

A Little Sensitivity Goes a Long Way
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I. Introduction

In *Insensitive Semantics*, Cappelen and Lepore do several things and they do them with great rhetorical flourish. They distinguish radical from moderate contextualism. They argue that moderate contextualism collapses into radical contextualism. But radical contextualism, they claim, is a crazy and inconsistent doctrine. On the positive side, they defend the combination of semantic minimalism and speech act pluralism. In my estimation, hardly any of it succeeds. They've shown neither that moderate contextualism collapses into radical contextualism nor that radical contextualism is inconsistent. Their defense of semantic minimalism is unsuccessful. What they call speech act pluralism is either old news or false. But truth is not the sole virtue and falsity not the sole vice. There are interesting ways of being mistaken and uninteresting ways of being right. Cappelen and Lepore have the virtue of being mistaken in quite interesting ways, ways that help us see what is really at stake in a sometimes difficult to untangle thicket of argument. So despite the fact that I mostly disagree with their premises, their conclusions and their arguments, I find myself considerably provoked by their book.

Although my disagreements with Cappelen and Lepore are pretty thoroughgoing, they are not utter and complete. They have glimpsed part of the truth about the underappreciated phenomenon of *modificationally neutrality*. A predicate, for example, is modificationally neutral when it expresses a property or relation that is neutral with respect to the class of (metaphysically) possible modifications of that property or relation. For example, there are many ways for a thing to be red.¹ A thing can be red by being a particular shade of red. Or it can be red by having some salient part or surface that is colored partly, mostly or wholly red. Moreover, standards of redness vary with the type of object in question. Red dirt must be *through and through* red, but it suffices for the redness of a table that its upward facing surface is red enough. Being scarlet, being cardinal, being through and through red and having an upward facing surface that is predominately red might be thought of as four different ways of being red. We might quite naturally ask what determinate way of being red is required for the truth of an instance of the scheme:

(1) x is red.

Since standards of redness apparently vary from object to object, one might be tempted to think that what proposition an instance of scheme (1) expresses will depend partly on exactly what noun phrase we replace the 'x' with. We typically express something different about the table when we call it red from what we express about dirt when we

call it red. Even if we hold the object fixed but vary the context, standards of redness seem to vary as a function of our purposes and intentions. An object with a surface that is not red enough to count as red taken in isolation may count as *the red one* when it is redder than any of the alternatives.

Some may conclude that 'red' is semantically incomplete, that we must supply standards of redness in "context," that different standards may be operative in different contexts. There are many semantically incomplete predicates, but 'red' is not one of them. 'Red' is rather what I call modificationally neutral. Though there are many ways of being red, many metaphysical modifications of redness, the predicate 'red' expresses a property that is neutral with respect to *all* such modifications. More generally, a modificationally neutral assertion to the effect that *x* is *P* expresses the weakest possible positive proposition about the *P*'ness of *x*. If 'red' is modificationally neutral, then an instance of scheme (1) typically will not be strictly equivalent to any instance of scheme (2):

(2) *x* is *m*'ly red.

In many conversational settings, modificationally neutral assertions will be minimally informative and of minimal conversational relevance. However, speakers who make modificationally neutral assertions may pragmatically convey something more informative and less neutral by their words. That fact has led many to mistakenly see semantic incompleteness where there is only modificationally neutrality. One who infers semantic incompleteness from data that support only a conclusion of modificationally neutrality has committed what I call a fallacy of misplaced modification. (Taylor, in press) Fallacies of misplaced modification lead many to believe that sentences with perfectly determinate, though modificationally neutral semantic contents stand in need of semantic supplementation. All forms of so-called radical contextualism are, I suspect, founded on fallacies of misplaced modification. Even some forms of moderate contextualism succumb locally to such fallacies. On this score, Cappelen and Lepore and I are in broad agreement. Indeed, their book is, in one way, really a sustained polemic against fallacies of misplaced modification. Unfortunately, they vastly overestimate the prevalence of modificationally neutrality and are thereby led astray in their arguments against moderate contextualism.

2. Lepore and Cappelen Against Moderate Contextualism.

Lepore and Cappelen define moderate contextualism by the following theses:

MC1. The expressions in the Basic Set do not exhaust all the sources of semantic context sensitivity [where the basic set is the set of indisputably context-sensitive expressions].

MC2. Many [syntactically well-formed] sentences ... fail to have [complete] truth conditions or to semantically express a [complete] proposition.

MC3. For the cases in question, only their utterances semantically express a proposition, and have (interpretive) truth conditions, and so, take a truth value.

Against moderate contextualism, Cappelen and Lepore offer a collapsing argument. Since the moderate contextualist rejects radical contextualism, they will be home free if their collapsing argument succeeds. There is, of course, a facial difference between moderate and radical contextualism. The moderate contextualist claims that only *some* expressions outside the basic set are context-sensitive and/or semantically incomplete, while the radical contextualists claims that every expression or construction outside the basic set is context sensitive.² If the moderate contextualist is to resist the collapsing argument, she owes us a principled way of augmenting the store of context-sensitive linguistic expressions and/or linguistic contexts by some but not all the expressions that fall outside the basic set. Cappelen and Lepore seem to hold that the moderate contextualist can't have that principled basis and that the contextualist's own methodology prevents her from doing so.

Consider the two currently extant forms of argument on behalf of moderate contextualism – arguments from incompleteness and context-shifting arguments. Context shifting arguments purport to show that what is (strictly, literally) said by an utterance *u* of some target sentence *S* need not be identical to what is (strictly literally) said by a distinct utterance *u'* of *S*. Arguments from incompleteness purport to show that some sentences are such that although they are syntactically well-formed and contain no expressions from the basic set, only *utterances* of the relevant sentence express complete propositions. Such a sentence, taken on its own, expresses no complete proposition, independently of context. Moderate contextualism is an attempt to explain the source of incompleteness and variability.

Now Cappelen and Lepore claim that as the arguments of the moderate contextualist actually go, they would suffice to show that some expression or construction not in the basic set is context-sensitive, only if they sufficed to show that *every* expression or construction not in the basic set is context-sensitive. All that prevents the moderate contextualist from seeing this, they claim, is a simple failure of imagination. As they put it, “Moderate contextualists are unimaginative radical contextualists.”

Let's look more closely at the details of this claim. As construed by Cappelen and Lepore, the contextualist's context-shifting arguments are breathtaking in their simplicity.³ A theorist imagines, perhaps in the company of some audience, uttering a sentence *S* in a certain context (more or less fulsomely described). She then imagines uttering *S* in some different context (also more or less fulsomely described.) She produces in herself the “feeling” that the two imagined utterances say or express different propositions. The theorist concludes, apparently solely on the basis of this feeling, that the sentence is contextually variable. So, for example, I might imagine myself standing on a corner in San Francisco, sometime in late March. I might imagine myself producing an utterance *u* of “It's raining rather heavily.” I might also imagine myself attending a conference in St Louis in late April and producing a distinct utterance *u'* of

“It’s raining rather heavily.” The contextualist intuition is that *u* and *u*’ express different propositions. *u*’ expresses a proposition about the weather in St Louis (at the time of the utterance); *u* expresses a proposition about the weather in San Francisco (at the time of the utterance). Given that except for verb tense, our expression contains no *obviously* context-sensitive construction, the contextualist wonders how *u* and *u*’ manage to express propositions about entirely different places. Contextualists are not of a single mind. Jason Stanley posits unpronounced variables present in the “logical form” of the sentence. (Stanley 2001) John Perry posits unarticulated constituents that somehow get introduced into the expressed proposition without being the value of any either explicit or suppressed constituent of the relevant sentence. (Perry 1986) I have appealed to the subsyntactic basement of the lexicon. (Taylor 2001) Substantive and methodological issues divide these and other forms of moderate contextualism one from another⁴. Cappelen and Lepore are not interested in such internecine debates. They reject not so much the further substantive and methodological positions associated with this or that brand of moderate contextualism. They reject the starting intuition shared by all forms of contextualism. They deny that *u* and *u*’ express propositions about different places. On their view, holding the time of utterance fixed the sentence “It’s raining” (strictly literally) expresses one and the same proposition, no matter where it is said.⁵

To see why context-shifting arguments prove too much, if they prove anything at all, we are asked to consider cases in which the moderate contextualist denies, but the radical contextualist asserts the presence of contextual variability. By the moderate contextualist’s own standards of evidence, claim Cappelen and Lepore, the radical contextualist wins in every case.⁶ Consider two different utterances of:

(3) Smith weighs 80kg

and consider two different scenarios:

Scenario 1. Smith has been dieting for the last eight weeks. He steps on the scale one morning, naked, before breakfast (but after having gone to the bathroom) and it registers 80kg.

Scenario 2. Smith is exactly as above. But (2) is uttered just as Smith is about to enter an elevator with a capacity of no more than an extra 80kg. Moreover, Smith is wearing a heavy overcoat and carrying a briefcase full of books.

Now we are supposed to have the intuition that as uttered in scenario 1, (3) expresses a proposition about the weight of Smith’s naked body, but as uttered in the second scenario, it expresses some proposition about the combined weights of Smith’s body, his clothing and his briefcase.

Or consider a case of a slightly different kind. What it takes for someone to count as having gone to the gym also turns out to be a variable matter. For consider an utterance of:

(4) John went to the gym

as it occurs in three different speech situations:

1. It is common ground that John walks nightly for exercise and that he typically does so only after the gym has closed.
2. You are discussing John's exercise and diet routines with his trainer, who asks you about John's exercise today.
3. You are at a meeting of a construction company planning on putting down some hardwood floor at the local gym. The boss asks who went over to the gym to supervise the construction of a bathroom in its basement.

Again, Cappelen and Lepore claim that an utterance of (4) expresses something different in each of these speech situations. In the first scenario, it expresses a proposition that can be true even if John never entered the gym. In the second it expresses a proposition that is false if John merely arrived in the vicinity of the gym, but never entered it. And in the third, it expresses a proposition that is false if John failed to engage in supervisory activities while inside of the gym.

Now Cappelen and Lepore seem to believe that with enough imagination an intuition of shiftiness of the sort prompted by scenarios like these can be produced for just about any sentence. And they apparently think that the methodology employed by the moderate contextualist commits her to conceding on the basis of such examples that if context-sensitivity is anywhere (outside the basic set) then it's everywhere (outside the basic set). They enshrine this conviction as a principle:

(GEN) With sufficient ingenuity, a Context Shifting Argument can be provided for any sentence whatsoever, and consequently for any expression.

3. Speech Situational Sensitivity vs Context Sensitivity

Before responding to these last claims, I distinguish two different flavors of sensitivity. I distinguish what I call speech situational sensitivity from context-sensitivity. By a context, I mean more or less what David Kaplan means. (Kaplan 1989) We may take a context to be some collection of more or less objective features of a speech situation. Following Kaplan again, let us allow that context-sensitive expressions have "characters," understood as functions from Kaplanian contexts to contents. But there is another class sensitive expressions that exhibit not Kaplanian context-sensitivity but sensitivity of another kind, viz., what I call *speech situational sensitivity*. An expression is speech situationally sensitive, roughly, when its semantic contribution to the (narrowly) semantic content of the utterance in which it occurs is determined by the speech situation in which that utterance is produced. A speech situation may contain a Kaplanian context as a proper part, but speech situations contain much more than is countenanced in a Kaplanian context. Though speech situations have many objective

features – they happen at a place, over a span of time, in a possible world, and involve various participants – a speech situation should not be thought of primarily as abstract bundles of such features. A speech situation is primarily a locus of action. As such, it falls less to *logic* and more to *the theory of action* to study their effects on meaning. Moreover, it is important to stress that speech situationally sensitive expressions should not be construed as indexicals. They are expressions of an entirely different semantic nature from the indexicals made prominent by Kaplan.⁷

My talk of the theory of action rather than logic will immediately suggest to some that speech situational sensitivity lives not on the pristine pastures of semantics but in the untamed wilderness of pragmatics. But that reaction betrays a misunderstanding of both the reach of pragmatics and the nature of the so-called semantic-pragmatics interface. As I argue in detail elsewhere and hope to demonstrate further in this essay, there is no such interface. (Taylor, forthcoming) There is no one place where the work of semantics ends and that of pragmatics begins. Pragmatics and semantics are everywhere intertwined because pragmatics happens everywhere. To say this is not say that the semantic collapses into the pragmatic. It is not to deny that there is a distinction in both concept and principle to be had between the semantic and the pragmatic. It is, however, meant to suggest that some of what falls squarely within the domain of the semantic is enmeshed with the pragmatic from the very start. In fact, I have argued elsewhere that the lexicon itself often directly “licenses” the “intrusion” of the pragmatic into the determination of narrowly semantic content. (See Taylor (2002), Taylor (2003), Taylor (forthcoming), Taylor (in progress)) Indeed, this is precisely what happens with expressions that exhibit speech-situational sensitivity.

I illustrate with an example. Consider:

(5) The cat is on the couch again.

I take (5) to be syntactically complete in the sense that it is a perfectly well-formed sentence, missing no syntactically mandatory elements. Despite its syntactic completeness (5), just taken on its own, independently of speech situation, appears to be semantically incomplete. Taken on its own it fails to express any fully determinate proposition. It no more expresses the proposition that the one and only one cat in the universe is once again on the one and only couch in the universe than it expresses the proposition that the one and one cat owned by Ken Taylor is on the one and only one couch on Ken Taylor’s Patio.⁸ That is because neither the quantifier phrase ‘the cat’ nor the quantifier phrase ‘the couch’ has a fully determinate quantificational significance on its own, independently of speech situation. But once (5) is uttered in an appropriate speech situation, more or less determinate domains of quantification for the quantifier phrases ‘the cat’ and ‘the couch’ may be determined.

It is an interesting and significant question just *how* speech situational determination works. I cannot tell a detailed story about that here. I have argued elsewhere that quantifier phrases, and some limited array of other expressions, are associated with “suppressed” parameters of various sorts. I have conjectured that such parameters hang out in what I call the subsyntactic basement of the lexicon and are present more as what I call *subconstituents* of certain *words of phrases* rather than *constituents* of the *sentences* in the relevant words of phrases go. On this approach, an

adequate *lexical* representation of an expression may need to specify certain sententially suppressed parameters such that:

1. The values of those parameters are to be speech situationally determined.
2. The lexicon constrains the kind of value the relevant parameter can take and determines what contribution the value will make, once determined, to the proposition expressed by an utterance of any sentence in which the “master” expression will occur, typically by assigning the value of the suppressed parameter a theta-like role in the “argument structure” of the relevant expression .
3. The values of such parameters are typically not straightforwardly determined by objective features of the context, but by speaker’s intentions.
4. The speaker is, in effect, free to “load” a speech situationally appropriate value onto the relevant parameter.
5. The relevant “parameter” need not be expressed as a *sentence level constituent* of any sentence in which the relevant expression occurs, though it may show up as a separable constituent of the expressed proposition.
6. As subconstituents rather than constituents, such parameters will, in the general case, be “below” the reach of sentence level quantifiers and so should *not* be thought of as occupying bindable positions in LF.

1-6 need substantial further spelling out and more defense than I can afford to give them here. For present purposes, 3 and 4 are the important points. They capture the thought that a speaker who chooses an expression with a suppressed parameter of the sort outlined above takes on a double burden – one semantic, one pragmatic. In particular, she takes on the semantic burden of loading a value of the requisite kind onto the suppressed parameter. And she takes on the communicative burden of making it mutually manifest to her communicative partners what value she intends to load. A speaker typically cannot rely on any merely objective feature of the surrounding context to do the value loading for her. Value loading is something that *she* must do. That is why the kind of sensitivity that such parameters display is *not* a form of *context sensitivity* but a form of *speech situational sensitivity*. When expressions are speech situationally sensitive, the content determining role falls not to “objective” features of the context, but to agents, the semantic and communicative burdens they undertake, and the actions they performing in discharging those burdens. It is right to think of the discharging of lexically generated semantic burdens as a bit of pragmatics. Typically, the pragmatics involved in the discharging of lexically generated semantic burdens involves what I call pre-propositional pragmatics. Pre-propositional pragmatics plays a decisive role in generating and making manifest what below I call the narrowly or purely semantic content of an utterance in a speech situation.

4. Total Utterance Content vs Narrowly Semantic Content

I claimed above that there is no such thing as *the* semantics/pragmatics interface because there is no one place where semantics ends and pragmatics begins. Nonetheless, I grant that there is a distinction between *what is strictly, literally said* by an utterance and *what is merely pragmatically conveyed*, somehow or other, by that utterance. This distinction in fact turns out to be highly relevant to Cappelen and Lepore's collapsing arguments against moderate contextualism. Cappelen and Lepore offer up various scenarios in which what is communicated by a given form of words varies from situation to situation. They insist that for any form of words such variation is always possible. But if mere variation suffices to establish context-sensitivity, moderate contextualism quickly collapses into radical contextualism. But this line of reasoning presupposes that the moderate contextualist can have no principled basis for distinguishing two different sorts of situational or contextual variation – variation in what is strictly literally said or expressed by an utterance and variation in what is merely pragmatically conveyed by an utterance, even as what is said remains fixed.

Cappelen and Lepore seem tacitly to concede that some such strategy is available to the moderate contextualist. They grant, for example, that their intuitions pumps are effective against moderate contextualism only if the pumped intuitions can be shown not to be due to “ambiguity, syntactic ellipsis, polysemy, non-literality, or vagueness.” To that list, they might have added Gricean conversational implicatures, Searlean indirect speech acts, or what I have elsewhere called pseudo-assertion rather than assertion. (Taylor 2000) Curiously, they claim that the range of cases they have chosen is “obviously not explicable by any of these irrelevant factors.” They add that “As far as we know, no one has suggested the examples we will now utilize can be so explained.” Consequently, they apparently feel no need to even try out alternative explanations. This is a puzzling argumentative strategy. Either the moderate contextualist will contest their particular examples or she will not. If she does not, they can't be used to make any point against moderate contextualism and in favor of radical contextualism. There might still be dividing issues about the source and nature of the alleged context-sensitivity in such cases. But such issues are irrelevant to any argument of Cappelen and Lepore's. On the other hand, if the cases *are* contested, then Cappelen and Lepore must be accusing the moderate contextualist of missing the obvious. But is it really “obvious” in each case that no alternative explanation of the sort a moderate contextualist would want to give of the pumped intuitions is available?

Now Cappelen and Lepore apparently do think that it is obvious that the speaker *asserts* something different, something non-minimal, in each of the imagined alternative speech situations. In this, I think, they side with the radical contextualist against the moderate contextualist. Of course, against the radical contextualist, Cappelen and Lepore claim that there is also something constant, but minimal *asserted* in the two scenarios. By contrast, a moderate contextualist who would deny the presence of any surprise sensitivity in (3) above, for example, might say that by an utterance of (3) at *t* a speaker strictly, literally asserts the non-minimal proposition that Smith's body weighs 80kg at *t*.⁹ And he might insist that the truth or falsity of this proposition depends, in each scenario, entirely on how things are by Smith's body. He might say, moreover, that if we hold time fixed, then we get the very same non-minimal proposition expressed in both scenario one and scenario two. When it comes to explaining the felt *communicative* difference between the two scenarios, the moderate contextualist need simply distinguish

the *total utterance content* of an utterance from the *purely or narrowly semantic content* of an utterance. The purely or narrowly semantic content of an utterance will be the proposition or propositions, if any, that are determined by a sentence's syntactic structure and the combination of lexically, contextually, and speech situationally determined semantic values of its semantically valued constituents. The total utterance content of an utterance is the totality of contents conveyed in the uttering of the relevant sentence in the relevant speech situation. That which is part of total utterance content, but not part of the narrow semantic content of the utterance, I call pragmatic externalities of the relevant utterance. On just about anybody's theory, the act of uttering a sentence will almost always produce some pragmatic externality or other, sometimes many such externalities. To this extent we are all descendants of Grice. But there are many proposals about just what sorts of propositions (or non-propositions) count as pragmatic externalities of an utterance. Curiously, Cappelen and Lepore canvass none of them. I am thinking not just of Gricean conversational implicatures, but of Perryesque reflexive propositions, of propositions made inferentially salient by the explicit adding of some proposition or other to the ever developing common ground, of propositions generated by accommodation, and of propositions generated by what I have called one and half stage pragmatics.

Since it may be the least familiar, let me focus briefly on the latter. Start by recalling my earlier claims about the semantics of:

(5) The cat is on the couch again.

I suggested that a speaker who utters (5) in a speech situation takes on a double burden -- the semantic burden of loading a domain of quantification onto a suppressed parameter and the communicative burden of making the loaded value mutually manifest. But *taking on* semantic and communicative burdens in a speech situation does not ipso facto entail successfully and openly *discharging* them. A speaker may fail to have a determinate domain of quantification in mind when she uses a phrase like 'the cat' or 'the couch.' Even if she does have a determinate domain in mind, she may fail to make it mutually manifest. But such failures are often the stuff of which further communication can be made. Suppose, for example, that Cottontail, the cat, and the green couch on Ken Taylor's patio are highly salient in a speech situation in which I utter (5) to my wife, Claire. Suppose that it is common ground between Claire and Ken that Cottontail frequently sleeps on that very couch and common ground that she is not allowed to do so. In that speech situation, my utterance of (5) may convey to my wife the pragmatically external singular proposition that Cottontail is on that very couch. And it may do so, I have argued elsewhere, even if I never discharge my semantic burden of loading a value onto the suppressed domain of quantification parameters associated with 'the cat' and 'the couch'. Indeed, we may say that it is *by failing to discharge my burdens and by doing so openly* that I generate the relevant pragmatic externality. I call externalities generated in this way one and half stage externalities to indicate that they are generated as we make the journey from sentence meaning to narrowly semantic utterance content. One kind of speech act we perform in the course of generating a one and half stage externality is what I have called *pseudo assertion*. Pseudo asserting a proposition is a way of putting forth a proposition as true, not by strictly literally asserting it in the course of what I below call an immediate speech act; nor by implicating it via a "post-

propositional” conversational implicature. Pseudo asserting happens on the way toward a flat out assertion and can happen whether the assertion itself comes off or fails to come off because of the failure to discharge the required semantic burdens.

The existence of one and half stage externalities underlines the myriad levels at which pragmatics plays a role in generating total utterance content. Again, pragmatics happens everywhere. Pragmatics plays a decisive role in completing semantically incomplete sentences, in ways constrained but not fully determined by the lexicon. During the lexically constrained journey from sentence meaning to narrowly semantic content, pragmatics often generates one and half stage externalities along the way. Nor is pragmatics done when the journey from sentence meaning to narrowly semantic content is complete. Suppose, for example, that I say to my son, who is in the kitchen as I enter and start preparing breakfast for myself “Have you had much breakfast?” I have done several things. I have *presupposed* that he has already had some breakfast. If he *accommodates* that presupposition, I have added a proposition to our common ground. I have *directly asked* him whether he has had much breakfast and have *indirectly offered* to make more if he wants it. The fact that I can offer by asking depends partly on the content of my question and partly on the Searlean background. Consider a parallel question asked in a therapist’s session with a couple experiencing marital difficulties. The couple has had an initial consultation. They are back for a follow up visit. The therapist asks the couple. “Have you had much sex?” Whatever else she is doing, she is clearly not *offering* them sex. She is not even *inviting* them to engage in sex together.

We do *lots* of things, many of them content generating, in making an utterance. One way to say this is to say that we are liable to perform *many speech acts* in any *one act of uttering*. The diverse speech acts we perform in a single uttering may have *many different contents*. If this sounds like a version of what Cappelen and Lepore call speech act pluralism, perhaps it is. But if so, then speech act pluralism is an unremarkable doctrine, one that is endorsed, in some form or other, by just about *everybody* who has ever been concerned with the semantics and pragmatics of communication. But if that is right, it’s hard to see why Cappelen and Lepore are convinced that their collapsing argument does any work at all against moderate contextualism. My guess is that they think such strategies as I gestured toward are legitimate only if they are accompanied by a solution to the demarcation problem. By the demarcation problem, I mean the problem of demarcating, in a principled way, that which belongs to narrowly or purely semantic content of an utterance “neat” from that which is a pragmatic externality of the utterance. In addition to the demarcation problem, there is also what I call the generation problem. That is the problem of explaining how the externalities of an utterance are generated by facts about the speech situation. The demarcation and the generation problems may be conceptually distinct, but they are likely to be methodologically intertwined. I suspect that the best way to demarcate the pragmatic externalities of an utterance from the narrow semantic content of the utterance is to show how each is generated. And it is arguable that any purported solution to the demarcation problem that left it entirely mysterious how the demarcated externalities were generated would, for that reason alone, be unsatisfying.

Theorists of various stripes have offered up solutions to both the demarcation problem and the generation problem. But Cappelen and Lepore *seem* to believe that the very methodology employed by the moderate contextualist makes it impossible for her to

provide any principled solution to the demarcation problem. Such desperate and forlorn attempts as have been attempted amount to either stubbornly digging in the heels in denial or unrealistically insisting that introspectable qualities decisively settle what belongs to semantic content and what counts as a pragmatic externality or working piecemeal on clever local fix after clever local fix, while missing the global shape of the problem. What underlies these desperate attempts to draw a boundary that apparently cannot be drawn -- at least not by any methods plausibly available to the moderate contextualist -- is supposed to be the “blind adherence” to the mistaken assumption that:

A theory of semantic content is adequate just in case it accounts for all or most of the intuitions speakers have about speech act content, i.e. intuitions about what speakers say, assert, claim, and state by uttering sentences.

The key to semantic progress, Cappelen and Lepore claim, is to abandon this blind adherence and to recognize that “there is no close and immediate connection between speech act content and semantic content.”

This claim is rather startling. The very distinction introduced above between narrowly semantic content and total utterance content already takes something rather like Cappelen and Lepore’s proposed corrective more or less fully on board. Moreover, I have stressed only a few of the myriad ways in which pragmatic externalities may be generated and how greatly those externalities may diverge from the narrow semantic content of the utterance. Cappelen and Lepore may mean by “speech act content” something different from what I mean by “total utterance content.” It is plausible, though not undeniable, that for every sentence *s*, there is at least one speech act *a* performed in the uttering of *s* such that *a* more or less directly “inherits” its content from *s*, as *s* occurs in the relevant context and speech situation. Call any such *a*, an *immediate speech act* performed in the uttering of *s* and say that the *immediate speech act content(s)* of an utterance is (are) the content(s) of the immediate speech act(s) performed in the uttering of *s*. Immediate speech act contents are, by definition, identical to narrowly semantic contents. In effect, radical contextualists deny that there are immediate speech acts, but Cappelen and Lepore do not. They are quite explicit that *one* of the things that gets asserted in a pluralistic speech act is a minimal proposition. Moderate contextualists, on the other hand, can certainly allow that there are both immediate speech acts and mediate speech acts. But notice also that on my own brand of moderate contextualism, which makes room for one and half stage pragmatic externalities, a speaker can perform a contentful speech act even if she performs no immediate speech act. Recall, for example, the notion of pseudo-assertion introduced briefly above. I have argued elsewhere that a speaker who utters the sentence ‘Santa Claus isn’t coming tonight’ directly *asserts* no fully determinate and truth-evaluable proposition. (Taylor 2000) ‘Santa Claus’ is an empty name. Empty names are, in a sense, devices of direct reference “in waiting.” Because of the emptiness of ‘Santa Claus’ there is no complete proposition, but at best a “gappy” propositional frame, to serve as an immediate speech act content for an utterance of this sentence. Nonetheless, a speaker may *pseudo-assert*, via one and half stage pragmatics, a complete proposition via such an utterance. She may pseudo-assert

something like the proposition that no jolly, red-bearded man who lives at the North Pole is coming tonight by such an utterance.

Given the variety of ways that speech act contents can be generated and the variety of ways they relate to narrowly semantic content, Cappelen and Lepore must be assuming that the moderate contextualist is committed to thinking that *only* immediate speech acts count as assertings or claimings. That is, they must be assuming that for the moderate contextualist no pragmatically external proposition, however generated, can be the content of any asserting or claiming. It is certainly true that moderate contextualist is likely to hold that not all speech acts performed in the uttering of a sentence are immediate speech acts and not all speech act contents are immediate speech act contents. But she may or may not want to reserve titles like ‘assertion’ or ‘claim’ for immediate speech acts. But for all Cappelen and Lepore have to say about “assertion” the question of which of the many speech acts performed in an utterance act deserves the title ‘assertion’ would seem to rest on nothing deeper than arbitrary linguistic legislation. To say the least, it is hard to see why they think any particular decision on this issue is supposed to lead the moderate contextualist into troubled waters.

I do not mean to suggest that in fact settling which speech acts deserve the title ‘assertion’ must be an altogether trivial matter. I do not doubt that the title ‘assertion’ properly belongs to some privileged class of speech acts. And I suspect that there may be some robust principle on the basis of which we might hope to pick out that privileged class. Assertion is plausibly distinguished from other speech acts partly by what we might call its committive force. To assert that p is, at least in part, to stake out, via an utterance, a commitment to it being the case that p . One can, perhaps, imagine an argument to the effect that the pragmatic externalities of our utterances do not carry anything like the commitment characteristic of full bore assertion. If that were so, it would give us some principled grounds for reserving the title ‘assertion’ for propositions directly expressed via immediate speech acts. Such issues are worthy of further exploration and they may yield something deep and revealing both about the nature of assertion and about the difference between immediate and non-immediate speech acts. But as far as I can tell, Cappelen and Lepore have nothing at all to say that might illuminate such issues. Absent further analysis of the very idea of an assertion on their part, it is quite premature of them to conclude anything at all about how much of the many things we do in making an utterance should count as assertions.¹⁰

4. Indirect Reports and Speech Situational Sensitivity

In this section, I explore more fully the theoretical significance of the distinction between speech situational and context sensitivity. I begin by considering one of the three tests proposed by Cappelen and Lepore for detecting “genuine” context-sensitivity. They claim that context sensitive expressions typically block what they call inter-contextual disquotational indirect reports. Suppose that Smith makes the following utterance on Tuesday:

(6) Jones will come home tomorrow.

And suppose that on Wednesday, Black wants to report what Smith said on Tuesday. She can't do so simply by disquoting, as in:

(7) Smith says that Jones will come home tomorrow.

Rather, if Black wants to stick with an indexical in her report, she must switch indexicals, as in:

(8) Smith said that Jones would come home today.

Now Cappelen and Lepore admit that there are *prima facie* exceptions to the apparent regularity that context sensitive expressions block ICDI reports. That is perhaps why they say only that context-sensitive expressions *typically* block ICDI reports. As they put it,

Sentences containing 'I' cannot be disquotationally indirectly reported (*except by self-reporters*); utterances of 'now' cannot be disquotationally reported (*except by simultaneous reporters*); utterances containing the demonstrative expression 'that' cannot be disquotationally reported (*except by co-demonstrating reports*) and so on for each member of the basic set. (emphasis added).

Arguably, however, such apparent exceptions to the rule are directly predictable from semantic character of the relevant expression and consequently are untroubling. Suppose that in context C, I, Ken Taylor, utter:

(9) I [Ken Taylor] am hungry.

As long as I am the speaker in C', I can disquotationally report in C' what I said in C without switching indexicals, as in:

(10) I [Ken Taylor] said that I [Ken Taylor] am hungry.

That is because an occurrence of 'I' denotes the speaker whether it occurs in embedded or unembedded position. To run truly afoul of Cappelen and Lepore's ICDI test, we would need a context C' in which someone other than me could report by using 'I' in C' what I said by using 'I' in C. That is something that can't be done. But only such a context would count as "relevantly different" for the purposes of our current test for context-sensitivity. As Cappelen and Lepore put it:

Suppose you suspect, or at least want to ascertain, whether *e* is context sensitive. Take an utterance *u* of a sentence S containing *e* in context C. Let C' be a context *relevantly different from C* (i.e. different according to the standards significant according to the contextualists about *e*). If there is a true disquotational* indirect report of *u* in C', then that's evidence S is context insensitive. (Disquotational* just means you can adjust the

semantic values of components of S that are generally recognized as context sensitive, i.e., we just test for the controversial examples.) (89)

To be sure, they concede that even when two contexts C and C' are relevantly different, a context-sensitive expression *e* may still turn out to have the same value in both C and in C'. But they insist that when this happens it is a mere accident that it does. They say:

So, if *e* is a context sensitive expression and Rupert uses *e* in context C, and Lepore uses it in context C', and the relevant contextual features change, then *it will be just an **accident** if their uses of e end up with the same semantic value.* (emphasis added) In particular, if Lepore finds himself in a context other than Rupert's and wants to utter a sentence that matches the semantic content of Rupert's utterance of sentence with *e*, he can't use *e* i.e. he can't report Rupert's utterance disquotationally. (89)

To appreciate the full significance of these caveats, it will help to consider a few other examples drawn from the basic set. Take the case of 'we.' At first glance, it may appear that 'we' sometimes does and sometimes does not block ICDI reports. For consider the following examples:

(11) We [S, S₁] had a good time. (said by S, to S₁ and S₂)

(12) S said that we[S₁, S] had a good time. (said by S₁ to S₂)

(13) S said that we [S₂, ?] had a good time. (said by S₂ to S₁.)

S₁ can utter (12) truly as a way of reporting what S said to S₁ and S₂. But S₂ cannot utter (13) truly by way of reporting what S said. If S₂ wants to report what S said, he has to utter something like:

(14) S said that *you* [S, S₁] had a good time. (said by S₂ to S₁)

Now one might suppose that we have three different contexts for 'we' here.

In A: S is speaking, addressing S₁ and S₂, and referring to S and S₁

In B: S₁ is speaking, addressing S₂, and referring to S and S₁.

In C: S₂ is speaking, addressing S₁, and referring to [S₂, ?]

If just *any* difference in who is speaking or who is being addressed counts as a *relevant* difference in context for 'we,' it would seem to follow directly that 'we' is equivocal with respect to the ICDI test.

But some caution is required here. It is open to Cappelen and Lepore to claim that only the shift from context A to context C is relevant to the question whether 'we' blocks ICDI reports. It is entirely unsurprising that in shifting from A to B 'we' does not

block ICDI reports. S_1 is a member of the reference set for ‘we’ in A. Since S_1 is speaking in B, S_1 is guaranteed to be a member of the reference set for ‘we’ as it occurs in context B. These facts guarantee that the reference set for ‘we’ in B overlaps with, and may possibly be identical to, the reference set for ‘we’ in A. On the other hand, since S_2 is *not* a member of the reference set for ‘we’ in A and since S_2 is guaranteed, in virtue of the fact that S_2 is speaking, to be a member of the reference set for ‘we’ in C, the reference set for ‘we’ in A and the reference set for ‘we’ in C are guaranteed to be different. And that is why, Cappelen and Lepore will no doubt say, the shift from A to C is, but the shift from A to B is not relevant to the ICDI test. That is, we can read Cappelen and Lepore as insisting that a context shift from C to C’ is ICDI-relevant, as we might call it, for ‘we’ just in case reference set for ‘we’ shifts from C to C’. One way to guarantee this result is simply to stipulate that a context must “contain” a reference set for ‘we’ and that contexts that contain different reference sets are ipso facto different contexts.

I have no particular objection to taking the reference set for ‘we’ to be one constituent of context among others. But notice if we have a sufficient basis for making that move in the case of ‘we’ we will also have a sufficient basis for making a similar move for various other members of the basic set. But we can’t stop there. There no basis for confining this strategy to members of the so-called basic set. Indeed, I shall argue that we pretty quickly get to a point where we begin to lose hold of any principled distinction between expressions within the basic set and expressions without the basic set.

To begin to appreciate why this is so, notice that although S_1 *can* truly report in B what S says in A via an embedded use of ‘we’, nothing merely linguistic guarantees that S’s use of ‘we’ will co-refer with S_1 ’s use of ‘we.’ All that is linguistically guaranteed is that S_1 refers to at least herself by her use of ‘we.’ From a purely linguistic perspective it is *always* an “accident” of usage if two tokens of ‘we’ co-refer. That is, there is no purely linguistic relation between pairs of contexts, x and y such that an occurrence of ‘we’ in x co-refers with an occurrence of ‘we’ in y that would serve to distinguish such pairs from pairs of contexts x^* , y^* in which occurrences of ‘we’ fail to co-refer. That is because who, if anyone, besides the speaker herself is included in the reference set for ‘we’ is entirely up to the speaker and her contingent referential intentions. Where a speaker S_1 does not use ‘we’ with the same referential intention as S, then S_1 cannot indirectly report what S said via an embedded use of ‘we’. Where S and S_1 do use ‘we’ with the same referential intentions, S_1 can indirectly report what S said via an embedded use of ‘we’.

We find a similar regularity for other members of the basic set as well. Consider, for example, ‘that’ Suppose S utters the following:

(15) That[shirt A] is a lovely shirt.

Suppose that S_1 intends to report what S has said. In the right sort of “context” S_1 can do so by uttering:

(16) S said that that[?] is a lovely shirt.

What counts as a context of the right sort? The answer is obvious. Any “context” in which S_1 refers to shirt A by her use of ‘that’ will suffice. And any context in which she does not refer to shirt A will not suffice. Once again, nothing merely linguistic guarantees that S ’s use of ‘that’ and S_1 ’s use of ‘that’ will co-refer in the requisite way. Once again, we may stipulate for the purposes of ICDI testing that *only* contexts in which the referent of ‘that’ shifts are ICDI-relevant. And once again, it is only this stipulation which preserves the claimed regularity that expressions in the basic set one and all block ICDI reports.¹¹

I will not try to decide whether there is a principled basis, independent of Cappelen and Lepore’s prior commitment to ICDI for construing ICDI-relevance in just the requisite way. Some will no doubt see the relevant stipulation as arbitrary and question-begging. But I am not certain. If one assumes that the ICDI test enjoys a certain *prima facie* warrant, one can use it as a defeasible heuristic for determining what context must be for various candidate context-sensitive expressions. Given intuitively context sensitive expression, one asks what context must be if the relevant expression is to systematically pass the ICDI test. This is not to deny the possibility that one may decided either to abandon the ICDI test or revise one’s intuitive judgments of context sensitivity by a process of semantic reflective equilibrium. But I will not explore such issues further at present. That is because, I shall argue that whether one regards ICDI relevance as arbitrary and stipulative or as a well-motivated heuristic, it turns out that whatever one wants to say about expressions like ‘that’ or ‘we’ or ‘foreigner’ -- expressions supposedly contained within the basic set -- one should also say about expressions like ‘ready’ that supposedly fall outside the basic set. That is to say once one has restricted the notion of context in ways that make the expressions of the basic set comport with the ICDI test, it turns out that if we make similar restrictions for expressions outside the basic set, they too turn out to comport with ICDI.

Consider ‘ready.’ Cappelen and Lepore claim that sentences like (6) stand in sharp contrast with sentences like:

(17) John is ready.

To see why, consider two different speech situations:

S1. In a conversation about exam preparation, someone raises the question of whether John is well prepared [for the exam]. Nina utters (9).

S2. Three people are about to leave the apartment; they are getting dressed for heavy rain. Nina utters (9).

Cappelen and Lepore intuit that ‘ready’ does not block inter-contextual disquotational indirect reports. They claim that a speaker in a third context can straightforwardly and truly assert each of the following:

18. Nina said that John is ready. [with respect to (17) as uttered in S1.]
19. Nina said that John is ready. [with respect to (17) as uttered in S2.]
20. In S1 and S2, Nina said that John is ready.

Now I do not deny that a speaker *can* utter ‘Nina said that John is ready’ and thereby either pragmatically convey or strictly literally assert something true in each of the imagined scenarios. The interesting questions concern *what* a speaker who utters this sentence in various speech situations says or conveys, *how* she manages to say or convey that very thing, and *whether* the situation in which the indirect report is made plays any role in determining what is said by the relevant utterance. Cappelen and Lepore apparently believe that an utterance of this sentence will express or convey at least some merely minimal -- or as I prefer to call it modificationally neutral -- proposition. In addition, they apparently believe that the speech situation or context plays no role in determining what is strictly literally said by the utterance of such a report. But there is, I shall argue, no direct evidence to support either of these claims and ample evidence in support of the claim that the relevant indirect reports are themselves speech situationally sensitive. Indeed it turns out that ‘ready’ behaves very much like ‘that’ or ‘we’ in the context of inter-contextual disquotational indirect reports.

Notice to begin that an utterance of ‘Nina said that John is ready’ can itself at least convey a non-minimal proposition. Moreover, such an utterance conveys different non-minimal propositions in different speech situations. Suppose, for example, that John, Bill, Nina, and Sally are planning to go to the theater together. Suppose moreover, that Sally is in the middle of writing. She tells the others that she will stop writing and get ready (to leave for the theater) when, and only when, John is ready to leave. Addressing Bill, who cannot see for himself that John is ready, Nina utters:

(21) John is ready. Go tell Sally.

Bill complies. Addressing Sally, he utters:

(22) Nina says that John is ready.

He might want to make explicit the relevance of his report of what Nina said to the broader conversational purposes. One way for him to do so would be to utter:

(23) Nina says that John is ready. So let’s get going.

It seems undeniable that at least the total utterance content of (22) as uttered in the imagined scenario, includes some non-minimal, non-neutral proposition – in particular, the proposition that Nina says that John is ready *to leave*. But the pressing question is whether the total utterance content of (22) also includes, as the narrowly semantic content of the utterance, the modificationally neutral proposition that Nina said that John is, as it were, barely ready. Moreover, it is fair to wonder whether we in any way cognize that modificationally neutral proposition, if there is one, in the course of cognizing the non-neutral content that would evidently be communicated if our imagined scenario were actual?

Before answering, suppose that we vary the case. Sally, Nina, and Bill are about to have dinner. Sally wants to keep working until dinner is ready (to eat). When it is ready, she will stop working and come to the table. Addressing Bill, Nina, who is cooking the pork, the last part of the meal, utters:

(24). The pork is ready. Go tell Sally.

Bill complies. Addressing Sally, he utters:

(25) Nina says that the pork is ready.

If Bill wants to make more fully explicit the relevance of his report of Nina's assertion, he might report that assertion as follows:

(26) Nina says that the pork is ready. So let's eat.

Again, it is clear that a certain non-minimal proposition, the proposition that Nina says that the pork is ready *to eat* is *somehow* conveyed by the utterance of (25) and/or (26) in the imagined scenario.

Now let's combine our two earlier scenarios into a third scenario. John is about to leave and the pork is about to be served. Sally has made it clear that she wants to be told both when the pork is ready to be served and when John is ready to leave for the airport. She intends to have dinner with Nina and Bill when the pork is ready and intends to say good-bye to John when he is ready. Addressing Bill, Nina utters:

(27) John is ready and the pork is ready. Go tell Sally.

Bill, addressing Sally, utters the following:

(28) Nina says that John is ready and that the pork is ready.

Again, it seems intuitively obvious that, at the bare minimum, at least the total utterance content of (28), as uttered in the imagined scenario, contains the non-neutral proposition that Nina says that John is ready *to leave* and the pork is ready *to eat*. Cappelen and Lepore predict that there will also be a reading of (27) in which Bill's report ascribes to Nina the assertion that bare readiness holds of both John and the pork. Any further attribution to Nina of a predication of a modification of readiness communicated by Bill's utterance must, on their view, be part of the total utterance content of Bill's utterance, but not part of its narrowly semantic content.

I suspect that Cappelen and Lepore would support this claim by arguing that from (28) something else follows, namely:

(29) Nina says that both John and the pork are ready.

And I'm guessing that they will say that (29) *does* have a modificationally neutral reading. They may even insist that (29) *must* have a modificationally neutral reading. After all, (29) seems intuitively true in the imagined scenario. But only on the modificationally neutral reading of 'ready' could (29) be true, they are likely to claim.

This last claim seems mistaken, however. It is true that in uttering (29) Bill *utters* only one token predicate. But if he speaks truly, *what he says* by uttering the one token predicate must involve two distinct predications of readiness – one with respect to John, the other with respect to the pork. Bill represents Nina as predicating readiness twice over, but he uses only one token of ‘ready’ to do so. With respect to the pork, he represents Nina as predicating readiness to be eaten. With respect to the John, he represents Nina as predicating readiness to leave. Or so it seems to me. At the bare minimum, it seems clear that the total utterance content of Bill’s utterance in the envisioned speech situation does contain two such predications. It would be a further, more complicated step to show that the narrowly semantic content of the utterance involves a double predication. It would also be a further step to show that the narrowly semantic content of Bill’s utterance does not involve a double predication. I don’t propose to settle that issue. There is, however, no antecedent reason to think that the presence of a single token predicate in a sentence implies that the content of the sentence can contain only a single predication. In (29) we have *two* embedded subjects that need not be taken collectively. Indeed, it seems clear that readiness is predicated of the subjects severally rather than collectively. Since the embedded subjects need not be taken collectively, the sentence need not represent Nina as predicating *the same modification of readiness* to the two subjects. Explaining exactly how a double predication of readiness, with each involving a different modification of readiness, gets introduced into either the narrowly semantic or total utterance content of an utterance of (29) is a slightly delicate matter. Whatever the exact details, it seems clear that Cappelen and Lepore have not yet discharged their burden of showing that an utterance like (29) is strictly literally true *only* on a minimal or modificationally neutral reading of ‘ready’.

I have been exploiting speech situations in which any supposed minimal or modificationally neutral reading of ‘ready’ is either minimally salient or entirely inaccessible. Cappelen and Lepore will no doubt insist that we need also to consider contexts in which the minimal or neutral reading is the *only* accessible and/or natural reading. Are there such situations? Consider reports made in ignorance. Nina intends to tell John that the students in her class all seem well-prepared for an upcoming exam. She utters:

(30) The students in my class are all ready.

Sally overhears Nina and John talking. She mistakenly thinks that Nina and John are discussing the school field trip. Unbeknownst to Sally, Nina’s class isn’t going on the field trip at all. Now Sally and Bill are trying to figure out which classes are ready for the field trip. Sally says to Bill:

(31) Nina said that the students in her class are ready.

It seems intuitively obvious that a certain false and non-neutral proposition – the proposition that Nina said that the students in her class are ready *for the field trip* -- is an element of at least the total utterance content of Sally’s utterance of (31). Is there a true neutral proposition associated with the utterance as its narrowly semantic content? I see no reason to think so.

Of course, Sally is not merely *ignorant*. She is *mistaken*. Perhaps it's her mistaken, hasty assumption, and not her ignorance, that serves to somehow raise the non-neutral proposition to salience. Suppose that Sally simply doesn't know and makes no hasty assumption about what exactly Nina's students are ready for. In what speech situations, if any, Sally would feel entitled to utter (31)? Suppose, for example, that Sally and Bill are again trying to determine which classes are ready to leave for the field trip. Sally cannot straight out utter (31) and leave it at that, at least not if she intends to be a cooperative conversational partner to Bill. Sally's uttering (31) in the imagined scenario would, at a minimum, invite the inference that Nina said that the students in her class are ready for the field trip and would, at the maximum, flat out assert that proposition. Sally is in no position either to offer such an invitation or to make such a flat out assertion. There are assertions that Sally can make in the imagined scenario that would neither invite inferences that Sally is in no position to invite nor make an assertion stronger than Sally is in a position to make. Sally could say:

(32) I overheard Nina say that the students in her class are ready. But I couldn't tell, from what I heard, what she was saying they are ready for. She might, for all I know, have been talking about the field trip.

Even here there is no reason to assume a modificationally neutral reading of 'ready.' A more natural interpretation is that Sally is reporting that Nina says that her students are ready *for something or other*. That is not precisely what Nina herself originally said. But sometimes an indirect discourse report functions only as a *partial characterization* of what another says. In such cases, the ascribed content need not be identical to the content originally expressed. This fact alone gives us reason to refrain from drawing hasty inferences from premises about the felt content of an indirect discourse use of 'ready' to conclusions about the content of an unembedded use of 'ready'.

As Cappelen and Leppore themselves point out, the property of being ready *for something or other* comes about as close as one can get, within a parameterized approach, to "bare readiness." The property of being ready for something or other is, after all, a property shared by anyone who enjoys any modification of readiness whatsoever. Indeed, they claim that anyone who thinks that *every* occurrence of 'ready' expresses such a property has, in effect, endorsed the minimalist reading of 'ready.' But it simply does not follow from the fact that *some* uses of ready – especially in the context of indirect discourse reports -- may take on an "abstract" non-specific value for the suppressed parameter in a given situation, that 'ready' is, therefore, speech-situationally insensitive. We have just examined a plethora of cases in which no such reading of ready seems salient, accessible, or relevant. Moreover, it takes a quite peculiar discourse setting to render such a reading salient, accessible or relevant at all.

Strikingly Cappelen and Lepore seem to hold that *all* instances of 'John is ready' must have an "abstract" narrowly semantic content, if *any* instances do. Though they allow that some occurrences of 'ready' may also express some *additional* non-neutral content specifically tied to the peculiarities of the speech situation, they insist that any additional non-neutral content is *always* a pragmatic externality of the relevant utterance. Given the cases we have just considered, they have not discharged the burden of argument they have taken on in making this claim. Moreover, if one keeps the notion of a

one and a half stage pragmatic externality clearly in mind, it should be clear that they could not discharge their explanatory burdens merely by adducing the kinds of considerations and examples they put on offer. Recall that such externalities may be generated even if the speaker manifestly *fails* to discharge her semantic burdens. Semantic failure may, in fact, play the decisive role in making such externalities communicatively salient. Imagine, for example, a speaker who utters (31) with no particular modification of readiness in mind in such a way as to render no particular modification of readiness salient or accessible. If ready is parameterized, then she has failed to say anything fully propositionally determinate. Nonetheless, if the dialectical setting is right, she may still succeed in communicating something about Nina's assessment of the state of readiness of her class. She may, for example, communicate that Nina takes her class to be ready for something or other. And she may do so, even if she hasn't managed to make that very proposition the narrowly semantic content of her utterance.

Cappelen and Lepore's disquotational test for context sensitivity thus leaves the moderate contextualist completely free to maintain that in virtue of the parameterized lexical character of 'ready,' any speaker who utters 'Nina said that John is ready' by way of indirectly reporting an utterance of (17) above has herself taken on the semantic burden of semantically "completing" her use of 'ready' by loading a semantic value onto a suppressed parameter. Never mind for the moment where in syntax or subsyntax such a parameter might sit. And never mind for the moment the exact semantic function of the suppressed parameter. A speaker who selects a speech situationally sensitive expression takes on not only a semantic burden but also the communicative burden of making it mutually manifest what value she intends to load onto the relevant parameter. Though such burdens are not difficult to discharge, they are not discharged automatically, merely through the device of disquotation. Nothing in the scenarios described by Cappelen and Lepore suffices to show otherwise. Indeed, it seems clear that a speaker who utters either (18) or (19) as a way of reporting (17) without loading a value onto the parameter for 'ready' has failed to ascribed a fully determinate propositional content to Nina. She has thus failed to discharge the semantic burden that she has taken on in electing to use 'ready'. But we have seen that pragmatics may step in to fill the communicative gap by generating one and half stage externalities even when semantics falters,. This is a fact that no moderate contextualist need deny. And given that, it is hard to be moved by Cappelen and Lepore's various arguments against the lexically-driven speech situational sensitivity of 'ready' and other such expression.

In this connection, it is easy to see that 'ready' fares much the same as 'that' or 'we' or 'foreign' with respect to Cappelen and Lepore's disquotational test for context-sensitivity. We have already seen, for example, that 'that' appears to "block" ICDI reports only where a shift in "context" involves a shift in reference. Where reference is preserved, 'that' does not block such reports. To preserve the intuitive context-sensitivity of 'that' as measured by the ICDI test, we stipulated that only where reference is not preserved do we have an ICDI-relevant context shift for 'that.' One way to implement this stipulation is simply to take the demonstrated object of the demonstration as itself an ingredient of context for 'that'. This makes it automatic that where reference shifts, context has shifted in an ICDI relevant way. But it is surely open to the contextualist to say much the same about 'ready.' The contextualist can hold, that is, that

an ICDI relevant context shift for ‘ready’ must involve a shift in the intended respect of readiness. One way to implement this suggestion is to take respects of readiness themselves to be ingredients of context for uses of ‘ready’. But now when context shifts in an ICDI relevant way, ‘ready’ will also block ICDI-reports. So the take home message is that Cappelen and Lepore’s disquotational test so far does nothing to distinguish ‘that’ from ‘ready.’ ‘Ready’ is no more or less context-sensitive than ‘that’ is. Either both are context sensitive or neither is. But however one decides that issue, the contextualist wins. If ‘ready’ turns out to be on a semantic par, more or less, with ‘that’, ‘we’, ‘foreign’ and many other expressions in the so-called basic set, the contextualist has shown all that she has set out to show.

5. Semantics Vs Metaphysics

I turn to one last charge leveled by Cappelen and Lepore against contextualists – both of the radical variety and of the moderate variety -- viz., that contextualists of all stripes have confused semantics and metaphysics. Charging the contextualist with conflation of metaphysics and semantics is, in large measure, a defensive move. It is designed to ward off the charge that their own minimal propositions are metaphysically incoherent. They have ample reason to be defensive. They claim, for example, that the proposition that *x is tall* can be true or false simpliciter, without any relativization to a standard of height or any reference class of heights. They claim, moreover, that there is nothing more to say about the truth conditions of this proposition than is expressed by the T-sentence “‘x is tall’ is true if and only if x is tall.” They don’t even attempt to say just what it takes to be tall simpliciter. And when pressed, they protest that it’s the business of metaphysics, not of semantics to answer such questions. Crucially, they claim that incompleteness arguments rests on an illegitimate conflation between semantics and metaphysics. The moderate contextualist who insists that a sentence like ‘John is tall’ is semantically incomplete, on the basis of the felt intuition that nothing can be tall simpliciter, is really asking the semanticist for something that he has no obligation to provide -- at least not qua semanticist. He is demanding a metaphysical analysis of what all tall things share.

Now I confess to having deep sympathy for the project of keeping semantics as disentangled from metaphysics as possible. Moreover, some arguments for contextualism do conflate metaphysics and semantics. For example, in defense of the claim the utterances of sentences like:

(33) It is raining.

express propositions containing unarticulated constituents, John Perry likes to say things like the following:

In this case, I say that the place is an *unarticulated constituent* of the proposition expressed by the utterance. It is a constituent *because, since rain occurs at a time in place, there is no truth evaluable proposition unless a place is supplied.* (emphasis added) It is unarticulated, because there is no morpheme that designates that place. (Perry 2001)

But it simply does not follow from the fact that rain occurs at a time and in a place that an utterance of ‘it is raining’ fails to express a complete proposition unless a place is supplied. Consider, for example, certain other apparently necessary properties of rainings. Whenever it rains, it rains a certain amount and for a certain duration. But we can express a fully determinate proposition by an utterance of ‘it rained’ without having to specify how much rain fell or over what span of time the rain fell.

Let me hasten to add that I agree with Perry, and disagree with Cappelen and Lepore, that unless a place is supplied we don’t yet have a truth evaluable proposition. So the question naturally arises just *why* we must specify *where* it is raining in the case of the present tense ‘it is raining’ if we are to express a complete proposition, but we need not specify *how much* it rained or for *how long* it rained in the case of the past tense ‘rained’ in order to express a complete proposition. A confused semanticist, of the sort against which Cappelen and Lepore rail, might be tempted by another distinction of Perry’s – that between the argument *roles* of relations and the argument *places* of predicates. Let us stipulate, for the space of the argument, that the verb ‘rain’ has fewer argument places than the raining relation has argument roles. I claim that a bare mismatch between the adicity of the predicate and the adicity of the expressed relation does not directly entail the semantic incompleteness of the relevant predicate. Moreover, there need be no deep metaphysical difference between those argument roles that are associated with some argument place and those that are not.

If one were antecedently convinced of the need to import deep metaphysical distinctions into one’s semantics, one might attempt to enforce something like the adjunct/argument distinction, not at the level of verbs and predicates, but at the level of relations themselves to explain why some roles are realized as argument places and other roles are not. This strategy is unpromising in the extreme. It really would bog semantics down in the metaphysical muck. For any relation in n arguments with a claim to be the unmodified raining relation, there will be other relations in m arguments, for m distinct from n , that appear to have no less of a claim to being *the* or at least *a* raining relation. There is a relation that holds between a place, a time, and a velocity just in case it is raining at the time, at that place, with that velocity. There is another, less “articulated” relation that holds between a time and a place just in case it is raining at that time at that place. Does one or the other of these relations have more of a claim to being *the* raining relation? Is the former relation merely a modification of the latter? If these questions are supposed to be purely metaphysical questions about relations rather semantic questions about verbs and predicates, then I confess to not having the foggiest clue how to answer them.

If incompleteness arguments for moderate contextualism rested squarely on such metaphysical questions, Cappelen and Lepore would have a point. But incompleteness arguments shouldn’t be construed as arguments about the metaphysics of relations. They are really arguments about the semantics of verbs and other argument taking expressions. I claim it is a fact about the verb ‘to rain,’ and not a fact about the metaphysics of the raining relation, that it demands contextual provision of a place, but not contextual provision of an intensity, amount or duration. In particular, I claim, and have argued at length elsewhere, that the verb ‘to rain’ has a lexically specified, but syntactically suppressed parameter that is theta-marked **THEME**, that takes places as values. I will

not elaborate on this proposal further here except to say that the fact that the verb demands a location as its theme endows location with a semantic privilege, but not a metaphysical one.

We may contrast ‘to rain’ with ‘to dance’ in order to illustrate that some verbs fail to semantically privilege the place where the relevant goings-on happen. There can’t be a dancing that doesn’t happen somewhere or other. For all the semanticist has to say, it may be that the place where a dancing happens is metaphysically on a par with the place where a raining happens. But they are clearly not on a par semantically speaking. Suppose a speaker utters:

(34) Laura danced the tango until she could dance no more.

without saying where Laura danced. The speaker has left nothing out required for the semantic completeness and full truth-evaluability of her utterance. One can say something fully determinate, something fully truth evaluable, by uttering (34) even if the speech situation makes manifest no place as the place where the dancing happens. I have hypothesized that difference between (33) and (34) depends entirely on the differences in the way ‘to dance’ and ‘to rain’ relate to the places where rainings and dancings happen. Unlike ‘to rain’, ‘to dance’ does not mark the place where a dance happens as the theme or undergoer of the dance. The theme or undergoer of a dancing is the dancer herself. The place where a dancing “takes place” is merely the place where the dancer dances. When Laura is dancing in a place, it is not the place that undergoes the dancing. This fact about the verb ‘to dance’ explains why, despite the fact that one cannot dance without dancing somewhere or other, a sentence containing ‘to dance’ can be semantically complete, even if the place where dancing happens is not situationally provided. That a dancing must take place somewhere or other is a (mutually known) metaphysical fact about the universe -- a fact that supervenes on the nature of dancing and the structure of space-time. But that metaphysical fact is not explicitly reflected in the argument structure of the verb ‘to dance’.

These remarks are intended to show only that contrary to Cappelen and Lepore arguments from semantic incompleteness need not conflate semantics and metaphysics. But if that point is granted, it follows directly that their defensive maneuvers are entirely unavailing. They make the highly counter-intuitive claim, supported by no evidence that I have seen, that objects can be barely tall, that is, tall without relativization to any reference class or standard of tallness. They admit this to be an incredible claim, endorsed as far as I can tell, by exactly two philosophers. About the best that they can do by way of defending this claim is to insist that qua semanticists they have no burden of explaining what all barely tall objects share. And to insist that semantics does bear such a burden, they claim, is to conflate semantics with metaphysics. We don’t have to take any stand on whether there is or is not such a property as bare tallness in the order of things to show that no expression of our own language expresses such a property. It is a better bet that the lexical meaning of ‘tall’ determines that ‘tall’ applies not to heights directly but only to heights as measured by some variable standard or as compared to some variable reference class. It is also a good bet that the lexicon explicitly represents that standards of tallness are to be speech-situationally determined and not fixed once and

for all by the lexicon itself. If that is right, the lexicon itself licenses pragmatic intrusion into the business of semantics from the very start.

Endnotes

¹ In *one* sense, *every* predicate may be thought to be “modificationally neutral.” But it is important to distinguish two different things – the indefinite *grammatical* modifiability of a predicate and the, as it were, *metaphysical* modifiability of a full, blown, but neutral property. Even semantically incomplete predicates, predicates that express no fully determinate property, are indefinitely grammatically modifiable. Some grammatically unmodified, but still indefinitely modifiable predicates may fail to express *any* determinate property until modified. Such a predicate would not ipso facto count as modificationally neutral. Modificationally neutral predicates express full blown properties, just very undiscriminating and thus easy to instantiate properties.

² This isn’t quite fair. The radical contextualist typically think that there are content generating processes of a pragmatic nature. It’s not a fact about expressions taken one by one.

³ Cappelen and Lepore do distinguish what they call the inadequate context shifting arguments of the contextualists from real context shifting arguments. I discuss one of their three tests below.

⁴ It is worth noting that the class of views that count as forms of moderate contextualism, by Cappelen and Lepore’s lights, is quite a motley crew. It includes not only thinkers like Jason Stanley, but also thinkers like Francois Recanati. In defending one form of “moderate contextualis,” I do not mean to defend all such views.

⁵ Cappelen and Lepore’s speech act pluralism does allow them to say that the total set of speech acts performed by distinct utterances of the same sentence may vary from context to context even if the narrowly semantic contents of distinct utterances remain the same.

⁶ Of course, that victory turns out to be pyrrhic, since radical contextualism collapses of its own weight. But never mind those arguments here. I come to defend moderate contextualism, not radical contextualism.

⁷ Kaplan erred, I think, in treating demonstratives and indexicals as members of a more or less uniform semantic category. I would argue that while indexicals are context sensitive, demonstratives are speech situationally sensitive. Indeed, in his discussion of the role of directing intentions in determining reference for demonstrative in “Afterwords” Kaplan himself comes close to grasping the difference.

⁸ Cappelen and Lepore would, I suspect, agree with the claim that (5) does not express either the proposition that the one and only one cat in the universe is on the one and only one couch in the universe or the proposition that the one and only one cat owned by Ken Taylor is on the one and only one couch on Ken Taylor’s patio. But they would explain this not by appeal to semantic incompleteness but by appeal to what I – but not they – call modificationally neutrality. They would say that (5) express the proposition *that the cat is on the couch again*. Full stop. And asked for a further characterization of just what proposition that proposition is and when it is true, they would refuse to offer any such thing. Their minimal propositions are, in short, only pleonastically specifiable, it seems.

⁹ I am setting to one side here delicate issues raised by the fact that we now know that weight (as opposed to mass) is relative to gravitational field. It is worth noting, though, that the discovery that weight, as opposed to mass, is relative to a gravitational field, even

though the relation expressed by the verb ‘weighs’ in our language has no explicit argument place for gravitational field raises interesting semantic and pragmatic issues not at all addressed by Cappelen and Lepore. Theories that posit such things as unarticulated constituents or processes like free enrichment are in part motivated by cases like these. On such approaches, there is *no* claim that the verb ‘weighs’ is itself a context-sensitive expression. Nor is there any claim that sentences containing this verb have hidden indexical elements or suppressed argument places or anything of that sort. Perry claims, for example, that *speakers* may introduce unarticulated constituents into a proposition even when that constituent turns out not to be the value of *any* constituent of the relevant sentence – though he does sometimes say that an expression or construction may “call for” the introduction of an unarticulated sentence. His approach is not entirely dissimilar to Recanati’s appeal to “free enrichment.” Though free enrichment is viewed by Recanati as a primary and therefore mandatory pragmatic process, it does not require that some either explicit or hidden *constituent* take the enriched content as its own value. It is fair to wonder for both Perry and Recanati what a sentence is doing semantically expressing a proposition some of whose constituents are not values of any constituent of the relevant sentence. But that is a question for another setting. I make this point because there is a quite natural seeming way of reading Cappelen and Lepore in which their view is more or less a notational variant on views like Perry’s and/or Recanati’s, despite rhetorical abuse to which they subject such views. After all, Cappelen and Lepore claim that what we strictly literally say in making an utterance goes beyond – and typically far beyond – the “narrow” semantic content of the utterance. Like Perry and like Recanati they agree, in particular, that once you’ve fixed the meanings of all the words and have provided values for all the explicit indexicals, you still need not have the full content in the sense of “what is said” of the speech act performed in making an utterance. Moreover, they agree with Perry and with Recanati that the additional ingredients of what is said that are somehow generated in a speech situation need not and typically are not the semantic values of any either suppressed or explicit constituents of the uttered sentence. So far then it looks as though Cappelen and Lepore may have simply rediscovered the radical contextualism against which they so intently rail. As far as I can tell all that is supposed to *save* them from this charge is their quite implausible claim that an expression like ‘tall’ expresses on its own, independently of context, a determinate (but apparently only pleonastically specifiable) property had by all tall things and no non-tall things. But this claim is quite frankly incredible, so much so, that one wonders if its only job is to prevent their view from collapsing into radical contextualism. And I say this as one who believes that they have dimly glimpsed a part of the truth about what I call the modificational neutrality of some predicates.

¹⁰ A great deal of philosophical work remains to be done on the notion of assertion, and on the relationship between the narrowly semantic content of an utterance and its assertoric content. But a start has been made. For some illumination, see Soames (2004) and Soames (forthcoming). Though Soames seems inclined to reject a form of moderate contextualism that posits hidden indexicals in LF, his views seem entirely consistent with the form of contextualism I have been at pains to defend in this essay. See also

Stojanovich (2003). She offers an illuminating discussion of just how complex the relation can be between what a speaker *says* by uttering a sentence and the semantic content of that sentence. See also Kent Bach (2005). Bach does not think of himself as a moderate contextualist, but many of his observations about the gap between semantic content and assertoric content can be taken on by moderate contextualism. But the main point here is that nothing at all prevents moderate contextualism from fully acknowledging that the relationship between assertoric content and narrowly semantic content is complex and multifarious. Indeed, it strikes me as just a mistake to say, as Cappelen and Lepore do, that the moderate contextualist seeks to load all that is asserted by an utterance into the narrowly semantic content of the utterance. Certainly, *this* moderate contextualist has not attempted to do so. To be sure, there is an issue that does separate moderate from radical contextualist on this score. Radical contextualists tend to view the mechanisms that somehow bridge the gap, when there is one, between narrowly semantic content and assertoric content as in some sense unconstrained. On my view, the generation of assertoric content is *semantically constrained without being semantically determined*.

¹¹ Consider the case of so-called contextuals like ‘foreign’. Suppose that I’m in France, surrounded by a bunch of locals. And suppose that I look puzzled upon observing some local custom. Picking up on my look, Francois utters:

(a) You are a foreigner who doesn’t understand our customs.

Now suppose that I am back in America and Claire wants to inform me about what Francois says. She might utter something like:

(b) Francois says that you are a foreigner who doesn’t understand their customs.

At first glance, it looks as though Claire can disquotationally* report in America what Francois said in France using ‘foreigner’. But mere disquotation leaves it open whether Claire intends by her embedded use of ‘foreigner’ to represent Francois as attributing the property of being foreign to America or foreign to France to me. Nothing merely linguistic settles this issue. It is settled by Claire’s intentions and only her intentions. Once again, from the linguistic point of view it is merely an accident if one speaker’s use of ‘foreign’ is indexed to the same country as another speaker is. And once again it follows that if we want ‘foreign’ to comport with the ICDI test we simply have to stipulate that only context in which different index countries are intended does ‘foreign’ block inter-contextual disquotational indirect reports. And once again, one way to implement this suggestion is to make the indexed country an ingredient of “context.” Of course, the way a country gets to count as the indexed country is not simply by being the country in which the speaker is speaking, or the country in which the speaker is located, but only by being the country to which the speaker intends to index her use of ‘foreign.’

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