we should not take it for granted that the cases described are cases of genuine disagreement *in the sense defined by Recanati*.⁸ We should not take it for granted that when I say and believe that the picture is beautiful and you say and believe that it is not, our assertions and beliefs must be evaluated with respect to the same standard. In Recanati's terminology: we should not take it for granted that our assertions and beliefs concern the same situation of evaluation. Of course sometimes they do, and perhaps sometimes we believe or suspect that they do, and for that reason we may engage in some debate about the matter. But this is not a precondition for the success of our assertions or beliefs. On the contrary, we are quite

⁸ By the way, it often seems that people assume that there is an argument, associated with myself, that proceeds from the premiss that there are cases that intuitively seem to be cases of faultless genuine disagreement to the conclusion of some form of relativism. Recanati is among these people, see p. 90, but see also MacFarlane 2007. I have never put forward such an argument. The argument that I have discussed is an argument that starts from the premiss that there is disagreement in *some sense*. For example, it seems that in Recanati's case, when I utter "the picture is beautiful", and you utter "it is not", I assert something that you cannot rationally accept without changing your mind (and vice versa). Similarly, if the assertions are sincere, I believe something that you could not rationally come to believe without changing your mind (see Kölbel 2002, 2003, 2007, 2008a and 2008b). If this is so, then *independently of how we define "disagreement"*, we cannot make room for the apparent faultlessness involved by postulating implicit indexical elements in the sentences involved. I believe that Recanati would agree with this observation.

comfortable with the fact that standards of taste diverge, so that my assertions and beliefs about the matter will be evaluated in a different way from yours.

Thus, on the alternative analysis of the case of apparent faultless disagreement, the two parties may indeed be faultless in the sense that they believe things that are correct by the only standards that matter for the evaluation of such beliefs: namely the standard of each person. Nevertheless there is disagreement in an important sense (even though it is not disagreement in the sense Recanati calls “genuine”): each believes a lekton that the other could not believe without changing his or her mind.

This account is compatible with Recanati’s framework of Moderate Relativism, for even here we can maintain that the situation with respect to which an assertion or belief is evaluated is determined by the context in which the assertion or belief occurs. However, I do not believe that it is useful to cling to this principle. For assertions and beliefs can be evaluated in many ways. When I discover that the treasure is not on the island I can evaluate my first assertion in several ways. I can evaluate it with respect to my earlier epistemic state, and I can evaluate it with respect to my later epistemic state. As long as I keep the various forms of evaluation apart and as long as I use each in its place, there is no problem.

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